GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL COHESION IN IRAQ

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DISCLAIMERS

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Foreword

Globally, substantial gender gaps continue to deprive women and girls of opportunities. Better educational outcomes and economic growth have still not translated into more and better jobs for women. Women's labour force participation rates have not been at the desired level. Furthermore, women are being disproportionately impacted due to economic crises as well as emergencies such as pandemic and disasters.

However, the global digital transformation also mitigates some traditional barriers to women's entrepreneurship the MENA region, Iraq included. The digitalisation of production processes and adoption of digital technology by businesses allow for new business models and facilitate the realisation of entrepreneurial projects operating from home. In addition, tech companies tend to be less capital and labour intensive. These new ways of doing business can particularly benefit MENA women, who often struggle to reconcile paid work and family responsibilities, and face impediments in accessing capital, leasing and owning property.

As SPARK, we are working with our partners to close this gender divide through higher education and job creation programs for refugees and host communities to catch up with global trends and a more equal access to work opportunities. SPARK's Jobs and Perspectives Programme in Iraq, funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, works on increasing access to (higher) vocational education and work opportunities for youth from host and refugee communities alike. Together with our partner universities, we focus on market relevant education to youth (with a particular focus on young women) while boosting gender equality and promoting social cohesion for refugees.

SPARK engages to strengthen its programs support for gender equality and women's empowerment. Accordingly,

We provide regional and/or country-specific women's entrepreneurship support and facilitate the women entrepreneurs to access to financial opportunities.

We reduce gender gaps in higher education, helping women overcome labour market disadvantages. We promote educational and training opportunities for women to enhance their economic and digital literacy. We improve curricula of higher education and academic education by incorporating gender studies.

We help establish gender units in HEIs and support our stakeholders and partners to design and implement evidence-based, gender-sensitive policies and programs.

For women to reach their full potential in the public sphere, they need the tools and relevant job skills to remain competitive in marketplaces. When women are empowered to fully participate in their local economies, those local economies grow. This creates conditions for increased stability, security, and prosperity for the wider community. When women have equal opportunities, communities are more likely to thrive and solve challenges peacefully.

This report covers the topics debated in the workshop titled "Gender Equality and Social Cohesion: Pathways for Future" which we organized in cooperation with Yasar University in October 2021. The workshop was held to provide a comprehensive situation analysis to unravel the potential opportunities and challenges to advance gender equality and women's advancement in Iraq. We appreciate the valuable contributions from every individual and many different stakeholders.

Leontine SPECKER
SPARK, Regional Programme Director

Foreword

Wars, conflicts, economic challenges, climate change, and the displacement of people have reached unprecedented levels in the 21st century. The severe impacts of these interlocking challenges are often felt more by weaker and vulnerable groups, especially women, whom the social structure encodes as more disadvantaged. Indeed, all crises and conflicts exact their highest price from women and girls. Drawing on the discourse of solidarity and global solutions, we need to go beyond repetitions of "good will" to initiate renewed commitments that lead to concrete actions.

Women represent half the population in Iraq and are among the world's most disempowered. According to UN figures, girls' illiteracy rates are double those of boys while only 14 percent of women are employed compared to 73 percent of men. Domestic violence, whether emotional, physical, or sexual, is prevalent and gender inequality pervades all levels of Iraq's conservative society. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected women and girls by exacerbating numerous social, economic, and political challenges. Hence, there is an urgent need to ensure that efforts towards achieving a peaceful and sustainable future in Iraq are more gender responsive.

To provide an opportunity to listen to the needs and suggestions of Iraqi people themselves, we held a workshop on 20th October 2021 under Yasar University (Izmir, Turkey) and SPARK, titled "Gender Equality and Social Cohesion: Pathways for Future". The workshop, which was attended by 130 public officials, researchers, and NGO workers in Iraq, was based on the idea that indigenous women and men can find solutions from their lived experiences. This report highlights some of the workshop's significant topics and discussions about gender equality. The report aims to provide a comprehensive situation analysis to advance gender equality and women's development in Iraq.

We hope this report can assist policy makers in designing and implementing effective gender-based response actions and suggest a path for increasing women's resilience and recovery in Iraq. We believe that gender equality and women's empowerment will be advanced by increasing women's representation in wider segments of Iraqi society, such as the national parliament, and national gender equality mechanisms and institutions.

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Executive Summary

This report is issued as a joint collaboration between SPARK, Yasar University UNESCO Chair on International Migration, and Yasar University Women and Family Research Center. The report is based on the outputs from an online workshop titled "Gender Equality and Social Cohesion: Pathways for Future", organized on 20th October, 2021. The workshop was attended by 130 public officials, researchers, and NGO workers in Iraq. This report aims to provide a comprehensive situation analysis to identify opportunities and challenges in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq.

The report contains six chapters that take a gender-based perspective on the challenging issues of disability, economic empowerment, violence, migration, the impact of Covid-19, and peacebuilding in Iraq.

The first chapter, "Life Means My Disability": Ableism, Disability, and Gender in Iraq", by Lynn Rose, discusses the implications of the combined forces of discrimination against women and discrimination against people with disabilities within the framework of sexism and ableism in Iraq. The author explains how women with disabilities in Iraq experience gendered ableism in an intersectional context of oppression that stems from a medical model of disability. The chapter presents the findings of 21 semi-structured interviews with people with a variety of disabilities in Iraq. Rose concludes that the problem that society needs to solve is ablesim rather than disability.

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The second chapter, "Normalizing Abnormality: Violence Against Women in Iraq", by Ozlem Duva Kaya, discusses the increasing violence against women with particular attention to the effects of war, migration, and famine in Iraq. The author underlines how violence against subordinated groups is normalized by cultural and religious values, traditions, and institutions. The chapter presents the findings of interviews with Iraqi NGO representatives. Kaya argues that the dramatic rise in violence against women in Iraq is due to the poverty resulting from war and displacement. She then calls for action to formally identify violence against women and implement existing laws appropriately, both in Iraq and worldwide.

The third chapter, "Understanding Covid-19's Impact on Women In Iraq", by Huriye Toker, focuses on the impacts of Covid-19 on Iraqi women. The chapter explains how the pandemic has dramatically increased the global gender gap, with a 36-year setback for achieving equality for women. Toker argues that women are paying the price of the pandemic much more heavily than men. In Iraq specifically, women and girls have faced increased poverty, domestic violence, maternal mortality, forced and early child marriages, female genital mutilation, and limited access to contraception and antenatal care. Toker suggests focusing on education as integral to human development and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and gender-based inequalities in the post-Covid-19 era.

The fourth chapter, "Empowerment of Women in Iraq's Economy and Social Life", by Serpil Kahraman, explains that despite Iraq's rich natural resources, high economic instability and low growth directly hinders women's economic and social empowerment. Kahraman argues that the government should implement macroeconomic and sectoral policies to ensure women's schooling, skills, and abilities to enable sustainable development and empower woman in Iraq.

The fifth chapter, "Women Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq", by Ayselin Yıldız and Ceren Genç, highlights how displacement and refugee status create a double vulnerability among women in Iraq. It focuses on the role of gender in explaining inequalities, violence, and socio-economic restrictions in Iraqi society. The chapter also suggests how governments, international donors, and agencies can develop gender-sensitive policies and programs for displaced persons and people in need of protection.

The last chapter, "Women in Peacebuilding Participation in Iraq", by Dilaver Arıkan Açar, discusses peace building and stability in societies suffering from armed conflicts. He argues that those trying to meet these challenges often ignore or marginalize women, including in Iraq. However, excluding women's essential contributions to peace is a likely reason why peace processes fail, as Iraq has experienced over the last four decades. Açar explains how many Iraqi women have been targets of armed conflict, particularly sexual violence, which has been used as tactic of war. He concludes that the wounds of conflict will be healed, and Iraq will achieve security, trust, and peace more quickly if women are included in peace-building process.

All crises and conflicts exact their highest toll on women and girls, and Iraq is clearly not the only area of conflict, so all the issues addressed in this report should concern many other countries as well. We will keep working in support of mainstream gender equality and to fulfil our commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals by considering gender equality as not only a distinct goal but also an intersectional issue. We all need to take further concrete actions to realize the central and transformative promise of "Leave no one behind".

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"LIFE MY DISABILITY": ABLEISM, DISABILITY, AND GENDER IN IRAQ

Introduction and Overview

This chapter discusses the implications of the combined forces of discrimination against women and discrimination against people with disabilities, in other words, sexism and ableism, in Iraq. Women with disabilities in Iraq experience gendered ableism in an intersectional context of oppression that stems from a medical model of disability. In contrast, a social model of disability, albeit with a caveat for the global South, would offer a more productive approach. This overview of women and disability in Iraq draws on the scholarly literature of disability studies and the words of Iraqi women with disabilities who we interviewed in spring 2020 about the daily realities of living with a disability. We conducted 21 semi-structured interviews of at least two hours with people with a variety of disabilities (sensory, corporeal, psychiatric, and cognitive) and whose birth dates ranged from 1938 to 2002.

After a brief introduction about the demographics of disability in Iraq, this chapter discusses ableism and intersectionality before considering the complexities of gendered ableism. Explanations of the medical model and social model are then presented, followed by a summary of signs of progress for disability equity in Iraq, and suggestions for the way forward.

Although not always visible, people with disabilities are a large part of any demographic. According to the World Health Organization (2021), at least 15% of the world's population is disabled and this population is increasing. Indeed, 15% is a low estimate if cognitive, psychiatric, and other invisible disabilities are included as well as physical disabilities. In Iraq specifically, about four million people are disabled—again, probably a low estimate. As a report from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq (2021, 4) put it,

> Persons with disabilities in Iraq have been disproportionately impacted by war, armed conflict, terrorism, violence and the economic hardship. Iraq has one of the largest populations of persons with disabilities in the world.

Disability is a health issue, a human rights issue, and a component of our identity as human beings. As Ms. Shatoo, one of our interviewees, says: "My disability is everything that I am; everything that I am made of is my disability". As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011, 231-232) explains, disability is an identity, one that works within a "pervasive cultural system ... that stigmatizes certain kinds of bodily variations". Variations in psychiatric configuration, learning capacity, and sensory experience are also vulnerable to stigmatization within this system.

While there have been several reports from humanitarian organizations on people with disabilities in Iraq (e.g., HI Iraq 2020; International Organization for Migration Iraq 2021; United Nations Assistance Mission For Iraq and The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNAMI) 2016; World Health Organization (WHO) 2021), there is very little academic scholarship.

While excellent scholarship on disability in the Global South has begun, Iraq is rarely included, as serious academic consideration of disability as a cultural phenomenon is still in its infancy.

Ableism and Intersectionality

The mechanism that stigmatizes differences is ableism. While ableism affects all aspects of life, most academic scholarship has addressed ableism in academia (Brown and Leigh 2020; Brown 2021; Dolmage 2014, 2017). Smith (n.d.) defines ableism as follows:

> Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities and often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be "fixed" in one form or the other. Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean, how able-bodied people learn to treat people with disabilities and how we are often not included at the table for key decisions.

Ableism is the belief that disabled people are worth less than nondisabled people. Many women have experienced sexism, whether through lower pay for the same work that a man does or rude comments about our bodies, or being called a "bitch"—or worse—if we speak out about something controversial. In other words, women experience discrimination in large and small ways, simply for being female. Similarly, people with disabilities also experience ableism every day in large and small ways, simply for being impaired. Ableism, like sexism, can also manifest in employment discrimination, rude comments, and silencing. Architectural ableism, for example, is expressed in many ways, including flights of stairs without ramps while cultural ableism includes media stereotypes of dangerous, mentally ill criminals, and legal ableism is seen in unimplemented laws that would, if implemented, guarantee the rights of people with disabilities.

Internalization of oppression is also very damaging in both sexism and ableism. When sexism is internalized, girls and women, steeped in a culture that tells them that they are by nature inferior to men and incapable on many fronts, start to believe it and act accordingly. Internalized sexism not only leads to believing oneself to be inferior but also to perceiving other women as inferior and unworthy. Likewise, people with disabilities internalize the belief that they are inferior to nondisabled people and may perceive other people with disabilities as inferior and unworthy.

Because of multiple systems of oppression, being female amplifies the identity of disability and the discriminatory system. Disabled women are subject to both ableism and sexism, and the result is multiplicative rather than additive. We are all a combination of all our identities—our ability, gender, class, economic status, sexuality, and so on, so intersectionality is a powerful lens through which to view multiple oppressive systems. As Deborah Stienstra and Leon Nyerere (2016, 255) explain, "intersectionality helps us to understand the structural locations and multiple experiences that are created, reproduced, and sustained on racialised and disability inequalities around the globe".

Intersectional oppression is prevalent worldwide, including in Iraq. Women in general are less likely to be heard while ableism makes it even less likely that disabled women's voices will be heard, especially if the disability affects speaking.

Recently, a woman in Sulaimani with a speech disfluency due to cerebral palsy was refused permission to draw money from her own bank account on the assumption that she would be unable to manage her own money. Deaf people in Iraq are usually shut out of conversations, given problems with sign language education while women who are deaf are even more prone to being shut out.

Gendered Ableism

There are deep systemic problems in Iraq regarding disability and ableism, especially when considering gender. These problems are present in the family even before a child's birth because there is a general lack of training and support for parents of children with disabilities. There is also a lack of screening, testing, diagnosis, treatment, and accommodation for children with disabilities, so they likely face immediate stigmatization. There is very little accommodation in Iraq's K-12 school system, whether for children using wheelchairs or children on the autism spectrum. Deaf students get education in sign language only up to the ninth grade in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) region of Iraq and the sixth grade elsewhere in Iraq. Furthermore, the quality of this sign language education is inconsistent. Underlying all of this is a pervasive stigma against disability, usually based in ignorance and fear.

Another example of intersectional gender-based oppression can be seen in the women with visible disabilities, who are stripped of their main role as females, specifically as wives and mothers. In any heavily patriarchal society this is a real and meaningful deprivation. Disabled women are often thought unfit to marry or worthy of marrying only an older or infirm man. They are expected to acquiesce to their husband remarrying and are sometimes expected to put up gratefully with an abusive marriage.

It is not unusual that girls with significant mobility impairments are given hysterectomies, with or without their consent, to save the caregiver from dealing with menstruation while women with significant psychiatric disability are given hysterectomies to prevent them becoming pregnant, for example in the case of rape. This reflects an assumption that intellectually disabled girls and women are less able to defend themselves against rape, hence impregnation, or even that they are promiscuous. This is not to say that their caregivers—particularly their families—take the decision lightly; rather, it is a decision that results from economic desperation. Families are responsible for caring for disabled family members; there is no government assistance beyond a tiny monthly pension that, in recent years in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is rarely distributed. According to Ms. Leila, one of our interviewees, "I could barely live and buy my medicine. [The government] provides a little money monthly... $200 or less for those who are disabled and can't work. That's why we can see lots of disabled people selling things on the street." In fact, most people with disabilities in Iraq live in poverty. For example, a recent study reported that they

> are excluded from livelihood opportunities, such as vocational training, employment, and business development support. In addition, many are not able to access social protection payments. Many persons with disabilities are unemployed with limited access to skills training, opportunities for employment or business development support. This means that they have little to no income and struggle to afford their basic needs. Women with disabilities have even fewer job opportunities compared to men with disabilities (IOM Iraq 2021, 6).

