

INTRODUCTION

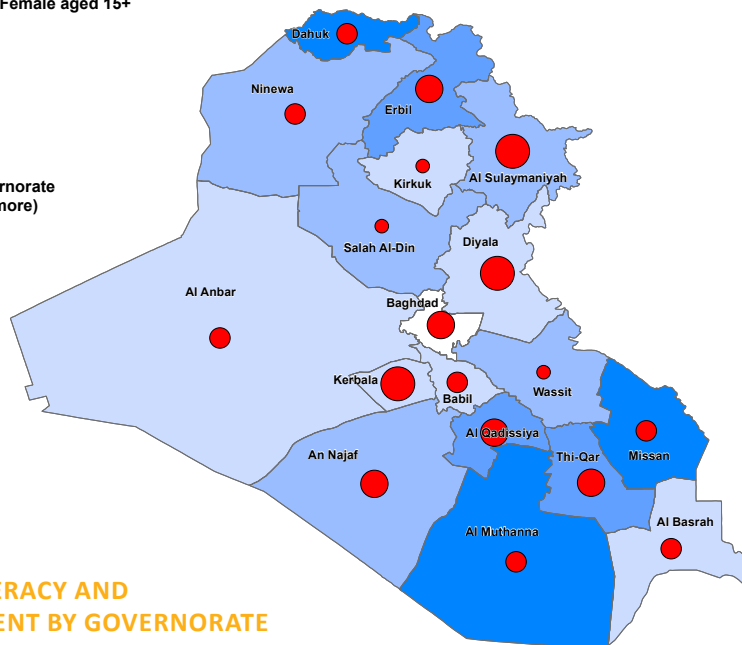
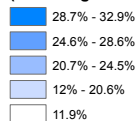
Years of repression, economic sanctions, and armed conflicts have led to deterioration in the lives of women in Iraq and an associated loss to the country since women are marginalized and unable to contribute economically, socially, and politically. Iraqi women today suffer from a lack of educational opportunities, a lack of health care and limited access to the labour market as well as high levels of violence and inequality. These conditions are often exacerbated by misconceptions of traditions, cultural and social values, false perceptions, and a lack of awareness of women's rights and potential, as well as institutional and legal barriers.

The United Nation's Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 and the Millennium Development Goal 3 underline the significant role of women in poverty reduction and development, in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and in peace-building. The Government of Iraq, as a signatory of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), identifies women's empowerment as a priority and is committed to improving gender equality and women's rights.¹ At the same time, the UN Development Assistance Framework 2011-2014, developed in close cooperation with the Gol, recognizes women as part of the human resources crucial for Iraq's long-term socio-economic development.

Unemployment Rate Female aged 15+



Illiteracy rate by governorate (female aged 12 and more)



FEMALE ILLITERACY AND UNEMPLOYMENT BY GOVERNORATE

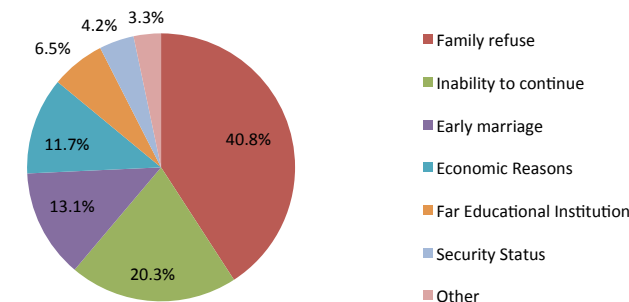
LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Gender-based discrimination in education is both a cause and an outcome of poverty and results in a breakdown of social and economic development. In Iraq, the ratio of female to male is 0.94 in primary school and 0.85 in secondary school². These statistics testify to the inequality in education among the two sexes at each level. Furthermore, 28.2% of women aged 12 years or older are illiterate, more than double the male rate of 13%.³ The percentage increases significantly for young women (aged 15-24) living in rural areas where the illiteracy rate is 33.6%.⁴ According to the Unicef Multiple Indicator Cluster

Survey 2011 (MICS 2011), the net enrolment in primary school for females is 87.4%, with big disparities between urban and rural areas where the percentage of female enrolment falls to 77% compared to 90% male enrolment⁵. Significant differences are also visible in the net enrolment ratio in secondary school: 44.6% for female and 52.5% for male. Some progress has been made since 2006 when 80.4% of women were enrolled in primary school while only 34.3% were enrolled in secondary school⁶. Nevertheless, the MDG target of 100% is still far from being achieved.

