

IDP collection point – Sheikh Younis, 5 March

An average of around 500 families per day are coming from villages west of Mosul, mostly between Al Tanak and Badoush, through the 9th Division ISF frontline. They are continuing on foot or being transported to an IDP collection point at Sheikh Younis village (36°15'55.91"N 43°02'13.17"E), the location of a 34th brigade CCP/PHC, which is situated around 6km south of the frontline. From there they are taken on ISF transport to the screening site at Hamam al Alil.

For now, the majority of IDPs displacing along this route are from villages outside Mosul. However, numbers are expected to increase significantly when the Iraqi advance reaches the far western neighbourhoods of Mosul city. Free Burma Rangers are giving NFI support at the site, but food and water is limited and comes almost solely from the ISF.

Sheikh Younis represents a third route of displacement from West Mosul – for IDPs fleeing west and then hooking south towards ISF 9th Division territory. The other two routes are via Albu Saif from neighbourhoods in or near the FedPol/ERD areas of operation, and via the Scorpion Junction collection point from neighbourhoods in or near ISOF areas of operations. (See previous Rise reports for more details on these routes). All routes converge on the Hamam al Alil screening site.

Displacement towards Sheikh Younis

It can take civilians up to three days to travel from villages west of Mosul – like Badoush, As Saghirah, Hulaylah and Al'bour – to the ISF frontlines. This is because ISIS are actively targeting civilians attempting to escape, and taking a direct route to the frontline is therefore far too dangerous. As it is, at its busiest the CCP at Sheikh Younis has received up to 15 civilian trauma cases per day, all caused by ISIS mortars and sniper fire.

ISF snipers cover the approach of IDPs as they near the frontline. When they arrive, the men are searched for weapons and explosives by ISF, while the women are searched using female volunteers from the group of IDPs, under supervision of the ISF. At this stage ISF personnel receiving the IDPs often give the most needy food and water from their own supply.



Sheikh Younis. The original inhabitants of Sheikh Younis and nearby villages left with ISIS ahead of the ISF advance (to what extent this happened voluntarily or by force is unknown). This village and others in the area are therefore empty of their original inhabitants. Sheikh Younis is reported to have been cleared of IEDs.

The 9th Division only have one military intelligence unit on the frontline. IDs are collected as people arrive and the names are relayed via radio to the military intelligence personnel, who check them against a database of ISIS suspects. While the checks are ongoing, the IDPs continue walking to the collection point at Sheikh Younis village or are taken there on ISF transport. Their IDs are returned to them either on the route or when they have arrived in Sheikh Younis. Some IDPs escape from ISIS territory with their own vehicles. In these cases, the vehicles are checked for explosives and are then allowed to proceed to Sheikh Younis in convoy. Some IDPs crossing further west go to Tell Kaysumah or Ad Dabajah and are taken from there to Sheikh Younis by ISF.



Some reports indicate that the ISF 9th Division has reached the river around Humaidat, although we have not yet been able to confirm this.

Civilian casualties

Civilian casualties are first treated at one of the ISF TSPs along the frontline. There are three, belonging to the 34th, 36th, and 37th brigades respectively, each reportedly staffed by 3 medics and an officer. After stabilization they are sent by ambulance to the CCP in Sheikh Younis or, for emergency cases, directly to one of the field hospitals in Hamam al Alil.



There are 6 beds available inside the CCP.



Medicines for IDPs provided by FBR.

At Sheikh Younis

Upon arrival at Sheikh Younis, IDPs are generally very tired from their journey, particularly the elderly and young children. Malnourishment is common and visible – people from these villages have reportedly been surviving solely on bread for the last few months at least. Pregnant women are often among the groups of IDPs – several have gone into labour at the CCP and have been sent directly to the MSF field hospital in Hamam al Alil. The CCP/PHC is staffed by a doctor and 4 medics and has a supply of basic medicines donated by the Free Burma Rangers (FBR). These include syrup for babies, medication for diarrhoea, cough syrup and antibiotics. FBR have also supplied NFIs such as blankets and nappies, as well as milk for babies. The ISF doctor at the CCP has direct contact with FBR and informs them when certain items have run out and more are needed. FBR reportedly come roughly once a week to replenish stocks. ISF provide limited supplies of food and water for the IDPs; they emphasised that anything they give comes from their own supplies. Some further supplies are sent each week from Baghdad by volunteer groups, but they are also limited. There are permanent toilet facilities outside the CCP, but they are inadequate for the numbers of IDPs that pass through the site.

When they arrive at Sheikh Younis, the men are told to sit down in the enclosed garden beside the CCP while the women and children stay in or outside the adjacent building, which consists of a few empty rooms. An ISF officer then asks the men assembled if there are any strangers among them who they can't vouch for. While we were there a young man stood at the front with the officer (whether his name was already flagged up on the database when the IDs were checked is not known for certain). He had told the officer which village he was from, his tribe, and that he had travelled with his relatives. This information was put to the crowd and in each case they responded by saying that the young man wasn't known to them and had only joined their group that morning. We were informed that the man (or boy, possibly around 17 years old) would be taken to the military intelligence unit at the 9th Division HQ in Bakhida and from there to Baghdad.

IDPs generally stay at Sheikh Younis for around 2 hours before they are transported onwards to Hamam al Alil screening site. Those IDPs with their own vehicles are taken in convoy. Recent bad weather made the road challenging for some vehicles and this meant that some IDPs were forced to stay the night at Sheikh Younis – however, this is uncommon. Overall the atmosphere at the collection point was relaxed and people seemed happy and relieved to be there, although very tired.



Men sitting down in the garden outside the CCP, with women and children gathered in the building and enclosed space next door.



The ISF officer addressing the crowd with his arm around the young man under suspicion.

Access

Getting to Sheikh Younis is not difficult. There is a turning onto a tarmac road on the west side of Highway 1, opposite Athbah. After around 10 minutes driving time the road enters an area of makeshift oil refineries and there is a fork to the right. Taking the fork, the road surface turns to mud and gravel, but it was still passable only a day after heavy rain. However, prolonged rain could make the road impassable to HGVs in some places. The road leads to an undulating plain and Sheikh Younis can be seen in the distance. The journey from Highway 1 takes around 15 minutes in total. Sheikh Younis is currently around 6km south of the frontline.

Needs

Food and water are the priority needs at Sheikh Younis, especially milk for babies. IDPs coming from the villages outside Mosul have particularly large families and therefore there are high numbers of babies and pregnant women. As mentioned above, numbers of IDPs passing through this collection point are expected to increase substantially, and therefore the need for food, water and NFIs could suddenly become more critical. Coordination with FBR is recommended as they may require support in supplying NFIs to greater numbers. More latrines will also be needed with increased numbers.