Like all women, those with disabilities experience violence and encounter many barriers in accessing support following violence, particularly in the Global South. Disability specific violence can include "unnecessary institutionalization, denial of control over their bodies, lack of financial control, employment, and community participation" (Dowse et al. 2016, 325). While violence against women with disabilities in Iraq has not yet been well studied, the country is no exception to the situation in the global South. A 2019 report on gender-based violence in Iraq includes a summary of violence against disabled women, concluding that disabled women experience more violence than disabled men and that "women with disabilities in Iraq face compounding discrimination on the basis of their gender and their disability.... Women and girls with disabilities in Iraq are more likely to experience physical abuse, discrimination, and exploitation" (Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq 2019, 8).

Almost 30% of Iraq's population of about 40 million is rural (Macrotrends 2022) which has special implications for disabled women. In addition to the generally more traditional and tribal milieu, the intersections between rurality and disability can "lock disabled people in feminized, domestic home spaces, typically at the bottom of local social hierarchies," in what Alexandra Gartell and Elizabeth Hoban (2016, 22) call "spatial boundedness". They argue that disability is socio-spatial: human geographies are a combination of reciprocal relationships between people and place; the nature of any given place results from relationships, including power struggles. As a result, people with disabilities are denied social and economic spaces, for example when workplaces in industry and manufacturing are not accessible, and when transportation is unavailable or unaffordable. Women in villages are already restricted to the home and its immediate environs; disability magnifies this confinement.

The picture of intersectional oppression is grim: disabled women are subject to both sexism and ableism, and thereby denied their rights and opportunities in all aspects of life. They are also subject to internalizing both sexism and ableism, thus thinking very poorly of themselves and developing low self-expectations. On the bright side, intersectionality provides a tool to analyze inequalities, as Stienstra and Nyerere (2016) point out, calling it "a strategy for transformative change in power relations from the collective action of those who have been marginalised". That is, we can start to dismantle the oppression of ableism if we understand it, and we can understand oppression by looking at two ways of perceiving disability: the medical model and the social model.

The Medical Model and the Social Model

Ableism results from perceiving disability in terms of the medical model. The concepts of the medical model and the social model were both developed early in disability studies, during the 1980s, to explain different perspectives about disability and their consequences. The two contrasting models have held up well over the decades as explanatory models. Explanations of the models can be found in any number of introductions or disability studies, for example Berger (2013), Retief and Letšosa (2018), and Shakespeare (2010).

The medical model, also called the charity or individual model, posits two categories of people: disabled and normal [sic]. Disabled people are broken, and their disability is the problem—the reason that they are broken. In the medical model, in other words, disability is caused by the impairment, whether physical, cognitive, or psychiatric, which should be fixed.

By extension, the people who need to be fixed are less than, other than, and inferior to nondisabled "normal" people. They are expected to hide their impairment and "pass" as nondisabled as much as possible. They are expected to want to be cured and to go to any lengths to become as close to nondisabled people as possible. The media perpetuates this attitude through movies Million Dollar Baby (Eastwood 2004), in which the character played by Hilary Swank heroically chooses suicide over living her life as a disabled woman. Ultimately, this attitude that people with disabilities would be better off dead led to eugenics programs, such as that of the Nazi T4 program, described by Kenny Fries in the 2020 New York Times article "Before the 'Final Solution'".

Picture 1. *Watercolor painting, figure on a staircase, by Lhon Fairh Nasrallah, used with permission of the artist (2020)*

It is difficult to capture the effects of internalized ableism, but art can help close the gap because it transcends words. The painting in Picture 1 uses muted blues, yellows, greens, mauves, and pinks to depict a long, curved staircase with walls on each side. We do not see the beginning or the end of the stairs, nor can we see over the walls. A person slumped in a wheelchair has climbed the first seven stairs, leaving a brown trail all the way down the stairs behind each wheel, suggesting grooves that the wheels have formed in the staircase. This fantasy painting represents the Sisyphean nature of the medical model as well as internalized ableism resulting from defeat.

The medical model is sometimes interpreted as a rejection of doctors and the medical field. Undoubtedly, there have been tensions between medical practitioners and people with disabilities. For example, doctors have treated disabled people as exhibits, or "cases," and have seen only the disability, not the whole person.

However, while these tensions are part of the medical model, rejecting the medical model does not mean rejecting the medical field. People with disabilities, just like nondisabled people, should be free to receive dignified medical care, and doctors and others in the medical profession have played a very important role in disability advocacy and disability rights. Thus, rejecting the medical model simply means rejecting the view that the individual person—the impairment, not the social context—is the problem.

The medical or individual model is obviously not a healthy way of looking at disability as it is ableist. The alternative to the medical model is the social model, sometimes called the cultural or community model. The social model posits that the problem is not disability but the environment in all its manifestations. An impairment—any sort of impairment—is disabling, or not, according to the cultural context. If people with impairments do not have to deal with barriers, they are not disabled. Barriers take many forms, such as inaccessible buildings and services, while social barriers include attitudes, stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. The medical model itself is an attitudinal barrier. Susan Marci (2017, 202) writes that "I am reminded every day on the news, subway ads, or facebook posts that mental health issues still make people uncomfortable." She goes on to say that "this is when my impairment becomes a disability—when society does not appreciate what I deal with and I am treated differently because of it" (Marci 2017, 206).

A good way to envision the contrast between the medical and social model is to picture a wheelchair-user facing a set of stairs. In the medical model, the wheelchair-user is the problem: it's too bad he or she can't get up the stairs, but it's just the way it is, and hopefully there will be a cure soon. In the social model, the stairs are the problem. They are an example of architectural ableism, and there should be an accessible entrance instead of, or in addition to, the stairs.

Picture 2. *Water painting, two people dancing, Lhon Fairh Nasrallah, used with permission of the artist (2020)*

Picture 2 is a painting of two people. On the left is a woman with long hair in a wheelchair, wearing a rose colored shirt and jeans. She is dancing with a man with short dark hair standing on the right, wearing an orange shirt and jeans. He has one leg and is using crutches. Each looks into the other's eyes and both are smiling slightly. The muted yellow, blue, and green shapes in the background suggest an urban area. In contrast to Picture 1, this painting represents the social model of disability and the rejection of internalized ableism. Just as some women can avoid internalizing sexism, not all people with disabilities internalize ableism. As one of our interviewees, Ms Tara, put it, "Life means my disability. It is beautiful, and it is my fate." Given that the social model was developed in the West and results from a disability rights movement steeped in notions of individual liberty and personal independence, there are caveats in applying it to the Global South. One of the most important forces for disability rights actions in the U.S. is the independent living movement. This has enabled disabled people to gain their own housing and the ability to live independent lives rather than being warehoused in nursing homes and other institutions, or by being forced to live with and cared for by their parents well beyond the age when this is expected. In Iraq, by contrast, anyone of any age who requires care receives it within the extended family. The extended family can consist of several generations under one roof, and any other kin, which can include hundreds of people. There is very little warehousing, and it is rare for anyone—disabled or nondisabled—to do anything but transfer from the natal family to the marital family. Although the family can provide comfort and security, it can also be stifling or even dangerous, especially for those members who are not "normal". According to a 2016 UNAMI report (13), NGOs report that,

> most families would not even admit to having a relative with disabilities, which confirmed the view expressed by some respondents that families were sometimes the first obstacle to the integration into society of their relatives with disabilities. One interlocutor noted that families sometimes believed that their child with disabilities might be a hindrance for other members of the family to get married, because of fears that impairment might be genetic.

In Iraq, one perceived solution to ridding an extended family of shame is so-called "honor" killing, for example if a daughter is believed to have been sexually active outside marriage. However, such punishment is not limited to sexual transgression; children with disabilities are also subject to disposal. Thus, applying the social model in Iraq, we have to consider the socio-cultural milieu of the family and acknowledge the role of interdependence rather than independence (Cultural Atlas 2021).

Signs of Progress

While there are many gaps in the quest to overcome ableism and sexism, there is also reason for hope. Many disabled people have resisted internalizing stigma, pity, and paternalism, and there is disability pride in Iraq. Organizations that advocate for people with disabilities continue to fight for the proper implementation of laws and policies to guarantee rights for people with disabilities that are presently mostly ignored, such as Iraqi Law 38 (Protection Law for People with Disability and Special Needs, passed in 2013) and Kurdish Law 22 (The Law of Rights and Privileges of Disabled People and Special Needs in the Kurdistan Region, passed in 2011). In addition, Iraq signed the UNCRPD (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) in 2013 but never implemented it.

Other organizations, such as the Halabja Disability Organization, work tirelessly to promote and provide appropriate education at all levels for people with disabilities. IOM Iraq (2021) identified 21 OPDs (Organizations for People with Disabilities) operating Iraq and there are other organizations that were not counted in this report.

In general, organizations of people with disabilities are aware of intersectional oppression, and many strive to include women among their directors and boards. The Rozh Society for People with Disabilities in Sulaimani, for example, maintains a equal balance of male and female board members, all of whom are disabled. As Dowse, Frohmader, and Didi note, "new global alliances within the disability movement are forming to pioneer feminist disability activism locally and to drive international action on gendered disability violence", and there is no reason why this cannot happen in Iraq.

How do we continue to dismantle ableism and sexism against women and girls with disabilities? Fear and stigma come from the unknown, so it is important to increase interaction between nondisabled and disabled people. Anna Roach (2017, 143), a 24-year-old woman with Down Syndrome, writes this: "I think people are embarrassed of me because I'm different. But don't leave me out. Try putting yourself in my shoes. Give me a chance to be a friend. I'm just like you, so treat me like I'm a person." There are many ways to dismantle sexism and ableism, and thereby improve the situation of women with disabilities in Iraq. The laws mentioned above and the UNCRPD principles must be properly implemented. However, for this to happen, and for any implemented laws to take root, the attitudinal atmosphere must improve. Disability rights must be accepted as human rights, replacing the medical model of pity and charity. The best way to achieve this —to implement the social model—is through education at all levels. Already, in addition to the efforts of the Halabja Disability Organization mentioned above, people from disability advocacy organizations are speaking to groups of students. However, their efforts, while worthwhile and commendable, are sporadic. The European Union plans to work with the Ministry of Education in Baghdad to begin incorporating human rights awareness units, including disability, in the Iraq primary education curriculum. Deeper education about human rights to ensure that people with disabilities are included in developing and delivering the curriculum is necessary at all levels. Disability Studies, the interdisciplinary field that considers disability as a characteristic rather than a defect, and one that shifts in meaning depending on its chronological and cultural context, would be very useful in secondary schools and especially in the university curriculum. As part of its gender studies minor, the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, will offer an introductory course in Disability Studies in spring 2022, the first ever in Iraq. Such courses should be incorporated into all of Iraq's higher education institutions.

Another valuable first step in any matter of social justice is simply to speak up wherever we see exclusion. In order to recognize injustice, we can read, and recommend what we read to other people. In addition to the other pieces cited here, a useful starting point is Emily Ladau's very accessible 2021 book, 'Demystifying Disability'. Maybe the most effective first step is to see the problem clearly. Ableism is the problem. Disability is not the problem. Disability is normal.

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CHAPTER 2

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NORMALIZING ABNORMALITY: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN IRAQ

Introduction

While violence can be categorized and defined in various ways, it can be roughly described as "harmful behavior to another person" that affects particular individuals and groups in different ways (WHO 2002, 5). The frequency of different kinds of violence varies across countries, but violence against women is both widespread and frequently condoned, making it a crucial area for understanding male dominance (Macionis and Plummer 2005, 314). Systematic violence, which has been going on for centuries and especially against women, is increased in situations like war, migration, and famine. While violence can affect all segments of society, those who have been historically subordinated are more seriously affected. That is, there is a common ground for violence across different geographies, cultures, and types. For example, those who are victims of sexism are highly affected by violence in society because the violence against them is normalized by cultural and religious values, traditions, and institutions.

Although acts of violence against women are human rights violations that breach specific obligations of states under international law, it is hard to eliminate such violence because it is embedded within the cultural norms and traditions of many countries. Extreme levels of discrimination have finally made violence against women a public concern, which has forced many countries to provide non-violent living conditions. However, despite all the legal measures taken, it is not easy to achieve this goal. It is difficult for women to avoid certain types of violence since domestic, physical, and sexual violence are socially normalized and law enforcement officers take a masculine view of such acts in many countries. Combating violence against women entails first identifying it formally and then enforcing and implementing the laws appropriately. Police, judges and law enforcement officers, who mostly adopt and reflect the common norms of their society, do not have gender equality perspective to implement the laws. Thus, various studies into combatting domestic violence and workplace harassment have usefully focused on changing social structures and cultural norms of the society. Depending on different countries and cultures, it is known that women have been subjected to violence on a wide scale from discrimination of women in the workplace to honor killings; from domestic and psychological violence to pressures that result suicides. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze carefully the structure of the society in which violence occurs.

Data and studies from non-governmental organizations are also useful to analyze existing problems in depth and find effective solutions. Such studies reveal the current situation in detail and provide the data needed to develop concrete solutions to the problems and recommendations to overcome with it. According to the United Nations' Data from 2000, "at least one in five of the world's female population has been physically or sexually abused by men in their life".

In 2021, WHO suggested a higher proportion: "globally about 1 in 3 (30%) of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime" (WHO 2021a). Although such figures are often hard to interpret, it is clear that violence against women is a major global issue. The key to understanding these issues is not to see them as 'women's issues' but as part of a gender regime in which patriarchy plays a key organizing role. Violence against women– particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major human rights violation that excludes no country or region, including Iraq.

Lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have increased women's exposure to abusive partners and other risk factors while limiting their access to services. While data remains limited, reports from China, the United Kingdom, the United States, and other countries suggest that domestic violence cases have incereased during the pandemic (WHO 2021b). Indeed, violence against women tends to increase during any emergency, and older women and women with disabilities are likely to face additional risks and have extra needs. Women who are displaced, refugees, and those living in conflict-affected areas are particularly vulnerable.

Available data and research findings indicate that it is more difficult to eliminate domestic violence and violence experienced by women for cultural reasons than other kinds of violence. However, it is also very difficult to estimate the intensity of such violence because of the difficulty of collecting data. Interviewing women about violence is challenging, especially in the presence of other family members, as this may lead to greater violence (WHO 2007, 23). Women remain silent both because of opressive family behavioral patterns and internalized traditional and religious norms. Beliefs, ethos, and cultural norms not only make it difficult to combat violence but creating an extra burden or resistence with exposing more violence against women if the society attampt to change it. In Iraq, for example, domestic violence against women has increased dramatically since the end of the war. Yet few women who are victims of violence make criminal complaints despite being the worst affected persons by war, instability, and a fragmented society.

This situation not only causes an increase in domestic violence, but also in physical violence. The fact that violence is considered normal by almost all members of the society also affects the combatting violence against women. Unfortunately, women are not only ignored, psychologically abused or marginalized but also they are exposed to many forms of violence and social devastation. It is observed that women inflict violence on themselves or end their lives because they cannot escape from the cycle they are in. The devastation and desperation caused by violence prevents women from fighting for their rights, and thus the scale and intensity of violence directed against them, including physical violence, enlarges.

Domestic Abuse and Physical Violence in Iraq

Domestic violence, including child and elderly abuse and intimate partner violence is a common problem in Iraq that many individuals are exposed to. Unfortunately, domestic violence causes the other forms of violence as they are interrelated. For this reason, fighting domestic violence means fighting other types of violence in society. Domestic violence includes a range of abuse, including economic, physical, sexual, emotional and psychological, against children, adults and the elderly, and women are also subjected to this abuse intensely.