Traditional cultural and social factors often remain obstacles to improving access to education for girls⁷. The main reasons for women failing to complete their education are the refusal of their families and early marriage.⁸ In fact, 21% of young women (aged 15-19) are currently married.⁹

Reasons for not reaching the desired level of education (women aged 15-49)



Source: CSO, Iraq Woman Integrated Social and Health Survey (I-WISH), 2011

HEALTH ISSUES

Iraq has made relevant progress in maternal health care with the proportion of births attended by skilled personnel raised considerably from 72% in 2000 to 90.9%¹⁰ in 2012; however, improvements are still required, particularly in rural areas, where skilled personnel attend only 78% of births.¹¹ Notwithstanding this progress, the maternal mortality rate for Iraq of 84¹² female deaths per 100,000 live births remains the highest in the region. Of all maternal deaths, 80% can be potentially avoided by interventions during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum

period,¹³ but only 37.9% of married women 15-49 years who gave birth during the past five years received postnatal care by a qualified person¹⁴. Ever-married women aged 15-49 suffered most from hypertension (8.2%), arthritis (7.6%), and anaemia (5.5%)¹⁵. They seek health care in private clinics (49.9%), primary health care centres (22.3%), and government hospitals (20.9%)¹⁶. Of Iraqi women, 35.4% perceived their health status to be bad or very bad and 47.7% of women reported difficulties in receiving health care from governmental health institutions due to lack of money to pay for services while for 40.6% it was difficult to reach the service¹⁷.

LABOUR FORCE AND EMPLOYMENT

Huge differences persist in the labour market between women and men: only 14% of women are working or actively seeking work compared to 73% of men; 21% of active females are unemployed compared to 11% of active males. The percentage increases to 27% for young women and is significantly higher in urban areas than in rural areas where women are mainly employed in the agricultural sector¹⁸. According to Iraq Knowledge Network 2011 (IKN 2011), young women with higher levels of education have more difficulties accessing work: the unemployment rate increases to 41% for those with a diploma and to 68% for those with a bachelor's degree¹⁹. Low participation in the labour market is a consequence of women's lower levels of education and lack of skills together with a mix of legal barriers as well as cultural and social obstacles. Despite Iraqi women enjoying equal rights to employment according to the 2005 Constitution, certain inequitable elements remain within the

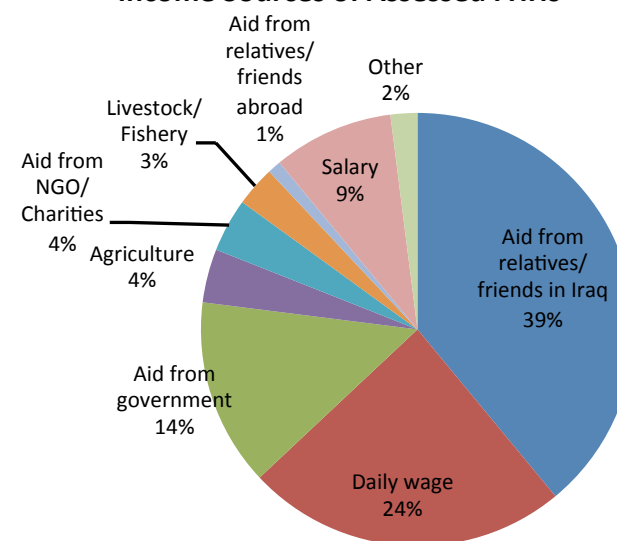
law that limit women's economic choices²⁰. In practice, some laws and their interpretations limit women from working in certain sectors that require hard labour, night-time work, or dangerous tasks. Moreover, Iraqi society still perceives women in their traditional role as housekeepers, even if it seems that a change is occurring among the new generations: 66% of youth, compared to 42% of the elderly, support women's right to work²¹. The effects of barriers to female employment are stronger in the private sector where only 2% of all employees are women²². Of all working females, 40% work in the private sector (96% of those who are illiterate or with basic education) while 60% are employed in the government and public sector (95% of those with a diploma or above)²³. Among female workers, 30.5% in 2011 worked in the agricultural sector, more than three times the percentage of men working in the same sector (9.5%). The percentage reaches 81% of working females in rural areas²⁴.

FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS (FHHS)²⁵

In Iraq, due to years of war and political instability, 10% of households are headed by females who are widowed, divorced, separated, or caring for sick spouses. They represent one of the most vulnerable segments of the population and are more exposed to poverty and food insecurity as a result of lower overall income levels. More than half of Female Heads of Households (FHoH) are between the ages of 35 and 54. This segment of the population is particularly disadvantaged in terms of education and access to employment and adequate shelter. According to IOM, only 2% of FHoH interviewed are employed and have a steady salary while an additional 6% are employed doing odd jobs and do not earn a regular income. Due

to poor living conditions, FHoH are vulnerable to illness and health problems such as malnutrition and skin and stomach diseases as well as a lack of food and clean drinking water.

Income Sources of Assessed FHHS



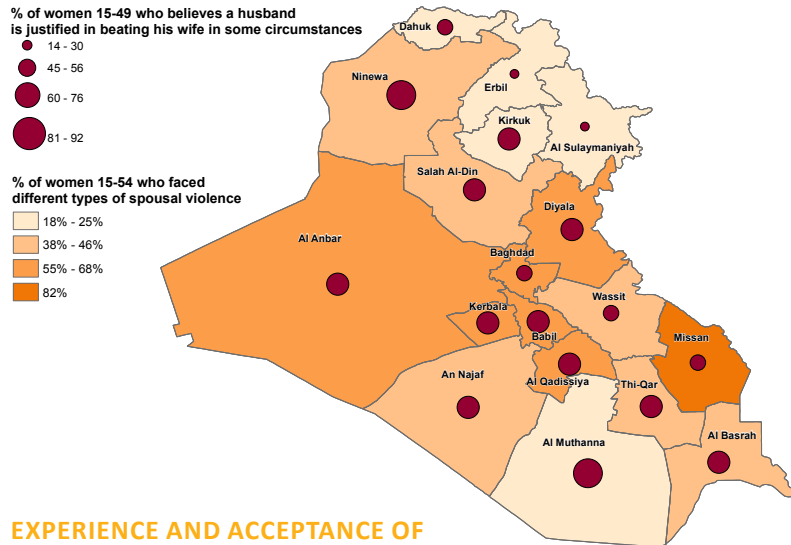
Source: IOM-Iraq, Special Report Female Headed Households, 2012

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Gender-based violence in Iraq is one of the factors preventing women's full political, social, and economic participation. Domestic violence, honour killings, and human trafficking remain a threat to many Iraqi women and girls due to a complex mix of misconceptions in cultural beliefs and traditions. Most of the violence against women occurs at home. 46% of girls aged 10-14 were exposed to violence at least once by a family member²⁶. 46% of currently married women were exposed to at least one form of spousal violence: 44.5% to emotional violence, 5.5% to physical violence, and 9.3% to sexual violence²⁷. Sexually-violent situations with a spouse are reportedly

faced once or twice per month by 38.3% of women and almost daily by 3.4% of women²⁸. Outside the home, violence against women occurs mainly in the markets (25.8%), streets (19.5%), while using transportation (10.5%), and at police stops (4.7%)²⁹. However, only 2.8% of women are willing to report violence to the police due to fear of damaging their reputation (51.4%) or because they consider the police unable to solve the problem (30.8%)³⁰. Iraqi women aged 15-49 describe common culture, influence of the family, and incorrect interpretations of religion, as well as the laws of the country, as the main causes of violence against women³¹. Honour crimes are still common in the country partly due to reduced sentences under the Iraqi penal code for honour killings. Iraqi women and girls are also victims of human trafficking within Iraq and in neighbouring countries for forced

prostitution and sexual exploitation within households³². Victims of trafficking receive little support within Iraq and are often blamed or even punished for what has happened to them. Moreover, in the Kurdistan Region 43% of women aged 15-49 reported some form of female genital mutilation, compared to only 1% in the rest of Iraq³³. 51% of women aged 15-49 believe that a husband has the right to hit or beat his wife in some circumstances. The percentage decreases among women with higher levels of education and those living in wealthier households³⁴. Meanwhile, 50% of women think they should be empowered against violence by instating deterrent laws, establishing protecting institutions (30.3%), or providing protection from VAW (12.6%)³⁵.



EXPERIENCE AND ACCEPTANCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN

Source: MICS2011, I-WISH 2011.