Intimate partner violence includes stalking by a current or former partner, sexual and physical violence, and psychological aggression. However, it is generally thought that domestic violence is underreported. Women generally do not prefer to talk about domestic violence because of fear and exclusion. On the other hand, domestic violence affects not only the victim, but also their family, co-workers and society in general. It causes a decrease in psychological and physical health, reduces the quality of life and effects the productivity negatively. Integration of domestic violence with physical violence is one of the most difficult situations for women to compete with. Especially women, who are vulnerable to violence due to traditional cultural codes, can make radical decisions such as ending their lives to be freed of this violence, since they do not have an economic income. When they take all risks and try to make a decision about their own lives, they may face dangers such as honor killings. Permanent solutions to these problems have not been developed, and moreover, it is known that the situation has worsened for women after the Covid 19 pandemic.

According to information gathered by the Listening and Guidance Center for Legal, Psychological, and Social Support in Iraq, physical violence is the most frequent form of violence in the country. Violence has also increased remarkably during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially against women and girls, as domestic violence has spread in all its forms in Iraqi families, particularly during curfews and when work has been disrupted. The NGO's representatives describe the situation as a "nightmare" while noting the increasing number of suicides and murders of Iraq's female population. The NGO has also accused the media of amplifying cycles of domestic violence rather than examining their root causes in Iraqi society (Workshop notes, 2021).

Although women have experienced similar problems worldwide during the pandemic, it should not be overlooked that the factors that encourage violence during crises are related to tradition and crisis management processes within the society. During crises, societies tend to become more introverted, conservative, and violent, so women unfortunately become the objects of this violence because of their social position. Cultural traditions normalize violent agents and legitimize their violence. Therefore, administrations and institutions have a public responsibility to protect women against such violence. Conversely, if the state's approach merely reflects the society's traditional family norms then violence cannot be prevented,

The Iraqi constitution stipulates that the family is the nucleus of society and should be protected. Domestic violence is not limited to the husband and wife, but extends to all family members, and the state bears the responsibility to protect this family for all forms of domestic violence, especially against women. Where support was provided to women exposed to violence during the Corona pandemic by the Listening and Guidance Center for Legal, Psychological and Social Support for the Iraqi Women and the Future Organization for the year 2020-2021, and legal and psychological support was provided and their case was managed until they reached a state of full psychological recovery. Where the highest rate of domestic violence has been determined is physical violence, especially violence by the partner, and the reasons are many, including the lack of awareness among women of their rights stipulated in laws, customs, and traditions even inside the home, in addition, the economic conditions due to a work stoppage, official working hours and the imposition of lockdowns (Workshop notes 2021).

This quotation clearly indicates that women will remain unaware about how to exercise their rights under the conservative circumstances. Since the women don't have the proper economic freedom to struggle and fight for their political rights, they have difficulties to find a way out for themselves. It is observed that women who do not have the economic power to establish their own lives, tend to internalize or endure passively to the violence. There are also historical, social, cultural and intellectual reasons for this silence of women.

Throughout history, based on perceived differences, women have been considered as either inferior to men or their direct opposite. Consequently, men have assigned certain duties and functions to women. Having been defined as lesser forms of the masculine individual, women have developed a paradigm of the self -based on a masculine prototype. Feminists have therefore argued that the self is not only a metaphysical issue but also has ethical, epistemological, social, and political dimensions. Thanks to women's movements and feminist theorists, questions about personal identity, the body, sociality, and agency have been discussed. For example, Simone de Beauvoir's provocative declaration, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other", adresses the central importance of the self and self-awarenessness for feminism. "Being Other" means being a non-subject or a non-agent in life. Within traditional structures that only make sense of women as a "thing", an instrument, or an object, women's selfhood has been systematically subordinated or even outright denied by law, customary practice, and cultural norms. These factors have led to marginalization and violence against women. Even a norm that belongs to the current normative system may result in punishment if considered contrary to "masculine ideals", without any need to justify or hide the violence in most cases. For example, violence, harassment and rape that women suffer as a result of going out late or at night, can be easily justified because of the masculine point of view. The fact that women are held responsible for the violence they have suffered, rapists benefit from the discount named "unjust provocation". Due to such practices, disincentives are removed and violent acts increase. Consequently, women's exposure to violence complies with "normal" living standards; so, violence against women cannot be prevented only by legal regulations. When it comes to acts of violence against women, penalties and legal sanctions for acts of violence are not properly implemented. That is, in implementing laws, the masculine view and cultural structure that promotes double standards, should also be criticized. Unfortunately, domestic violence in Iraq is not only supported by the legal system but receives widespread social acceptance. In short, violence against women can not be prevented without a holistic approach that mobilizes all implementation practices together.

As in many parts of the World, gender-based violence and discrimination against women as well as impunity for such acts have unfortunately been longstanding problems in Iraq. Although physical violence, rape, and sexual assault are criminalized in Iraq's penal code, the judicial system enables impunity for such crimes. For example, violence is considered a crime yet those convicted of sexual violence crimes can be acquitted if they marry their victims, including victims under the age of 18. This is more than a contradiction: it encourages sexual violence. The problems raised by such provisions cannot be understood or resolved through legal principles because they are sustained by conceptualizations of "honor" and ethos that are embedded in culture and that increase the pressure on victims by preventing them from speaking out against violence (Puttick 2015, 12). If women are forced to marry their rapists or other violent men, it is impossible to reduce the pressure on victims. In addition, because they have internalized the cultural codes, the female victims themselves may also become carriers of this masculine discourse that blames them. It is therefore important to foster Iraqi women's self-confidence and awareness as well as implement legal processes to protect them.

One of the dominant cultural factors that makes women vulnerable, especially to domestic and sexual violence, is early or forced marriages to preserve "honor". Unfortunately, marital rape and certain other acts of violence are not criminalized in Iraq's penal code (Iraq 2020 Human Rights Report, 42) while women's economic dependence and lack of education, which are inherent to the system, make the situation of women even more difficult. When NGO representatives were asked how they would restructure Iraq's legal system to prevent violence against women, they had several concrete suggestions:

> Activating and approving the anti-domestic violence law is a national response to combat domestic violence and prevent violations against women and the family as a whole. In addition to implementing laws in areas controlled by the clans and eliminating violations that occur in these areas, for example, some of the clan laws that I referred to (9) of the Iraqi Personal Status Law No. 188 of its year and early marriage that I referred to (3) of the Personal Status Law, and marriage outside the court referred to it (10) of the Iraqi Personal Status Law, and the loss of inheritance referred to (49) of the Iraqi Personal Status Law and other violations practiced against women (Workshop notes, 2021).

These suggestions indicate that violence is normalized at every level, from traditional structures to the legal system. Therefore, it is necessary to deal with the structural problems of Iraq's legal system as well as ineffective implementation of existing laws. Clearly, solving these problems requires a certain level of public debate.

War, Conflict, and Insecurity in Iraqi Women's Lives

Domestic violence, regional conflicts, insecurity, and institutional failure to implementing the limited available legal protections have left Iraqi women increasingly at risk of violence. The workshop participants clearly revealed that violence leaves deep psychological scars in the lives of women and children. For years, but especially since the war, Iraqi women have faced many difficulties and dangers in their lives. The participants agreed that Iraq's political agenda should include gender equality trainings for Iraqi men and women, spreading gender equality, and enforcing the rule of law. To secure their rights and participation in post-conflict Iraq, women should be rapidly incorporated into all sectors of society, including political debates, policymaking, and economic restructuring. Yet, instead of creating a new society and system, Iraq's post-war transiton has permitted the erosion of women's rights.

Violence against women became prominent in the post-war chaos, catalyzed by militarization and masculine structures inherent in Iraqi politics. Especially since 2003, the absence of law and impunity for most crimes has led to an increase in crimes against women. These crimes were also committed by religious groups that pressured citizens, claiming that they would end the instability. Unfortunately, women were excluded from public life and the system of rights by supporters of Islamic authorities.

Women who seek divorce because of domestic violence face many difficulties with unbearable consequences, particularly the awareness that without a male relative they lack economic, physical, and social protection and support. Especially in rural Iraq, many women depend on male relatives for their survival because they are less likely to have an education or a profession.

Consequently, many choose to remain in abusive relationships rather than risk violent reprisals, social stigma, and financial hardship. There are numerous documented cases of violence, including murder and abuse of women by male family members. The inability to turn to the legal structure leaves women defenseless.

Despite all these difficulties and pressures, a very limited number of women's rights organizations are committed to protecting Iraqi women from domestic violence, death threats, and other forms of gender-based violence. They have even tried to provide safe women's shelters, albeit illegally and secretly. Iraqi NGOs and women's rights defenders face systematic harassment, arbitrary surveillance, and unauthorized investigations. The Iraqi regime often uses oppressive and coercive forces to control and repress democratic initiatives, which places NGO workers and victims at risk. Within Iraq's traditional cultural structure, women's shelters are thought to encourage wives to disobey their husbands and daughters to disobey their parents. Worse, many people consider the shelters as brothels because women live there without the permission of a husband, father, or other male guardian. Hence, anyone living there is ostracized, so that even if women manage to escape from domestic violence, they are punished by society once again. In short, it is extremely difficult for women to resist violence because of the pressure of traditional norms and the uncertainities arising from instability and conflict in Iraq. Meanwhile, instutions and mechanisms to protect Iraqi women from violence remain very inadequate.

War and instability has imposed many forms of violence on women. One is migration due to displacement. Migration of women within Iraq from rural to urban areas or to another country makes them more vulnerable. Despite many recorded cases of international trafficking of women, this problem has not considered sufficiently even in the receiving countries. Even if these women have valid legal documentation to stay in the receiving country, this does not mean that all are safe. That is, trafficking in women is not the same as trafficking in foreigners generally. However, receiving countries primarily impose measures to remove foreigners staying illegally to protect the state rather than the trafficked women. Therefore, it is critical to analyze carefully and understand well that the reason of international migration of women by using any means. It is necessary to avoid normalizing the violence and to realize women's desperation when they are exposed to violence. The experiences of women who endure violence or attempt suicide because of desperation should be identified priorly. Violence, which is likely to occur later, can be prevented if the violence is well analyzed; solutions can be developed against them. For this reason, non-reportable problems should be addressed and studies in this field should involve the inequalities and economic, cultural and social pressures.

It should be noted that when women have experienced or witnessed violence, they often hide it for various reasons. This makes it more difficult to document the intensity and prevalence of violence suffered by these women, whether inside or outside Iraq. The issue therefore needs to be addressed using a multi-perspective approach while any action plan requires a multi-component and multi-disciplinary method. An action plan prepared from different perspectives can, for example, investigate the underlying causes of a woman's suicide and analyze the factors that lead to violence. The experiences of Iraqi women can also be understood by such multi-component explanations. We can understand how many forms of violence, including domestic violence, affect women when we focus on the causes that lead to suicide, by considering it not just as a suicide but also a pure despair.

According to NGO representatives in Iraq, women's suicides were not seriously investigated and the root causes ares ignored. Another major problem is barriers to talking about the violence experienced by women. Because the government and otherauthorities do not take the violence seriously, acts of violence are considered as ordinary. The different groups, sects, and nationalities in Iraq share the same beliefs and talk in the same way when it comes to violence against women. All religions, sects, and ethnic groups perpetrate violence against women. There is no political will to enforce the laws, which are themselves indequate.

According to the humanitarian actors working in Iraq, the civilian population desperately lack food and security. Food insecurity has worsened since the last months of 2015, especially in areas under ISIL control and extremely besieged areas. Many of those needing humanitarian assistance are displaced persons, of whom half are children who need to be cared for by women (Ocha 2016, 5). Iraqi NGO representatives that we interviewed also stated that the poverty caused by war and displacement increases violence against women to extreme levels:

> Poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and adherence to customs, traditions and problems led to the suicides of many young women and also young men, in addition to the presence of suicide cases for women, including murders of women in the name of defending honor or even premeditated murder because of the weak techniques available in the forensic evidence through which it can be determined if they were Is the incident a suicide or a murder? Many women may resort to suicide to escape the painful reality and violence that women are subjected to, especially women who have been displaced in areas of conflict with ISIS, because after liberation, women have a lot of responsibilities and have also become ostracized from society, especially if their husbands belong to ISIS gangs or Of the missing persons, their fate is unknown, and children are held responsible for them, who are not allowed to give them identification papers (Workshop notes 2021).

Conflict, war, and poverty make violence against women more likely and more difficult to eliminate. Furthermore, chaos and disorder in one region easily spreads to others. Several studies have documented how simply living in a conflict-affected area may increase the risk of interpersonal violence, even long after the conflict is over. A "contagion" effect of violence has also been documented in various areas of Iraq. Thus, even if violence cannot be eliminated totally in the short term, it is extremely important to struggle to minimize it. The spread of violence against women can be prevented by empowering them in political, economic and social aspects of their lives as well as questioning the dominant stereotypes of masculinity. This struggle requires taking women's problems into the public sphere and addressing them with a political consciousness, based on the motto that the private is political. Given that violence against women is normalized both in Iraqi culture and its bureaucracy, it is necessary to speak in the political realm. Therefore, women need to become political actors although women in Iraq have not yet been fully accepted as a "subject" in the current political structure. In short, while the political struggles of women's groups and activists are very important, women still lack representative power to change Iraq's political system and transform its political structure.

Political Participation and Women's Rights in Iraq

Political participation has long been considered the essence of democracy as it enables citizens to have their voices heard and for the political authorities to take legitimate action. It is commonly accepted that democracy is not possible without the broad and genuine political participation of all society. Individual and autonomous participation in political decisions is the root of citizenship while the institutional character of democracy is shaped by discussions and decisions in the public space, where all members of society are seen as equal citizens (Cohen 1996, 98).

Although Iraq's constitution prohibits gender discrimination and provides equality between women and men, discrimination continues widely in practice. For example, families commonly forbidwomen to drive and force them to cover themselves in public. Another serious problem is honor killings as current legislation considers protecting honor" as a mitigating circumstance. Thus, the maximum sentence for a murderer convicted of an "honor killing" is six months imprisonment.

Based on Islamic law, husbands are allowed to discipline their wives using violence, as are parents and teachers for children, provided that it remains within the limits of law and tradition. The Interior Ministry's Passport Affairs Office approved a measure requiring women to obtain approval from a male relative before obtaining a passport. This makes it impossible for women to gain independence or escape violence.

Women who have been sexually abused by foreign soldiers or opposition groups are blamed by their relatives, killed, or forced to commit suicide. This enabled Al Qaeda to use many women as suicide bombers to take personal revenge. Many women become suicide bombers to take revenge from a family member who maltreated them. The number of women who killed and injured in violent incidents has been reached to the peak numbers during the war in Iraq in 2008. Even, 740,000 Iraqi women who lost their husband during the war, were struggling in the country as well. However, given that these figures are based on hospital records and exclude honor killings and other incidents, the actaul number of women who were killed is certainly higher.

More positively, various legal arrangements have been introduced to encourage Iraqi women to enter politics. For example, the constitution stipulates that 25 percent of members of parliament and provincial assemblies should be women while the election law requires political parties to reserve 25 percent of candidacies for women. However, although women were nominated as election candidates, they could not participate in the election campaign itself. For example, approximately 4,000 women candidates who participated in the local elections of 31 January 2009 did not even dare to leave their homes during the election campaign due to the threats from fundamentalist organizations.

These specific circumstances indicate that women's political participation must be viewed in its cultural and historical context. In Iraq's post-war environment of instability and political dissolution, it is not surprising that women cannot easily be the subject of politics or occupy leadership positions. Men's participation in Iraqi politics can also be fraught with difficulties. Sometimes they are mobilized through networks of relatives or under the control of various groups. Ultimately, participation is determined by informal dynamics as well as formal procedures. Therefore, it is always necessary analyze the specific context of the participation of both men and women in politics and the differences between these contexts.

The nature and permanence of women's political participation in Iraq has also been affected by the way it was legitimized. That is, women often pay a price to participate in politics in a way that men do not. If they raise feminist demands, they are likely to attract negative sexual or political comments. They may also have to periodically relinquish their political activism to conform to their expected roles. The price that women pay for their political participation is determined by many factors, including class affiliations, family structures, and financial dependence. Compared to men, women are generally punished or ignored by their relatives, social groups, public institutions, and the state because of their fight for independency.

Since high-ranking positions in the parties are mostly held by men, women's problems are ignored while the violence they experience is normalized in the political arena. Regarding parliamentary procedures, women can only participate in a few decisions and it is taking a long time to increase women's parliamentary representation. It is therefore necessary to strengthen and support women, raise their voices, and increase their representation. Women should be free to participate in political parties and express themselves. To achieve these objectives, women should be involved in creating the legal framework for establishing a new Iraq. In particular, they should be empowered by the new political structure and its instruments.

Conclusion

War has clearly affected women more and differently than other groups in post-war Iraq. Problems of security and poverty in Iraq have negatively affected all society. However, growing conservative social tendencies, domestic violence, and the deaths of many family members from attacks, have increased the pressures on women. Meanwhile, militant groups continue to target those political institutions and voluntary agencies that advocate for women's rights. Women were already victims of oppressive practices that restricted freedoms under Saddam Hussein's regime, and have become even more vulnerable the negative effects of political, social, and economic instability since the US invasion of Iraq. According to NGO representatives, cultural and familial pressures on Iraqi women, their expected roles and responsibilities, the violence they have suffered, and post-war uncertainties have created such appalling conditions that women have even been pushed to suicide:

> Many women may resort to suicide so as to escape the painful reality and violence that women are subjected to, especially women who have been displaced in areas of conflict with ISIS. After liberation, women have had a lot of responsibilities and have also become ostracized from society, especially if their husbands belonged to ISIS gangs or were missing persons, their fate is unknown, and children are held responsible for them, who are not allowed to give them identification papers" (Workshop notes 2021).

Many reasons and forms of violence have led women to this point. However, starting from domestic violence, anti-violence laws should be implemented as soon as possible, starting by addressing domestic violence. Urgent solutions are needed to prevent attacks on women's lifestyles, preferences, bodies, and identities from both within and outside the family. Iraqi women demand that the law should be used as a shield to protect them, not a weapon to target them. According to them, the reasons for women's silence and not taking legal action against violence should be analyzed and emphasized:

There are several reasons why women face violence or rather remain silent about violence. One of the reasons may be the lack of a shelter to resort to other than the husband's house, or for the sake of children and preserving the family, lack of sufficient awareness on the part of women of the laws supporting them in the acts they are exposed to violence, poverty and economic status of them. One of the most common reasons why women face violence is that they do not have the independent income to separate from an abusive husband, customs and traditions, and parents' refusal to reveal the violence that women are exposed to, considering it a shame and a preference for silence. (Workshop notes 2021).

While it is always risky for outsiders to make suggestions about the problems of another society, considering the problems of oppressed women, trying to make their voices heard can be seen as a form of solidarity. One of the most striking aspects of the workshop held with Iraqi women was their silence. The fact that they were expressing their experiences more than verbally showed how intense the pressures on them are. To solve their problems, it is first necessary to introduce laws and implement policies to enable women's political participation and strengthen their social status. Universities, political institutions, and activists should cooperate with other institutions and organizations working on rights in Iraq to develop supportive policies. In addition, it is necessary to create a public space where women can express themselves and declare their opinions freely in the face of the pressure of traditional, cultural, and religious norms. However, considering that violence against women is multifaceted, policies to maintain peace in the region will be insufficient to stop it. Therefore, international cooperation is needed across many fields, especially regarding women's empowerment. If Iraqi women can gain self-confidence and freely express their own demands then they will have the power to solve their problems. Issues that still need to be addressed include increasing women's parliamentary representation, creatomg solidarity with women regarding anti-violence laws, and empowering Iraqi women economically, educationally, and socially.

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CHAPTER 3

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UNDERSTANDING COVID-19'S IMPACT ON WOMEN IN IRAQ

"During this period of the Covid-19 crisis in Iraq, more women face intimate partner violence and their lives are at risk. People have more stress due to loss of jobs, lack of fianacial resources, and more spare time. Women's and girls' movements are more restricted. Courts do not work on civil cases and lawyers cannot defend women's rights in the courts. All these things increase the chance of more violence against women and increase the number of survivors of gender-based violence."

Ibtisam Lateef, Iraqi Organization for Woman and Future, Kvinna till Kivinna, 2020

"Everything we worked for, that has taken 25 years, could be lost in a year."

Anita Bhatia, UN Women Deputy Executive Director, 2020

Introduction: The Shadow Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, who are at greater risk since they are more highly represented in healthcare and childcare, which are the key sectors in the pandemic. The response has also damaged the lives of women and girls, who urgently require differentiated policies to counter increased sexual exploitation and gender-based violence (GBV), and reduced access to health care and economic opportunities. Reports from various institutions, such as UNWOMEN, UNFPA, ILO, World Bank, European Union, and WHO, clearly show that the pandemic has increased gender disparities, making them more visible and unbeareable.

Although the 25th anniversary of the UN's Beijing declaration, which aimed at women's advancement worldwide, has passed, there is still a long way to go before gender equality is achieved. Moreover, according to the World Economic Forum's 2021 Global Gender Gap Report, the pandemic has increased the global gender gap from 99.5 to 135.6 years to reach equality, a 36-year setback.

Women are paying the price of the pandemic much more heavily than men. For example, they are on the "frontlines of Covid-19 exposure and make up 80% of nurses as well as 67% of the health care workforce in general, according to a survey of 104 countries" (Lim 2021). Meanwhile, the pandemic is pushing an additional 47 million women and girls below the poverty line.

The pandemic has impacted women in different fields. In particular, it revealed the oldest and greatest human rights violation in history: violence against women as the pandemic response has led to an increase in domestic violence. During lockdowns in 2020, "243 million women and girls (aged 15-49) across the world [were] subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner" (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2020).

UNWOMEN Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka (2020) describes this violence against women as "the shadow pandemic". Whereas reported crime rates fell worldwide, police interventions due to domestic violence increased globally. Even Google searches for help about domestic violence have increased. The pandemic has also intensified other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), such as increased maternal mortality, with about 56,700 additional maternal deaths, more forced and early child marriages, female genital mutilation (FGM), and limited access to contraception and antenatal care. These were already areas of inequality for women, which national and international women's organizations were working on. However, pandemic-related measures, lockdowns, and restrictions have increased the negative impact on women in every field.

The pandemic's social and economic fallout could also have a long-term impact on gender equality. Even beforehand, international organisations were warning that 100 million girls were at risk of child marriage in the next decade. According to UNFPA reports, the pandemic led to 13 million more girls facing the risk of becoming forced brides, reversing 25 years of progress. Moreover, due to restricted access to contraception, there were 10 million unplanned pregnancies, mostly in low- and middle-income countries, while antenatal care provision and attended fell by 10% during the pandemic, according to the Center for Global Development's recent analysis. UNFPA estimated that 31 million more GBV cases would ocur if the lockdowns continue for six months more. The UNHCR-led network of NGOs and UN agencies all reported that GBV had become more frequent in 90% of its operations. Countries, NGOs, and other institutions should measure GBV as much as they can (UNFPA 2020).

Besides GBV, women have suffered most from anti-Covid-19 measures. Even the most innocent-looking school closures and limited or distrupted access to health services have severely affected women and girls. "Worldwide school closures mean that over an estimated 1.54 billion children, including 743 million girls, are staying at home. As women are often primarily responsible for children, their participation in work outside of the home is expected to decrease as a result of school closures" (Lim 2021). Meanwhile, school closures have increased the risk of forced marriage by 25% per year, because of the common bride price custom which is becoming an important replacement during the loss of household income due to the Covid-19.

The pandemic's economic effects have also hit women badly by limiting or even reversing the gains made in previous decades. Alongside a significant jump in GBV, the second most important threat to respond to globally is increasing female unemployment.

Based on previous experiences of wars and economic hardship, the Covid-19 global recession will cut women's incomes and labor force participation, thereby disproportionately increasing female poverty rates.

Due to years of economic inequality, women already lag behind men in every respect. Globally, for example, women spend three times as many hours as men in unpaid care and domestic work, which clearly limits their access to decent paid work. While 94 % of men aged 25-54 are in the labor force, only 63 % of women are. Even if women participate in the labour force, they face a global average pay gap of 16 %. Finally, 740 million women work in the informal economy, which has been affected far worse by anti-Covid-19 measures (Figure 1).
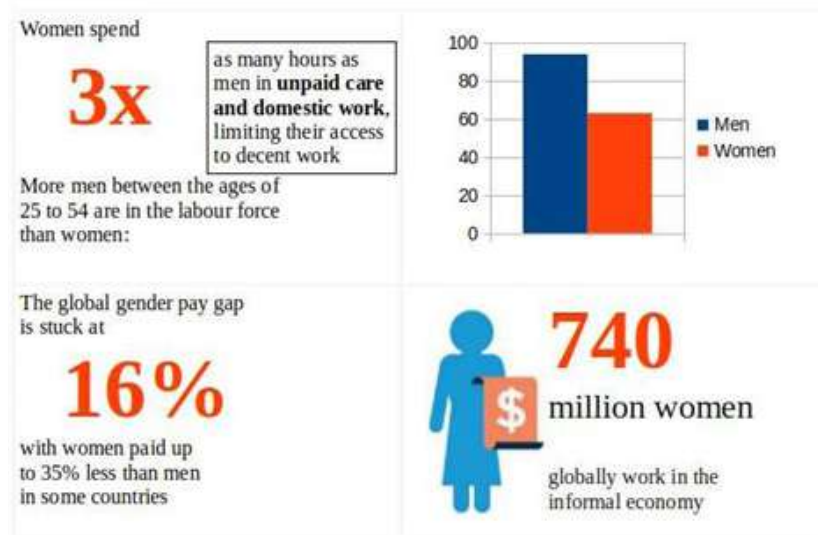
Figure 1: *Gender Based Economic Inequalities during the Covid-19 Pandemic*
Source: Lim 2021

The pandemic has simply aggravated these disparities. "Based on a sample of 55 countries, there were 1.7 times as many women as men outside the labor force (321 million women compared to 182 million men) until the end of June 2020" (Lim 2021). Many international reports have shown that after years of progress for women in their working lives, their position will have regressed to 2017 levels by the end of 2021. The pandemic has already caused five years of regression in women's working lives. In particular, women's unemployment increased most in 17 out of 24 OECD countries.

The first reason is general labor inequality due to the overrepresentation of women in the informal economy. Women mostly work in the domestic sector, which means insecure positions without paid leave or distance working opportunities. "In fact, women make up 80% of domestic workers, and 72% of domestic workers have lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic" (UNWOMEN 2020, 5).

Apart from losing their jobs in the informal economy, women in underdeveloped countries were more likely than men to have to shut their business. For example, "in sub-Saharan Africa, 41% of women-owned businesses closed, compared with 34% of those owned by men" (Lim 2021). This has forced about 100 million more people into extreme poverty, of whom half are women. Unemployment has also widened the gender poverty gap as more women than men face extreme poverty. One UN report stated that 53 % of women suffered reduced work hours compared to 31 % of men during the pandemic.

Thus, Covid-19 continues to damage lives and livelihoods worldwide, with the economic consequences having a particularly regressive effect on gender equality. Women's jobs have been 1.8 times more vulnerable than men's. Consequently, although women account for only 39 % of global employment, they have suffered 54 % of job losses globally. In short, women's employment in whichever sector is dropping faster than men's.

The Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Iraqi Women

Until the Gulf War in 1991, Iraqi women and girls enjoyed more rights than in many Middle East countries. The Iraqi Provisional Constitution of 1970 formally guaranteed equal rights to women, including voting, attending school, and running for political office (Human Rights Watch 2003).

In 1980, women won the right to vote and run for office while in 1986 Iraq became one of the first countries to ratify the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is the basic treaty protecting women worldwide. Despite reservations to some articles, the status of Iraqi women has increased in the public sphere. Furthermore, the government also passed further legislation to eradicate illiteracy, which gave rural women and girls access to education.

After the 1991 Gulf War, however, Iraqi women's legal, social, and economic gains were reversed due to legal, economic, and political factors. Iraqi women have thus paid a heavy price for the war. As Vilardo and Bittar (2018, 4) note, "The years of repression caused by a strong conservative culture, economic sanctions and armed conflicts in the country have led to deterioration in the lives of women in Iraq and an associated loss to the country. It also caused marginalisation of women [who were] unable to contribute fully economically, socially and politically".
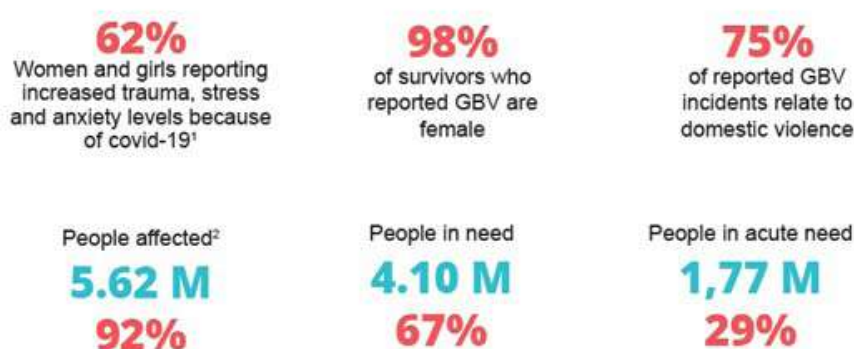
The first broad regional gathering for women, the Baghdad Regional Forum, was organized by the Iraqi Women's Network and Iraqi Al-Amal Association in 2019, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. It was held to prepare for the anniversary of UN Resolution 1325 + 20 and Beijing + 25. This was the first regional women's conference hosted in Baghdad since 2003, with participation by representatives fom governments and national and international NGOs from Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Yemen, and Bahrain. The main recommendation was the development of "institional mechanisms for the advancement of Women in Iraq". The forum ended with a call for "joint national efforts to establish an independent national body for women's empowerment in Iraq" (Baghdad Regional Forum 2019).

The conference noted many challenges that hindered women's rights in the region: conflicts, occupations, terrorism, extremism, religious radicalism, corruption, patriarchal mentality, and tribal norms. The conference called for "the independence of institutional mechanisms for women, ensuring competent human resources and sufficient budget for them, and strengthening their partnership with the civil society, to ensure that gender integration is influenced in all government policies, strategies and plans" (Baghdad Regional Forum 2019). It also called for government commitments to concrete actions to achieve gender equality and enhance women's participation in all development areas, including security, peace, and community cohesion.