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Women in Iraq have the same right as men to vote and participate in political life. Since 2005, a quota of 25% for women in parliament has been in place; however, it has not resulted in greater inclusion or support for women's issues in the overall political agenda.³⁶ Moreover, women remain under-represented in local and national government. Furthermore, the prevalent insecurity remains a significant obstacle to women's political participation and representation. There is also an obstacle of perception with only 67.7% of women believing that women should participate in political elections as candidates and 84.8% believing that women should vote. Politics is considered a "man's business" for the 41.5% of women that do not want to participate in political affairs. While women's participation in the

2010 Parliament remains low (67.4%), a significant improvement has been achieved since 2005 when the percentage of participation was only 46.4. Female participation within the community is also very low: less than 10% of women joined clubhouses, social clubs, unions, political parties, or women's associations.

Economic participation is low for different reasons: of women that cannot find paid employment, 17.2% stated the main reasons for their unemployment to be having a low level of education or lacking skills, while 6.9% cite family opposition. Lack of education and awareness of rights also limit women's empowerment: 38.6% of women in Iraq do not perceive men and women as being equal in society while 31.5% think they are partially equal. Among women that consider men and women partially equal, 47.7% think the reason for the inequality is that men are superior, while 19.2% think men and women are not equal because the law does not give them equal rights, and 13.1% think this inequality is a consequence of misinterpretation of religion. 50% of women think that the government and the parliament can empower women to perform their social role by providing projects for women's support, while 16.7% think it is important to raise awareness among men on women role and rights³⁷.

MALE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

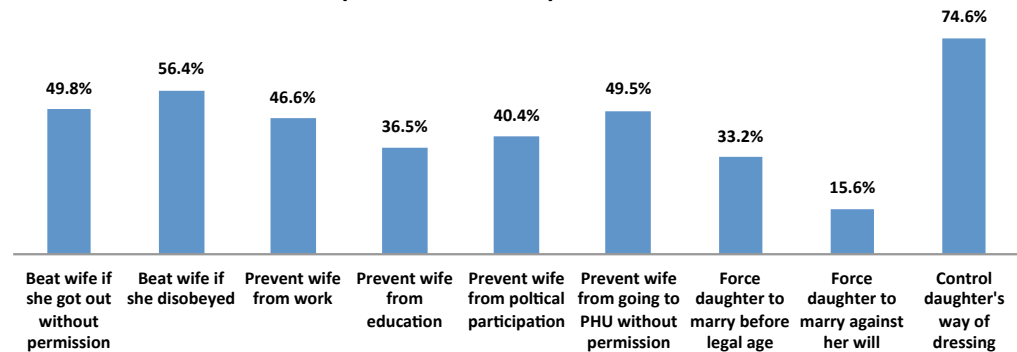
Men and boys play a key role in achieving gender equality, thus raising their awareness of women's rights is crucial to empowering women and eradicating gender-based violence. For many Iraqi men, especially in rural areas, women are considered to be followers of men in both the household and society. Women are not perceived to be as capable as men in public and political affairs or as decision makers. They are often limited to the stereotypical roles of child-bearing and managing internal household affairs³⁸. A large percentage of men justify violence against women—violent acts may include beating of wives and daughters, forcing daughters to marry before the legal minimum age, and preventing them from going to work or medical centres alone.³⁹ Moreover, 68% of young men accept the killing of women for shaming a family's honour⁴⁰. Changing these cultural and social beliefs requires a sensitization of men at each level: parliamentary, judicial, and legal, as well as within the police forces, civil society, community, and among religious leaders.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Civil society organizations and NGOs are crucial to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Since 2004, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) has worked to prevent violence against women by providing shelter for women and girls seeking to escape so-called honour killings and sexual slavery.⁴¹ The Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) works to enhance local capacity to increase rural and marginalized women's awareness of their rights and the laws protecting them. Furthermore, WEO cooperates with religious leaders and the Ministry of Religious Affairs to reduce violence against women through direct dialogue and debate with actors who exert a great influence on people in Iraq.⁴²

The State Ministry for Women's Affairs (SMWA) is developing a national strategy to promote the status of Iraqi women through the mainstreaming of gender and human rights in planning and programming

Percentage of men (18+) who perceive that men have the right to undertake specific actions in specific situations



Source: I-WISH 2011.

with the support of international organizations and concerned ministries and institutions, whether directly or indirectly. The SMWA is also setting up a national strategy to combat violence against women with the support of UNFPA.⁴³

Since 2008, Kurdish law has mandated that an honour killing has to be treated like any other murder, but the practice continues, and the crime is often hidden or disguised to look like suicide.