It urgently called for establishing a National Council for the Empowerment of Women, and an inclusive and comprehensive strategy to advance Iraqi women's conditions to implement the agenda for women, security, and peace in Iraq. The conference also emphasized the need to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals, reduce violence against women, promote their political empowerment, and establish institutional mechanisms for their advancement.

As well as high levels of violence and inequality, Iraqi women today suffer limited access to education, healthcare, and the labor market. According to Human Rights Watch (2003), "These effects were compounded by changes in the law that restricted women's mobility and access to the formal sector in an effort to ensure jobs to men and appease conservative religious and tribal groups". In sum, women's conditions are becoming even more unbeareable due to institutional and legal barriers, misconceptions of traditions, and restrictive cultural and social norms. Given as well the high level of violence and lack of security and stability, Iraqi women and girls are easily pushed into traditional reproductive roles, thereby limiting their access to education and employment. The Covid-19 pandemic has made all these problems even more severe.

Country Context of Iraqi Women during the Covid-19 Pandemic

62% Women and girls reporting increased trauma, stress and anxiety levels because of covid-19[1]	**98%** of survivors who reported GBV are female	**75%** of reported GBV incidents relate to domestic violence
People affected[2] **5.62 M** **92%**	People in need **4.10 M** **67%**	People in acute need **1,77 M** **29%**

Source: Kvinna till Kvinna 2020, 6

According to the recent report of Swedish NGO Kvinna til Kvinna, "over the past few years, Iraq's health system has faced many challenges, including internal conflict and the world's biggest mass displacement in 2014–2016, all of which had a tough toll on an already fragile health system. The sudden eruption of the virus in the neighbouring Islamic Republic of Iran scaled up the risk of the disease spread in Iraq and necessitated faster prevention and infection control measures especially in the holy cities and pilgrimage sites, bordering governorates, and vulnerable communities in internally displaced and refugee camps. But the greatest challenge to Iraq's Covid-19 response is the dramatic deterioration of state-society relations" (Kvinna til Kvinna 2020, 2).

The pandemic has also led to a horrifying increase in violence against women, with nearly one in five women worldwide experiencing violence in 2020. Similarly, in Iraq, 62% of women reported raised trauma, stress, and anxiety levels while 75% faced domestic violence, and 29%, or 1.7 million, needed acute help (Figure 2). During the Covid-19 crisis, all forms of GBV in Iraq have increased, with an inadequate referral system aggravating the situation.

The pandemic has affected Iraqi women very intensely due to a lack of family income, unequal caregiving roles within the family and women's related unpaid care work, and their responsibility for home-schooling children. However, the problem remains invisible because there is no systematic local data collection on these challenges and their effects on women and girls.

The situation is even worse because sexual and reproductive health services have been deprioritized while financial support and the social security system is inadequate, and marginalized women cannot access awareness-raising materials on Covid-19. Finally, the authorities have lacked commitment in enforcing laws protecting women and girls during the pandemic despite the severity of the situation, especially in terms of GBV.

Another problem is women's economic participation. "Iraq's economy is mostly state-run with more than 90 percent of government revenues and 65 percent of the GDP coming from the oil sector. This sector, however, employs only one percent of the total labor force. Iraqi people remain highly dependent on the public sector, which provides around 40 percent of employment which consists 60 percent of the jobs for women who are employed" (World Bank 2021). These issues have particularly affected women due to years of war, social unrest, and Iraq's highly conservative, patriarchal culture.
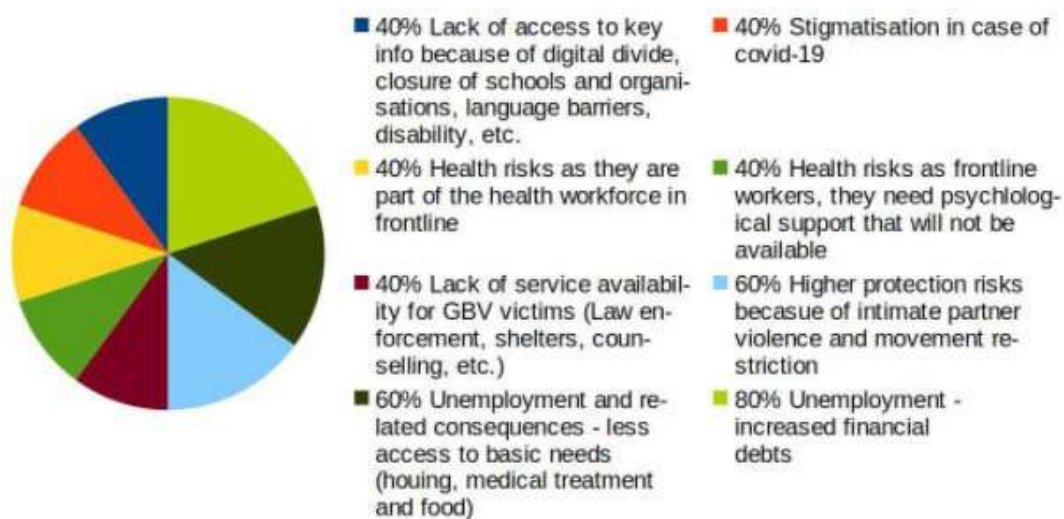
To understand Iraq's level of development, it is necessary to consider international development statistics. The country is categorised as the medium human development category by According to the Human Development Index (HDI)1, Iraq's score of 0.674 represents medium human development while UNDP ranks it at 123 out of 189 countries. However, in terms of inequality adjusted (IHDI) figures,2 which were introduced in 2010, Iraq only scores 0.541, a loss of 19.7%. Regarding GDI (Gender Development Index), calculated for 167 countries, Iraq's female value was 0.566 in 2019 compared to 0.731 for males, resulting in an overall GDI value of 0.774, placing it in Group 5. In comparison, Algeria and Saudi Arabia's GDI values were 0.858 and 0.896, respectively. The 2010 Human Development Report introduced the GII (Gender Inequality Index), which measures gender-based inequalities in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity. Iraq's GII value was 0.577 in 2019, ranking it 146 out of 162 countries.

As these figures indicate, Iraq face various consequences due to gender inequality. Women hold 25.2% of parliamentary seats while 39.5% percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education compared to 56.5 percent of men. For every 100,000 live births, 79.0 women die from pregnancy-related causes while the adolescent birth rate is 71.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 years. Female labor force participation is 11.6% compared to 74.2% for men.

Moreover, gender-based inequality has caused multidimensional poverty. About 8.6% of Iraq's population, or 3,319,000 people, are multidimensionally poor. An additional 5.2%, or 2,015,000 people, are classified as vulnerable. The breadth of deprivation (intensity) in Iraq, which is the average deprivation score experienced by those suffering multidimensional poverty, is 37.9%. The UNDP (2021) includes Iraq with 23 countries3 facing multidimensional poverty.

Due to successive wars and conflicts, Iraq is categorized as a fragile state that is emerging from conflict and facing the challenge of reconstructing core physical infrastructure and delivering public services to 39 million people (Index Mundi 2021). This has restricted the focus of government action. "Iraqi government spending is more highly focused on energy and defense than contributing to development needs. In fact, about 60 percent of Iraqi households are suffering from unadequate water supply and sanitation and/or a minimum of 12 hours of electricity from the public network a day, and food security. As of 2015–2016, Iraq invested only 5.7 percent of its government expenditure on education, which puts the country on the bottom ranking of Middle East countries in any given year" (UNDP 2021).

In fact, Iraq was already categorized as a fragile state for the society, and even more so for over 20 million Iraqi women and girls. According the Swedish NGO Kvinna till Kvinna, "over the past few years, Iraq's health system has faced many challenges, including internal conflict and the world's biggest mass displacement in 2014–2016, all of which had a tough toll on an already fragile health system. Organisations providing GBV services in Iraq reported an increase of emergency calls between 30-40% during the lockdown in March 2020, in comparison to previous months. Another organisation supporting GBV-survivors with legal services reported an increase of 30% (compared to previous months) for calls of rights-holders seeking legal advice, owing to a higher rate of conflicts inside families and more violence against women. Still operating women's centers noted an increase of demand for in-person psychological support by women as well as higher demand for legal advice" (Kvinna till Kvinna 2020, 8). The report emphasizes an urgent need to invest funds and resources to collect data systematically on all aspects of the gender-based impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

- 40% Lack of access to key info because of digital divide, closure of schools and organisations, language barriers, disability, etc.
- 40% Health risks as they are part of the health workforce in frontline
- 40% Lack of service availability for GBV victims (Law enforcement, shelters, counselling, etc.)
- 60% Unemployment and related consequences - less access to basic needs (houing, medical treatment and food)
- 40% Stigmatisation in case of covid-19
- 40% Health risks as frontline workers, they need psychological support that will not be available
- 60% Higher protection risks becasue of intimate partner violence and movement restriction
- 80% Unemployment - increased financial debts

Figure 2: *Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Iraqi Women*
Source: Adapted from Kvinna till Kvinna 2020, 11

The report's survey revealed that Iraqi women's needs, such as housing, medical treatment, and food, were being less met because of the pandemic while their vulnerability had grown because of intimate partner violence and movement restrictions. Furthermore, because of the digital divide, school and other closures, language barriers, and dissabilities, women could not access key information and suffered stigmatization. They also faced greater risk of forced and early marriage or engagement in paid sex because of Covid-19's economic impacts.

The Possible Recovery: What Needs to Be Done

On 31 March 2021, Iraq's Ministries of Planning, Labor and Social Affairs, and Trade held a joint workshop to discuss the impacts of Covid-19 and possible recovery paths, specifically a joint program to reform Social protection. Other participants included the main international NGOs, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the European Union. The workshop and joint program were the culmination of consultations with partners funded by the EU.

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The workshops outlined an actionable roadmap for 2021-2025 to implement the governments plans to reform social protection, including its Covid-19 response. The reforms will prioritize vulnerable social groups (children, youth, women, elderly, persons with disabilities, and displaced people) and launch Iraq's Social Protection Programme. The workshop also recommended a sector coordination mechanism to ensure effective collaboration and complementarity with national and international stakeholders.

The following five vital joint actions were specified (UNICEF 2021):

• Development of a social protection strategy 2021-2025

• Expansion of cash transfer programs for children and pregnant women linked to key services

• Expansion of employment-based social protection schemes to young people and informal sector workers

• Coordination of of information systems management and the establishment of a single social register for eligible people

• Implementation of a sector coordination mechanism with national and international institutions

The workshop also conlcuded that education should be an integral part of the post-Covid-19 era. Education is integral to human development and breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty and gender-based inequalities. Enabling as many children as possible to continue their education is thus key to avoid exacerbating inequalities and disadvantage, and leaving behind the youngest and poorest.

Under the proposals, governments should put women's safety first as they respond to the pandemic. Every anti-Covid-19 measure should be evaluated in terms of its potential impact on women. Every decision (curfews, lockdowns, vaccinations, school closures, etc) should minimize gender-based inequalities, which simply increase social inequality generally.

UN Resolution 1325, with its Agenda "Women, Peace and Security", provides a legally binding framework for protecting women and girls during armed conflict (Medica Mondiale 2020). However, it has been poorly implemented and should be implemented effectively once the pandemic is over.

Based on above mentioned discussion and Oxfam's International Gender Analysis Report in Iraq (2020), the following recommendations should be made to three significant groups of actors in Iraq:

Recommendations to National and International NGOs:

• Collect data on GBV and include the women support services in their Covid-19 response plans.

• Inform the community about the increased risk of GBV during the pandemic and support women subjected to violence.

• Increase long-term (to respond to the pandemic's gendered impacts), sustainable funding for Iraqi women's NGOs by making the application process more flexible and less burdensome while considering diverse needs (including the use of Arabic), particularly for grassroots initiatives.

• Make all pandemic-related information, forms, and formats accesible for women with different educational levels.

• Support the actions of women's rights organisations regarding online family planning, sexual and reproductive health counselling, and participate in their awareness-raising campaigns.

• Lobby the Iraqi government regarding all recommendations and support the inclusion of women leaders and NGOs as critical partners in Covid-19 response plans.

Recommendations to Iraqi Government Authorities:

• Government should implement hotlines, crisis centers, shelters, legal aid, and protection services.

• Include essential services to address GBV in all Covid-19 preparation and response plans; identify ways to make them accessible given physical distancing measures.

• Urgently collect systematic gender-based data on the challenges and effects of the pandemic.

• Improve digital communications and internet services during the lockdown and include female members in Iraqi Crisis Units to improve their response to GBV cases.

• ConductCovid-19 awareness-raising sessions with families in local communities to increase women's testing rates.

Recommendations to Media Organizations:

- Help empower women and improve society by changing programming.

- More specifically, focus on stress management in TV and radio programs to combat the pandemic's negative impacts.

- Allocate more program time to GBV.

- Increase usage of social networking sites like WhatsApp, Instagram, Skype, Viber, and Facebook Messenger to raise awareness about GBV.

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CHAPTER 4

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EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN IRAQ'S THE ECONOMY AND SOCIAL LIFE

Introduction

Women's empowerment undoubtedly plays a crucial role in every country's economic development and growth as there is a high correlation between women's advancement and economic progress. Iraq is a significant country in the global economy in terms of both its geopolitical position and rich energy resources, such as petroleum. Accordingly, major world economic players have a significant interest in Iraq, which has led to wars, international sanctions, and occupations over a long time. This in turn has caused high economic instability and low growth, which directly affects women's empowerment in both the economy and social life (Yousif 2010). The impacts of ongoing conflicts have affected men and women differently, with women being more socio-economically vulnerable. Moreover, Iraq's socio-cultural characteristics severely limit women's economic inclusion. Thus, women's level of economic and social empowerment (mainly education and health services) are all determinants of gender inequalities in Iraq.

The main goal of this chapter is to review these issues from an economic development perspective. Conceptually, the distinction between the economy and social life as a basis for empowering women in Iraq makes an important contribution to the literature. This chapter first summarizes Iraq's macroeconomic outlook and women's status in the economy and social life. I will relate these from an economic perspective to historical factors, such as political regimes, various wars (Gulf Wars in 1991, 2003; Iran-Iraq War in 1980-1988), and international sanctions. I will then evaluate Iraq's human development components before concluding by discussing recent developments and policy suggestions.

Iraq's Economic Outlook: An Overview

In recent decades, Iraq has faced the consequences of economic recession due to wars, invasions, and sanctions. Iraq's economy is highly dependent on its oil reserves, with an estimated 92 % of government revenues being based on oil and gas (Jassim, 2021:1). Over the last decade, 65 % of Iraq's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and 90 % of government revenue has come from oil revenues, which also account for almost all the country's export volume) (The World Bank 2021a; Vilardo and Bittar 2018). This leaves Iraq dependent on international oil prices, unlike most products for which the prices are determined by market mechanisms. In 2009, petroleum multinationals like BP, Exxon, Statoil, Eni, RDS, and the International Oil Company (IOC) signed contracts with the Iraqi government to invest in oil production (Jassim 2021). This excessive dependence on petroleum increases volatility in Iraq's economy. These fragilities have been accelerated by global developments, political conditions, and Iraq's low development level.

According to World Bank figures (The World Bank 2021a), Iraq's estimated population exceeds 40 million (The World Bank 2021a) while its GDP is 167.22 billion USD, or 0.15 % of the global economy. GDP per capita in 2020 was approximately 4,157 USD compared to 10,357 USD in 1990. Regarding inequality, its Gini Index was 29.5 (where 100 means perfect inequality and 0 means perfect equality of income distribution) among income groups. Life expectancy has increased by 4.6 years since 1990 (United Nations Data 2021).

Table.1. Iraq: Key economic indicators

Indicators	2020
Population (million)	40.2
trGDP (USD billion)	167.22
GDP per capita (current USD)	4157.48
Lower middle-income poverty rate (3.2 USD)a	14.8
Upper middle-income poverty rate (5.5 USD)a	52.4
National poverty rate	22.5
Gini index	29.5
School enrollment, primary (% gross)[b]	108.7
Life expectancy at birth (years)[b]	70.6

Source: WB (2021a). Iraq's Economic Update – October 2021
(a) Most recent value (2012), 2011 PPPs
(b)WDI for School enrollment (2007); Life expectancy (2019)

Table 2, which presents Iraq's macroeconomic outlook for 2019-2023 shows that the COVID19 pandemic has critically affected its macroeconomic indicators. As in other countries, Iraq's economy shrank in 2020 with dramatic changes to almost all macroeconomic indicators. Growth in gross fixed capital investment, government consumption, and import volume by about 30%.due to the recession. Real GDP growth in export volume also decreased because of reduced energy consumption, particularly oil, in world economies. Aggregate demand and investment both fell, leading to a sharp reduction of 15% in growth rate while real growth in agriculture decreased by around 40%, which caused the 2021 global consumer price index to rise to 4.3% and 6.4% for Iraq, specifically (The World Bank, 2021a). Due to declining global growth, international trade volume, the energy usage ratio, and net foreign direct investment as a share of GDP all fell. However, the debt ratio to GDP also declined, which was crucial for Iraq's balance of payment (BoP). More recently, Iraq's economic indicators have gradually improved as global oil markets rebound from the pandemic in line with global economic recovery. Iraq's macroeconomic outlook still faces downside risks due to the country's fragile political and structural characteristics.

Table 2. Macroeconomic Outlook of Iraq (%)

	2019	2020	2021[e]	2022[f]	2023[f]
Real GDP growth at constant market prices	5.2-	15.7	2.67	.3	6.3
Private Consumption	1.5-	9.0	2.02	.5	3.0
Government Consumption2	5.2-	10.6	5.33	.1	3.0
Gross Fixed Capital Investment	- 13.8-	40.01	0.0	8.08	.0
Exports, Goods, and Services	4.6-	15.8	3.01	0.2	8.2
Imports, Goods, and Services	28.4	-9.4	3.03	.0	3.5
Real GDP growth at constant factor prices	6.0-	15.7	2.67	.3	6.3
Agriculture	46.24	.5	4.04	.5	4.8
Industry	7.5-	16.9	2.99	.7	7.9
Services	-0.7	-15.3	1.72	.1	2.6
Inflation (Consumer Price Index)	-0.2	0.67	.5	3.53	.1
Current Account Balance (% of GDP)[a]	5.6-	5.84	.8	5.95	.2
Net Foreign Direct Investment (% of GDP)[a]	1.41	.8	1.71	.7	1.7
Fiscal Balance (% of GDP)[a]	1.3-	6.51	.5	4.03	.2
Debt (% of GDP)[a]	44.4	64.5	55.04	7.44	2.5
Primary Balance (% of GDP)[a]	2.4-	5.32	.9	5.95	.3

Source: WB (2021a). Iraq's Economic Update – October 2021.
Emissions data sourced from CAIT and OECD
Notes: e = estimate, f = forecast, (a) Share of factor cost GDP

Iraq has also faced BoP imbalances, a high government budget deficit due to high government spending to restructure the economy and the economic embargo. According to United Nations (UN) data, government expenditure was 118.3 billion USD in 2020 to exceed 70 % of GDP in 2020. Most government expenditure is used for energy and national defense whereas little is used for economic development (Vilardo and Bittar 2018). As a result, macroeconomic policymakers have implemented strong monetary and fiscal policies to reduce the risk level. The World Bank and the International Monetary Foundation (IMF) have provided technical and financial assistance to promote sustainable economic growth. Currently, the economy is recovering from the oil shock and the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic while the international oil market is recovering due to the OPEC+ production quota.

The Empowerment of Iraqi Women: Historical Context

Between 1960 and the early 1990s, Iraqi women were granted equal rights in every aspect of society. In 1958, King Faisel declared that citizens had equal freedom regulated and protected by law. In 1959, the government of Abdel Kareem Qasim and Abdel Salam Arif then introduced the Personal Status Law, which granted equal rights, mainly in family issues but also regarding Sharia law.

After 1972, the Ba'ath government, which was supported by Western countries, had a crucial impact on the economy. The government focused on gender equality and workplace regulations, such as equal wages for equal work, while men and women could participate in the labor market equally, but mainly in the public sector (United Nations Development Programme 2020).

During the oil crisis in 1974, the country's social life was strongly influenced by economic development due to increased foreign direct investment. During this period, free education and health services were key drivers of growing wealth and development. During the economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s, important steps were taken to improve women's status regarding divorce, marriage age, and schooling. Indeed, Iraq's government provided more rights to women than neighboring Arabic countries.

This progress continued until the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and the 1991 Gulf War. During the war years, women's status and empowerment began to deteriorate. Although the 1990 Constitution granted all citizens equal rights, and free education and health services, female literacy rates fell from 91% in 1957 to 12% due to a campaign against women's rights (Jawad 2013). Women's access to health, education, and the labor market were also harmed by United Nations (UN) sanctions on Iraq. The sanctions particularly affected women in household management because they created massive dependence on the government's monthly food distribution.

Thus, women's gains during the early years of Saddam Hussein's regime were reversed due to sanctions in the 1990s, followed by the US-led invasion and occupation in 2003. Since then, the role of women has dramatically changed. In 2005, the occupying USA and UK declared that the new constitution would provide equal rights for minorities and other disadvantaged groups, including women (Gunter 2021; Jawad 2013) and when the Iraqi governments took back control, gender issues became one of the most important focuses for social and economic development to improve welfare. Between 2014 and 2017, however, Iraqi women suffered from restrictions and violence after the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Vilardo and Bittar, 2018).

Human Development and Gender Equality in Iraq

The UN assesses human development and gender equality through five development indices: the Human Development Index, the Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index (IHDI), the Gender Development Index (GDI), the Gender Inequality Index (GII), and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). The HDI includes a set of variables that capture different dimensions of human development and well-being, such as life expectancy, education, and income per capita. Under UN methodology, GDI is the ratio of female to male HDI values while GII is a composite index of inequality in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market. In 2019, Iraq's HDI value for Iraq was 0.674, which ranked it 17th in the MENA (the Middle East and North Africa) region and 120th out of 189 countries in the middle human development level group (United Nations Development Programme, 2020; United Nations Data, 2021).

Table 3 shows some of the key human development and gender equality indicators for Iraq. One striking inequality is that female GNI per capita is 1,895 USD for females versus 2,427 USD for males. In addition, labor force participation is starkly different: 11.6 % for females and 74.2 % for males. Clearly, the gap between female and male labor force participation rate is extremely high. Regarding reproductive health, another GII metric, women aged 15-19 had 71.7 births per 1,000 with 79 pregnancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births. Women's political empowerment is still extremely limited, with women holding only 25 seats in Iraq's parliament, where the women are under-represented, while the government has no women ministers. Indeed, Iraq's political empowerment index value 10.2 % is the worst in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2019).

Table.3. Gender Inequality in Iraq (2015-2020)

Gender Development Index (GDI) Metrics (2019)	Value	
	Female	**Male**
Life expectancy at birth (years)7	2.7	68.6
Expected years of schooling [a]	10.4	12.2
Mean years of schooling [b]	6.08	.6
Estimated Gross National Income (GNI) per capita (2017 PPP USD) [c]	2,4271	,895
Gender Inequality Index (GII) Metrics		
Population with at least some secondary education (percentage aged 25 or above) (2015-2019)	39.5	56.5
Labour force participation rate (percentage aged 15 or above) (2019)	11.6	74.2
Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births) (2017)	79	
Adolescent birth rate (births per 1000 women aged 15-19) [d] (2015-2020)	71.7	
Share of seats in parliament (percentage held by women) 2	5	

Source: United Nations Development Programme, 2020. The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene: Briefing Note for Countries on the 2020 Human Development.
Notes:
(a) Updated by HDRO based on data from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys for 2006-2019
(b) Updated by HDRO based on data from UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2020)
(c) Because of the unavailability of disaggregated income data, these figures were roughly estimated.
(d) Based on OECD data (OECD, 2019b).

The labor force participation rate is a key indicators of gender inequality in an economy. In Iraq, women's empowerment is directly related to this as well as economic and financial inclusion. A major macroeconomic problem is unemployment, with women facing several barriers to labor market inclusion. Consequently, according to World Bank data, Iraq's female labor force participation rate was just 11.53% in 2019. Another key labor market inefficiency is that most unemployed Iraqi women are educated and highly skilled (Jawad 2013).

As Table 4 shows, Iraq's female labor force participation rate increased from 8.3 % in 1990 to 14.09 % in 2015 while the ratio of female to male labor force participation rate increased from 10.51 % in 1990 to 19.09 % in 2015. Although females still lag in the labor market, there has been some limited development due to various action plans and policies implemented between 2015 and 12019 (International Labour Organization, 2021).

In addition, many women do unpaid jobs within the family or the informal economy. However, economic opportunities, information economics, e-trade, and information and communication technologies are still not sufficiently accessible for the female labor force.

Table.4. Selected Labor Market Indicators in Iraq (1990-2019)

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2019
Female labor force participation rate, (% of female population aged 15+) (modeled ILO estimate)	8.38	.449	.661	1.53	12.011	4.09	11.53
Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (%) (modeled ILO estimates)	10.511	1.01	12.8	15.741	.621	9.09	15.53

Source: International Labor Organization (2021) "Labor Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Ages 15+) (Modeled ILO Estimate)- Iraq".

Iraq is mostly compared with other MENA countries as it shares many cultural similarities concerning women's role in society. While international organizations differ in which countries to list, the MENA region generally includes Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Iraq is currently listed in the in-conflict country group alongside Syria and Yemen (The World Bank 2016). Regarding gender inequality and the economic and social challenges that Iraqi women experience, Table 5 shows the HDI rankings and GII figures for MENA countries, based on the 2020 UN Human Development Report.

MENA countries have the world's largest gender gaps. Iraq is in the medium development group alongside Syria and Morocco, with an HDI rank of 123. Similarly, Iraq is ranked 118th globally for its GII value (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). There are also significant human development gender disparities in MENA countries. According to the global gender gap index, Iraq is ranked 18th regionally and 152nd globally (World Economic Forum 2019).

Table.5. Human Development and Gender Inequality in MENA Countries (2020)

Country	Human Development Index (HDI) Rank	Human Development Index (HDI)		Gender Development Index (GDI)	Gender Inequality Index (GII)	Gender Inequality Index (GII) Rank
		Female	Male			
Very High Human Development						
Israel	19	0.904	0.9290	.973	0.1002	4
Malta	28	0.8770	.909	0.9660	.195	44
United Arab Emirates	31	0.8420	.905	0.9310	.113	26
Saudi Arabia	40	0.7910	.883	0.8960	.224	49
Bahrain	42	0.806	0.8740	.922	0.2024	5
Qatar	45	0.866	0.8411	.030	0.2074	7
Oman	60	0.7680	.821	0.9360	.304	65
Kuwait	64	0.7930	.807	0.9830	.354	77
High Human Development						
Iran (Islamic Republic)	70	0.7090	.919	0.866	0.2455	3
Algeria	91	0.6710	.702	0.8580	.492	118
Lebanon	92	0.6910	.774	0.8920	.300	63
Tunisia9	5	0.6890	.766	0.900	0.3627	9
Jordan	102	0.664	0.7580	.875	0.469	113
Libya	105	0.7130	.731	0.9760	.172	41
Palestine, State of	115	0.638	0.7330	.870	0.450	102
Egypt	116	0.6520	.739	0.882	---	---
Medium Human Development						
Morocco	121	0.6120	.734	0.8350	.540	131
Iraq	123	0.566	0.7310	.774	0.4921	18
Syrian Arab Republic	151	0.4920	.593	0.8290	.547	136
Low Human Development						
Djibouti1	66	---	---	---	---	---
Yemen	179	0.2700	.553	0.488	0.8341	62
World Average						

Source: UN (2021). Gender Inequality Index.

The World Bank also monitors gender equality in MENA countries. Iraq's female labor force participation rate of 15.2% is much lower than the region's average of 22%, and dramatically lower than the global rate 49.5%. As in most countries, the young educated female labor force is the group most affected by unemployment. Alongside Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, Iraq has the highest unemployment rate among young females aged 15-24, while only 2.3% of Iraqi women hold top management positions or own businesses. Regarding human capital endowments, Iraq's maternal mortality rate of 0.05 % (or 50 deaths per 100,000 live births) is the lowest among MENA countries. This may indicate a problem with the quality of Iraq's healthcare services.

Finally, in 2017, the ratio of girls to boys enrolled in secondary school was 0.75, which is lower than the ratio of 0.84 for primary school. However, the gender gap in completing education is largest in Iraq and Yemen among MENA countries.

Regarding finance, few Iraqi women have their own bank accounts or debit cards. Women may also face discrimination in accessing financial instruments (The World Bank 2017). Equal opportunities for job searching, paid jobs, acceptability of the female or male labor force, and contributing to household income may be key aspects to evaluate gender inequality in economics (International Labour Organization 2017).

Table 6. Gender Inequality: Selected Development Indicators

Economic OpportunitiesW	orld	MENA	Iraq
Female labor force participation rate (percentage of female population aged 15+ ILO estimate)	49.5	21.6	15.2
Ratio of female to male labor force participation rate (percentage) (ILO estimate)	67.7	30.62	1.8
Female unemployment (percentage of female labor force) (modeled ILO estimate)	6.21	9.6	26.8
Ratio of female to the male youth unemployment rate (percentage aged 15-24) (ILO estimate)	1 14.9	1 81.32	05.3
Firms with a female top manager (percentage of firms) (year for firm-level data)	18.6 (2016)	5.62 (2016)	.3 (2013)
Account at a financial institution, female (percentage aged 15+)	57.4		7.4
Account at a financial institution, male (percentage aged 15+)	64.11		4.6
Human Capital Endowments			
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate per 100,000 live births) 2015	2 168	15	0
Births attended by skilled healthcare staff (percentage of total) (year)	78.3 (2013)	88.29 (2013)	0.9 (2011)
Ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school (gross) (year)	0.99 (2014)	0.960 (2014)	.84 (2017)
Ratio of girls to boys enrolled in secondary school (gross) (year)	0.99 (2014)	0.940 (2014)	.75 (2017)

Note: Unless another year is noted for the economic opportunity indicators, the reference year is 2016. Data on the legal framework is from 2015. MENA aggregate data includes Malta.
*Global Findex data includes Egypt, West Bank&Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Yemen.
Source: The World Bank (2017). Progress towards Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

Finally, Table 7 summarizes the economic opportunities, human capital endowments, and voice and agency related to Iraqi women's empowerment.