The Government of Iraq should remove the discrimination persisting in the civil and penal code that limits women's participation in the labour market and leaves unpunished certain types of violence against women. A more participatory strategy to empower women and reduce gender inequalities should be adopted, one that involves working more with civil society as well as involving boys, men, and religious leaders to gradually change the perception of women and to increase their role in the society and in the development process.

UN RESPONSE

UN agencies are working closely with the GoI and NGOs to promote gender equality and support national and local strategies for women's empowerment and civil society capacity building. They are also working together to implement several programmes and projects to address the barriers that hamper women's socio-economic participation. Projects include literacy and educational interventions, vocational training, support in

initiating business activities via the provision of loans and training, and socio-economic assistance to female-headed households. Violence against women is addressed through advocacy campaigns and the Combating Violence Against Women (CVAW) strategy for improving prevention and response.

UNFPA's Gender Programme proposes prevention and response strategies for ending Gender-Based Violence (GBV). UNWomen/UNDP/UNHCR/WHO/UNAMI supported by the Joint Analysis and Policy Unit (JAPU) are in the process of developing a system of data gathering and monitoring for violence against women, in collaboration with the SMWA. UNWomen is supporting the drafting of legislation to combat domestic violence. UNDP has provided 1,000 women with loans for micro-businesses through the Private Sector Development Programme in Iraq and has enhanced access to justice for women and children by supporting the development of a regional anti-domestic violence bill. UNESCO strives to mainstream gender equality across its programme encompassing Education, Science, Culture, and Communication and Information, hence contributing to the UNSC objective of linking women to the peace and security agenda in Iraq. IOM has provided socio-economic assistance for women including support for female-headed households, vocational training in business management, and the formation of Women's Empowerment Groups to voice the problems and needs of women and girls.

ENDNOTES

¹ UNDP, WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT – INTEGRATING WOMEN INTO THE IRAQI ECONOMY, 2012.

²⁻⁴ CSO/KRSO/UN, IRAQ KNOWLEDGE NETWORK 2011.

⁵ CSO/KRSO/UNICEF, MULTIPLE INDICATOR CLUSTER SURVEY 2011(MICS2011), FINAL REPORT 2012.

⁶ CSO, MDGS MONITORING REPORT, 2012.

⁷ GOI, NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (NDP) 2010-2014.

⁸ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

⁹⁻¹⁰ CSO/KRSO/ MOH /UNICEF, MULTIPLE INDICATOR CLUSTER SURVEY 2011(MICS2011), FINAL REPORT 2012.

¹¹ CSO, MDGS MONITORING REPORT, 2012.

¹² WHO/COSIT/KRSO/MOH, IRAQ FAMILY HEALTH SURVEY 2006-2007.

¹³ WHO, [HTTP://WWW.EMRO.WHO.INT/IRQ/PROGRAMMES/MATERNAL-NEWBORN-CHILD-ADOLESCENT-HEALTH.HTML](http://www.emro.who.int/irq/programmes/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health.html)

¹⁴⁻¹⁷ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ CSO/KRSO/UN, IRAQ KNOWLEDGE NETWORK 2011.

²⁰ UNDP, WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT – INTEGRATING WOMEN INTO THE IRAQI ECONOMY, 2012.

²¹ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

²²⁻²⁴ CSO/KRSO/UN, IRAQ KNOWLEDGE NETWORK 2011.

²⁵ IOM-IRAQ, SPECIAL REPORT FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS, 2012.

²⁶⁻³¹ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

³² UNHCR, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT 2012.

³³⁻³⁴ CSO/KRSO/ MOH /UNICEF, MULTIPLE INDICATOR CLUSTER SURVEY 2011 (MICS2011), FINAL REPORT 2012..

³⁵ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

³⁶ UNDP, WOMEN ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT – INTEGRATING WOMEN INTO THE IRAQI ECONOMY, 2012

³⁷⁻³⁹ CSO/KRSO/UNFPA/PAN ARAB PROJECT FOR FAMILY HEALTH, IRAQI WOMEN INTEGRATED SOCIAL AND HEALTH SURVEY (I-WISH 2011), 2012.

⁴⁰ UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORT, IRAQ NATIONAL YOUTH SURVEY 2009.

⁴¹ WWW.OWFI.COM

⁴² WWW.WEOIRAQ.COM

⁴³ [HTTP://WWW.SMWA.GOV.IQ](http://www.smwa.gov.iq)