Table 7. Summary of challenges to gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq

Economic Opportunities	Human Capital Endowments	Voice and Agency
Low female labor force participation rate and high levels of female and youth unemployment; vulnerable employment among women, especially for female heads of household; widespread financial exclusion; few women in corporate leadership and top management positions; low levels of female entrepreneurship	High teenage pregnancy rates; limited access to reproductive and health services; low female school enrollment; high schooling dropout rates, particularly in rural areas	High rates of gender-based violence (GBV); increasing rates of early/forced marriage due to economic hardship and insecurity; conflict-related injuries for men and boys; increasing rates of FGM; mobility constraints due to security and safety concerns; lack of clarity around rule of law and weak enforcement to protect women

Source: The World Bank (2017). Progress towards Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

Recent Developments in Women's Empowerment in Iraq

After the UN suggested including women in parliament to improve political inclusion (United Nations Development Programme, 2020), Iraqi women won 8 % of the seats in 2003, compared to 6.4%in the 1980 elections (Al-Ali 2005). Improvements in gender equality across social and economic inclusion are crucial to achieving the WB Groups' development goal. Thus, the WB Groups announced ae Regional Gender Action Plan for MENA countries in 2017, focused on gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable growth to reduce the inequality gap. In 2018, the Iraqi government launched its own program, Gender and Social Protection in Iraq: Towards Economic Empowerment in Iraq in cooperation with the Canadian government and the World Bank Group. This program aimed to contribute to the WB's Poverty Reduction Strategy 2010-2014 and the Social Protection Strategic Framework. A grant of 1.95 million USD was provided to support the program which is based on the two pillars (The World Bank 2018):

- A long-term legislative and institutional framework for Iraqi women
- Economic and political empowerment of Iraqi women, including entrepreneurship and labor market inclusion programs.

Iraq also signed the National Development Plan (2013-2017) National Employment Policy, supported by the UN Development Assistance Framework for 2015-2019 and the ILO.

This focuses on job creation and social security coverage (International Labour Organization 2016). On August 3, 2021, the WB launched a reform package with Iraq called the Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for 2022-2026, based on the following pillars (The World Bank 2021b):

- Improving governance
- Strengthening the role of the private sector and improving public sector delivery
- Strengthening human capital by considering priorities like climate change, gender inequality, etc.

Since 2003, women's organizations, primarily founded by educated women, have been established to close the gender gap. These include the National Council of Women (NWC), the Iraqi Women's Higher Council (IWHC), the Iraqi Independent Women's Group, and the Society for Iraqi Women for the Future (Al-Ali 2005). Moreover, women are at the core of economic reconstruction and are cultural reproducers of the nation. In Iraq, cultural, ethical, social, and religious identities have restricted gender roles, with women traditionally looking after the hone and caring for children. These features have determined women's status and role in both the economy and society (Al-Ali 2005).

More recently, Iraq has entered a new reconstruction phase based on the Iraq 2030 vision. This identified five goals: man building, good governance, a diversified economy, safe society, and a sustainable environment (Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning 2019). One of the focal points of the safe society goal is women's empowerment concerning "appropriate development of families, women and vulnerable categories". According to this vision, development should be inclusive for disadvantaged groups, including women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities or special needs. Thus, women should be empowered to increase the female labor force participation rate and change income distribution (Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning 2019).

Conclusion

For decades, Iraq has faced economic, political, and social challenges. Indeed, before the oil crisis, the wars and the invasion, Iraqi women had made good economic and social gains to become the most highly educated and skilled in the MENA region. Over the last two decades, however, respect for human rights in Iraq has become extremely weak, particularly for Iraqi women, who have been hard-hit by the country's difficult economic and political situation. Fortunately, Iraq has taken important steps since then to reduce poverty and is now an upper middle- income country (The World Bank 2016). During the economic boom due to the oil crisis, Iraqi women enjoyed more equal rights. However, the US invasion and occupation, UN sanctions, and political factors all weakened these rights (Jawad 2013). In particular, economic welfare and development gradually decreased since sanctions began. This led to Iraqi women experiencing discrimination regarding their rights and achievements, which in turn directly hindered their economic and social empowerment. Women's social status in Iraq is also critically impacted by norms, stereotypes, cultural features, and religion. These enable men to have more business opportunities or prevent married women working outside the home.

It is well known that women's empowerment is impossible unless they can contribute to the economy. Therefore, macroeconomic and sectoral policies should be implemented in Iraq to empower women, such as subsidies, tax reductions, and social security plans. To achieve sustainable development, economic development plans should focus on ensuring women's schooling, and improve their skills, and abilities (Mahdawi and Hassan 2013). Like other developing countries, Iraq still needs more effective policies to support and strengthen women's contribution to the economy, which will then directly improve their social life. Education is undoubtedly the key to closing the gender gap. To conclude, it is clear that the role of Iraqi women in society is closely associated with economic development.

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CHAPTER 5

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WOMEN REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ

Introduction

As a worn-torn and post-conflict country, Iraq has suffered long years of repression, political instability and economic sanctions that have severely harmed the lives of its people. The country's sufferings have been exacerbated by decades of armed conflict: the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), the United States-led coalition invasion (2003-2011), and the rise and rule of the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS, also known as Daesh) from 2014 to 2017. Damaged by the consequences of endless war and conflict, rebuilding has not ensured durable peace, or economic and political stability. Instead, during the post-ISIS recovery and reconstruction, Iraq's economy has worsened, with rising prices, poverty, and constrained access to livelihoods. The economic downturn and challenging political context have exacted a high cost on society, direct impacts on the already repressed group of Iraqi women and girls, who are particularly vulnerable to violence and restrictions.

Iraq also struggles to ensure safety and a dignified life for its large vulnerable displaced population of almost 6.4 million refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), IDP returnees, asylum seekers, and stateless people (16 % of Iraq's population) (UNHCR 2022a). Within this vulnerable population, women face a "double vulnerability" due to their gender and protection status. Their access to livelihoods, healthcare, educational opportunities, and the labour market is limited due to their refugee or IDP status and exacerbated by cultural and social norms as well as institutional and legal barriers. In addition, women in Iraq also suffer from high levels of inequality and violence (Vilardo and Bittar 2018).

This chapter explains the overall situation of woman refugees and IDPs in Iraq and the challenges they face. It also identifies opportunities to resolve gender-related problems. While acknowledging that gender-based discourses themselves contribute to the construction of exclusionary or discriminative narratives, one should not ignore that displacement in Iraq has gender-specific consequences. Gender plays a significant role in explaining inequalities, violence, and socio-economic restrictions in Iraqi society. Gender vulnerabilities among displaced people differ between men and women since traditional roles and social norms are the main determinants underlying the economy and the regulation of everyday life (Kaya 2018). Given these differences and Iraq's new political context, characterized by the transition from humanitarian intervention to recovery and development programming, the chapter also suggests how governments, international donors, and agencies can develop gender-sensitive policies and programs for displaced persons and people in need of protection.

Refugees and IDPs in Iraq: Overview

Long years of war and conflict have left almost 1.2 million Iraqi IDPs and 4.9 million IDP returnees living in protracted internal displacement (UNHCR 2022a). Additionally, Iraq currently hosts 256,006 Syrians, 38,790 refugees from other countries, and 47,000 stateless people (UNHCR 2022a). Women and girls constitute the 48% of the total population of Syrian refugees and almost 50% of all asylum seekers and refugees of other nationalities (UNHCR 2022b).

Concerning almost 1.2 million IDPs, 900,000 live in non-camp, private settings (of whom only half have safe and adequate housing) while 180,000 IDPs live in 26 camps (25 in areas administered by the KRG) and 100,000 IDPs live in 477 informal settings (UNHCR 2022a). 91% of refugees in Iraq reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) (UNHCR 2022b). This has put immense strain on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), particularly in terms of providing public services and local infrastructure (Dore-Weeks 2018).

In March 2021, the Iraqi government issued its National Plan to address displacement in Iraq and decided to close the camps to end prolonged displacement. However, the KRG has not yet closed camps in areas under its control and is not expected to do so imminently. The Iraqi government plans to ensure that people return to their previous homes or find new shelter. However, this simply creates further displacement since many cannot access safe housing due to destroyed property, lack of livelihood opportunities, and insecurity. Displaced people are also left on their own to return home safely and find affordable services. Many camp residents are female-headed households displaced by fighting between ISIS and the Iraqi military. Left in limbo, they encounter administrative hurdles (access to civil documentation, shelter, food and livelihoods) due to their perceived ISIS affiliation (Human Rights Watch 2021). Moreover, their previous homes and basic infrastructure (water, electricity, and health care) have mostly been destroyed. Due to systemic injustices, they cannot prove or claim ownership of their property or else it is still occupied by community or tribal leaders (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2020). Finally, although Iraqi law guarantees women's property rights, traditions and tribal customs remain insurmountable barriers to securing these rights.

Refugees and displaced persons are often more vulnerable to protection risks (such as detention and refoulement), particularly due to the absence of an effective legal framework for refugee protection in Iraq. Iraq is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and lacks a comprehensive legal framework for refugees aligned with international standards. Instead, two laws outline the refugee protection and rights. Act No 51 of 1971 (the Political Refugee Act) only grants the right to work and access health and education services to those defined as "political refugees". Law 21-2010, which established the Ministry of Migration and Displacement, stipulates the assistance and services offered to internally displaced persons and refugees in Iraq. Given the protracted nature of displacement and the lack of effective legislation on protection, registration, and access to documentation (e.g., birth, marriage, and divorce certificates, and humanitarian residence permits) remain key protection needs to prevent the risk of detention and refoulement and enable access to public and humanitarian services. Besides, although refugees can work, and access health and education policies, Iraq does not expect them to integrate, so there are legal obstacles to obtaining long-term residency or naturalization (UNHCR 2022b). According to a UN Women study that interviewed 500 female Syrian refugees, only 4% said they had access to work although 78% had a Kurdish residency permit allowing legal employment in KRI (Dore-Weeks 2018, 3).

Women's Double Vulnerability among Refugee and IDP Groups

There are a number of external factors that significantly increase the vulnerability of women refugees and IDPs in Iraq. These include poor living conditions, administrative hurdles related to refugee/IDP status, cultural and social norms influenced by the dominance of male culture, and misperceptions of traditions. Indeed, the key difficulties and complexities facing refugee women in Iraq are not entirely different to the vulnerabilities and gender-based problems of Iraqi women in general. The UN Gender Inequality Index of 2019 ranked Iraq 123rd out of 188 countries (UNDP 2020). High levels of violence against women, gender inequality, and insufficient access to educational opportunities, healthcare, and the labour market remain key issues for Iraqi women (Vilardo and Bittar 2018, 4). This vulnerability is doubled for women with refugee/IDP status living in displacement conditions, exacerbated by restrictions on women linked to existing gender roles and stigma. Economic vulnerability and insecurity is one of the most prevalent challenges facing refugee women in Iraq (Dore-Weeks 2018; UNHCR and IMPACT 2022). Economic insecurity is their primary concern as many cannot purchase enough food to meet their household's basic needs. The Multi-Sector Needs Assessment showed that women refugees in Iraq encounter more difficulties than men, especially to access livelihood opportunities due to their lack of qualifications, low literacy, travel restrictions, and traditional gender responsibilities (UNHCR and IMPACT 2022). The pandemic has also exacerbated these vulnerabilities since many people lost their jobs and income (OCHA 2021). For example, the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (2022) reported that 93% Syrian refugees have less income than before COVID-19.

In addition to their precarious socio-economic situation and challenging living conditions (poverty, limited access to livelihoods), refugee women in Iraq also face multiple risks of gender-based violence (GBV). One form is intimate partner violence (IPV) (in many countries it refers to domestic violence), which includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and controlling behaviours by an intimate partner (WHO 2012). This is common in Iraq (Al-Atrushi et al.2013) as displaced women experience higher rates of IPV, especially in conflict situations (Mishkin et al. 2022; UNHCR 2022c; Vaughn et al. 2014).

According to UNHCR (2021), GBV, including domestic and sexual violence, forced and child marriage, and denial of resources, is one of the major issues reported by Syrian refugees, mostly by women and girls. In Iraq, certain groups are at particular risk of physical threats and GBV, such as Palestine refugees, single or divorced refugee women, and those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity (UNHCR 2022b). The pandemic also disproportionately affected displaced populations in Iraq, particularly in terms of increased gender based domestic violence. Based on its assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on GBV in Iraq, UNHCR (2022a) notes a sharp increase in domestic violence. Similarly, OCHA (2021, 29) reported an increase in domestic and GBV during home confinement.

The main factors explaining why women living in refugee camps suffer violence are gender norms, separation from the family, men's substance use, and forced marriage (Wachter et al. 2018). In both the camps and camp-like settings in Iraq, females are particularly at risk of sexual violence and disproportionate restrictions, such as living their lives in safety and privacy (IOM Iraq 2016). Although the camps in Iraq were due to close recently, women's vulnerability is increased in these settings due to unfavourable conditions, such as the lack of basic services and security (Baghdad Women Association and UN Women, 2017).

Restrictions on women force them to resort to harmful coping mechanisms and depend on others to access even the most basic services. This in turn makes them more exposed to sexual harassment and violence. Violence against refugee women is also underreported due to cultural norms. For example, a UNFPA report (2016) noted that sexual violence is often underreported in Iraq, especially among IDPs and refugee communities. Rather than seeking justice for the victim, the relatives/family members are more likely to conceal the crime, especially for unmarried women or adolescent girls, whose lives may be seriously threatened in the name of family 'honor' (Vilardo and Bittar 2018, 37). All these factors leave refugee women in Iraq more vulnerable and less resilient. In a context where Iraq's overall political, economic, and security environment remains unpredictable, significant humanitarian support is still crucial. Accordingly, the advocacy and close monitoring of international organizations and other humanitarian actors are essential, not only to assist the development of sound legislative and policy framework, but also to act against GBV and support the provision of the essential needs for the people of concern.

Policy Suggestions

Iraq's economic and political context cause significant challenges for its recovery. While providing policy suggestions for the advancement of refugee women in Iraq, one should not overlook this overarching challenging environment. In the midst of a weakening economy, the new Iraqi government is fragile due to the ongoing internal conflict and unresolved political situation. The new government elected in October 2021 has had to handle sectarian tensions, the demobilization of powerful militias, and ongoing tensions with Kurdish groups demanding greater autonomy. The context is further complicated by the immense economic and social challenges exacerbated by massive displacement. More than 1.2 million people remain internally displaced and nearly 6.5 million remain in need of humanitarian assistance.

Within this already challenging context, Iraq's intention to gradually transform itself from a country of humanitarian interventions and crisis to a country where development is progressing is reflected in the National Development Plan 2018–2022 (Iraq Ministry of Planning 2018), the Poverty Reduction Strategy 2018–2022, and the KRG's Vision 2030. Women, who are given a special focus, are considered under a separate sub-title within the human and social development chapter of the National Development Plan. The plan aims to empower women economically, increase their enrolment in education, improve health services targeting women, and particularly empower women in areas affected by terrorist acts. However, the plan lacks concrete targets and a feasible strategy for achieving these aims and overcoming the gender gap, which is crucial for the foundations of development. The same comment applies to the need to develop policy interventions for refugees and IDPs since it only aims at voluntarily returning IDPs and refugees to their home areas.

Iraq still lacks an effective legal framework for refugee protection. Its policy on humanitarian response needs to advance women's resilience and empower them by eliminating current legal, social, and economic barriers. Women refugees and IDPs still face major obstacles, particularly obtaining civil documentation as a key protection safeguard, the complexity of accessing these procedures, and receiving quality legal advice. For example, since the mobility of Syrian refugees in KRI is restricted, they cannot easily ratify or verify their documents at the Syrian embassy in Baghdad. Given the lack of proper identification and documentation, further initiatives are needed, particularly in health (denied medical services) and education (denied school enrolment for their children) to tackle the specific problems faced by women refugees/IDPs.

Given that these specific needs have not yet been properly identified, needs assessment surveys should prioritize collecting data pertaining to needs of girls and women. This would enable gender responsive efforts to be better supported and lead to inclusive and gender-sensitive policies.

Some of the biggest challenges, which are not specific to refugee/IDP women in Iraq, are traditional stereotypes of women's roles and the dominance of male culture. These are deeply embedded in Iraqi society. Given the difficulties due to cultural norms, the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq can be promoted by increasing women's participation in refugee support programs. Influential community leaders and male family members should be included in programs aiming to break down gender norms and should call for increased women's participation and gender responsive efforts towards achieving equality. Both the Iraqi government and international donors should prioritize women's enhancement and gender equality in their reconstruction and funding programs. Conditionality-based funding mechanisms can be used to push all actors to implement gender-responsive policies.

The lack of effective resilience mechanisms and self-reliance increase the vulnerability of many women refugees. Although existing resilience policies try to include a gender perspective in their programs, their policy framing does not directly integrate the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Kaya 2018). WPS addresses the protection of women during conflicts and encourages women's participation in preventing and resolving conflicts. Regarding self-reliance efforts, cash-based transfer programmes, mostly financed by international organisations, should be accompanied by new initiatives that target building sustainable resilience mechanisms and investing in the capacities of both the refugee and host communities, rather than seeing people solely as beneficiaries of assistance. Without income-generating or skills-development activities, support programs increase people's dependency on aid mechanisms and stop them contributing to society. Moreover, "vulnerability" should not be restricted to refugee women in Iraq. Instead, it should apply to all women through an inclusive policy to prevent cleavages between locals and migrants. The promotion of social cohesion needs to be based on an approach where positive interactions between communities should be supported while women's vulnerability should be dealt with irrespective of their refugee or citizen status.

Resettlement options remain limited for refugees in Iraq. Accordingly, this chapter called for increased resettlement spaces, especially for displaced female-headed households. Resettlement should be prioritized for women who cannot return to their homes due to destroyed property, lack of livelihood opportunities, insecurity, or perceived affiliation to extremists. Alternatively, further ways should be explored to strengthen their self-resilience.

The situation in Iraq remains unstable while the wounds of war and insecurity, compounded by social and economic hardships will continue to fester. Although the country is gradually recovering, humanitarian needs and displacement remain stubbornly persistent. The unprecedented scale of internal displacement places refugee women at heightened risk of violence and exploitation. Beyond the restrictions due to traditional roles and social norms of gender, women and girls in Iraq are more likely to encounter challenges to self-empowerment and equality, given the lack of improved livelihoods, access to formal work, strengthened self-resilience, and effective protection legislation.

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CHAPTER 6

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WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACEBUILDING IN IRAQ

Introduction

All conflicts are complex. However, if they take on armed forms then they become even more multidimensional, socially, politically, and economically, and harder to understand, address and resolve. Thus, building peace and ensuring stability in societies suffering from armed conflicts are complex and challenging tasks. Women are generally the most frequently and severely affected group of the society during conflicts. Yet, despite this and women's central role in societies, they are often ignored while reinstating peace and ensuring the institutionalization of sustainable stability. Because they are not included in the peace process as they need and deserve to be, the harm they have suffered and the grievances they feel during a conflict are usually exacerbated in the post-conflict period. This marginalization of women in peacebuilding efforts and the exclusion of their essential contributions to peace are a likely reason why peace processes have failed in various parts of the world.

Women's indispensable role in creating peace in conflict-affected societies, particularly in post-conflict circumstances, is becoming increasingly clear and recognized by those involved in peacemaking efforts. However, given existing gender inequalities, women unsurprisingly face difficulties participating in peace processes. While gender-based discrimination has commonalities worldwide, it is also crucial to recognize the unique characteristics of each conflict and their impacts on specific societies in which the conditions of women differ from others. Nevertheless, while taking into account the specific circumstances of women in their respective societies, it is essential to develop a universal understanding of gender equality and the internationally recognized roles that women play in peace and security, as stated in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325 2000). Regarding post-conflict peacebuilding, it is critical to ensure the women are involved as one of the most important stakeholders to ensure the society can develop a workable peace while contributing to efforts to achieve gender equality. Gender equality is also an important part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the form of Goal 5, Gender Equality, aiming to achieve gender quality and empower all women and girls by the year 2030 (United Nations General Assembly A/RES/70/1 2015). The Goal 5 targets to achieve gender equality with specific reference to "ending all forms of discrimination, eliminating all forms of violence and harmful practices against all women and girls" as well as "ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life, and Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources". Universalization of normative frameworks for gender equality and women, peace and security provide governments, societies and individuals reference points in order to evaluate the status of gender equality and address the related problems. This is particularly important for the countries where lack of gender equality converges with experience of long-lasting violent conflicts. Iraq is such a country that it needs these reference points and policy recommendations and guidance for working on gender equality in post-conflict conditions.

Over the last four decades, Iraq has experienced challenging times due to various armed conflicts that have brought death and devastation, including the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), its invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War (1990-1991), and the invasion of Iraq by United States-led coalition (2003-2011). These wars and armed conflicts have been followed by regime change and severe civil wars during the invasion and in its aftermath as well as the period of existence of a violent entity in the country (2014-2017) in the form of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS). These traumatic events directly affected Iraq's society, politics, the economy, and international relations. Iraq's women have not been spared from these events. Women have died, suffered violence, and lost families and people around them, while their homes have been destroyed, livelihoods and properties lost or taken, and their social and legal status weakened in terms of fundamental rights and individual freedoms. Alongside other discriminated groups, women have suffered long-lasting effects of fragmentation and conflict in Iraq. Thus, their problems and needs have to be addressed urgently to create sustainable peace, stability, and harmony. Iraq's women deserve to participate actively and take responsibility in all aspects of public life as equal members of Iraq. This is especially important in a divided society, where identities based on ethnicity, religion, sect, and local characteristics as women can drive the institutionalization of harmonious and peaceful relationships and contribute to Iraq's overall development.

Iraqi Women and Political Representation

The regime change that followed the US invasion enabled women to secure equal rights, especially social, political, and electoral rights, under the new Iraqi constitution of 2005. The constitution stipulates that Iraqi citizens are "equal before the law without discrimination based on gender", have the "right to participate in public affairs and to enjoy political rights including the right to vote, elect, and run for office", and institutes "a percentage of representation for women of not less than one-quarter of the members of the Council of Representatives" (Constitution of the Republic of Iraq 2005, Articles 14, 20 and 49). The inclusion of political rights in the constitution and the quota in the national parliament are important signs of efforts to incorporate women into the political system. However, providing space for political representation quantitatively does not necessarily ensure that women gain political influence in practice.

Women's participation in the political arena and holding influential government posts are significant reflections of political representation. Moving beyond this, getting more seats than the reserved parliamentary quota in the Council of Representatives, securing more ministerial posts, and gaining increased representation in bureaucracy would strengthen women's presence in the public space and leadership positions. In this sense, the establishment of the Ministry of State for Women's Affairs in Iraq was a positive sign that the government was giving specific attention to issues related to women as part of its policy portfolio. However, the ministry was closed in 2015 due to a reshuffle of government institutions (RFE/RL 2015), which set back women's representation in government and lost women their specific issues' place in the government's agenda. Furthermore, although the constitution has anti-discriminatory and pro-women articles, it is also very important to determine whether these constitutional rights are reflected in relevant laws, bylaws, and other procedural arrangements lower down the legal ladder. Ultimately, the crucial point is whether legal arrangements are followed to the word and spirit of the law and implemented to promote women's interests. In a country like Iraq, where a democratic culture and rule of law did not flourish and was not respected for long time, the transition to democracy and establishment of rule of law may be problematic at various levels.

In particular, constitutional rights may not be directly applied to the practicalities of daily life for women while discriminatory practices may continue (Iraq National Action Plan 2014-2018, 2014, 8-10), hence the need for a women's affairs ministry with given the obvious need to improve women's status and representation, the ministry's elimination was a step backward for Iraq.

Women's political representation at both the local (at the local councils) and particularly the national level in the Council of Representatives must be genuine. That is, women should not participate merely to fill quotas and win for political parties; rather, they should have influence over policies so that they can make a difference for other women. Gender equality must be ensured in politics by opening spaces for women to influence policy making and take responsibilities in governing roles. Gender equality in political representation is a necessity rather than an opportunity provided to women and included in the constitution.

The results of Iraq's latest parliamentary election, on 10 October 2021, were considered to be very positive for women, particularly women parliamentary candidates, who surpassed and won more seats than the designated quota (Anadolu Agency 2021), with 95 Iraqi women elected to the Iraqi Council of Representatives out of 329 available seats. Thus, women won 29% of the seats, which is more than the constitutional quota of 25%. Indeed, "57 women won outside the quota by garnering the highest number of votes in their respective electoral constituencies" as they did so although women have long continued to face problems during election and campaign periods, including "gender-based attacks, gender stereotyping, inadequate financial resources to run effective campaigns and patriarchal structures across society" (Gender Analysis of Iraq's October 2021 National Elections 2022, 4).

Despite long-enduring difficulties, these positive results in the parliamentary elections indicate that women successfully used democratic means to improve their representation at a national level. This is a positive step towards Iraqi women's further participation in Iraq's political processes. That is, just as the quota system has enabled more women to participate in electoral politics, their electoral successes motivate women to participate more at both local and national levels. This positive development in women's presence in representative democracy may then produce actual policymaking influence to enhance women's political and social status.

Women and Peacemaking in Iraq

Women's ever-increasing presence in parliamentary politics may help transform Iraq's contentious, fragmented, and antagonistic political arena. This could also ultimately help to facilitate conflict resolution and peacemaking processes in the country by consolidating democracy and dialogue. This in turn would increase economic prosperity and development. According to the latest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII), which is rather a comprehensive and multidimensional socioeconomic assessment, Iraq ranks 146th (out of 162 countries assessed with 2019 data) (UNDP Gender Inequality Index – GII, Online 2022). This ranking shows the need for further empowerment of women in Iraq and the need to improve their status relative to men in the areas of employment and economic welfare.

Iraq has long suffered from armed conflicts, with women being one of the most affected groups in the society. Both during and following armed conflicts, women's socioeconomic conditions and their overall welfare have weakened considerably.

Conflict-related violence and gender-based violence (GBV) in addition to existing domestic violence all threaten Iraqi women's physical security. The UN recognizes GBV as one component of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) within the framework of threats to international peace and security (UNSC Resolution 1820 S/RES/1820 (2008) and UNSC Resolution 1888 S/RES/1888 (2009)). Therefore, GBV has been included in post-conflict peace and reconciliation processes in Iraq.

All women who suffer trauma and the effects of physical damage and injury during conflict must be cared for, treated, made secure, and achieve justice. Women should be involved in these processes to ensure that women who have suffered from conflict achieve their social status, and individual and civil rights. Many women have suffered from armed conflicts since 2003, whether to Iraq's sectarian and ethnic or the unprecedented violence inflicted by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in almost a third of the country more than a decade later. Many Iraqi women were targeted during the armed conflict and suffered sextual violence, which was used as a tactic of war in this period. Therefore, it is sine qua non to address women's grievances, especially for victims of violence, to achieve just and sustainable peace in Iraq. Women must be actively involved in all aspects of Iraq's social and political life for peace to prevail, and to institutionalize peace, stability, and social development. Iraq will more quickly heal the wounds from conflict and achieve peace if women have equal status with men.

Gender equality in Iraq and women's representation in public and private sector roles remain rather limited. Despite the efforts to improve women's status across all walks of life, and legal and procedural incentives, the transformation of state and society has been slower than expected and without satisfying Iraqi women's needs. Women's presence and representation across all aspects of life are essential for ensuring individual rights and freedoms, consolidation of democracy and rule of law, and the institutionalization of good governance in Iraq. Unless gender equality is achieved and women's role in public life is firmly established, Iraq will not never fully achieve democracy, stability, or prosperity. Having experienced long-lasting armed conflicts and instabilities due to social divisions, Iraq desperately needs women to play a central role in building security and trust. Women can be the glue that binds the country's fragmented social and political spaces, and may serve as a common driving force to bring the country together. The more that women gain space in politics in terms of representation and influence, the greater the possibility of building consensus around commonalities in Iraq. Women's participation in negotiations for peace, mediation amongst various parties that involved in conflicts and building trust in the society could serve for institutionalization and sustainability of democracy and peaceful coexistence in Iraq.

Conclusion

Gender equality should be a reference point for development and peace in Iraq in the 21st Century. Peace and harmony in Iraqi society can only be sustainable if gender equality is insured. It has been a challenge to achieve full gender equality, even in the most developed countries and in the way it is reflected in international agreements and international reference documents. Hence, it is even more challenging for countries like Iraq, where democratic values, rule of law, equality, and social justice have struggled to flourish, and long-lasting armed conflict had brought nothing but devastation and instability. Peace and gender equality is possible in Iraq to the extent that all social strata are informed about and aware of the benefits of gender equality for the overall good of all people in Iraq just as any other country in the world.

Empowerment of women at local and national level could be a driving force for Iraq to overcome the overall effects of previous conflicts that were experienced in the country. Women at all levels could be important contributor to dialogue that would pave the way for institutionalization peace and stability in Iraq. Women's presence in politics and filling in positions of responsibility are important means to ensure addressing long lasting political, economic, and social problems caused by conflicts. Peacemaking has always been a complex endeavor and active participation of women where peace is sought after would positively contribute to these processes. As conflicts cause harm and grievances among women, addressing their problems would constitute and important phase of conflict resolution in Iraq. Inclusion of women in decision-making processes would facilitate addressing the root causes of fragmentations in society and help ameliorating the existing divisions by emphasizing the common problems that women face at all over Iraq. Protecting women from violence and ensuring justice for the victims of violence are important parts of a sustainable peace in the post-conflict countries. Elevating economic conditions and ensuring economic empowerment would be leverages for women to stand for their rights in the society and their specific needs. Society could be more resilient to divisions and fragmentation if women are proportionally represented and involved in the decision-making processes. Women presence in public life could be made more visible through women civil society organizations and the space they get in the public life. Increasing the number of women civil society organizations and their involvement in peace-related issue areas would be positive steps for empowerment of women in Iraq. Bringing gender equality to the attention of Iraqi society would be a way to create an awareness among all Iraqis for this purpose and help development of ownership especially among the women for their rights. Overcoming existing prejudices and established negative gender roles for women are not easy tasks in Iraq. However, as women play get more responsibility and in governance and contribute the peace, prosperity, and stability of Iraq, they will consolidate their role and place in public life never to lose again.

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Ceren GENÇ

Ceren Genç is the Team Leader for International Student Admissions at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. She has 18 years experience in international higher education management, working on different aspects of internationalisation, such as Erasmus mobility, the Bologna Process, setting up international offices and partnerships. As an expert in admissions and recognition of academic qualifications, she is particularly interested in pathways for refugee students. Having worked in both public and private universities, as well as the NGO sector, she has built an extensive and diverse professional network. Projects related to empowerment of women and innovative ways of using credentials to help employability are her special interests.

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