

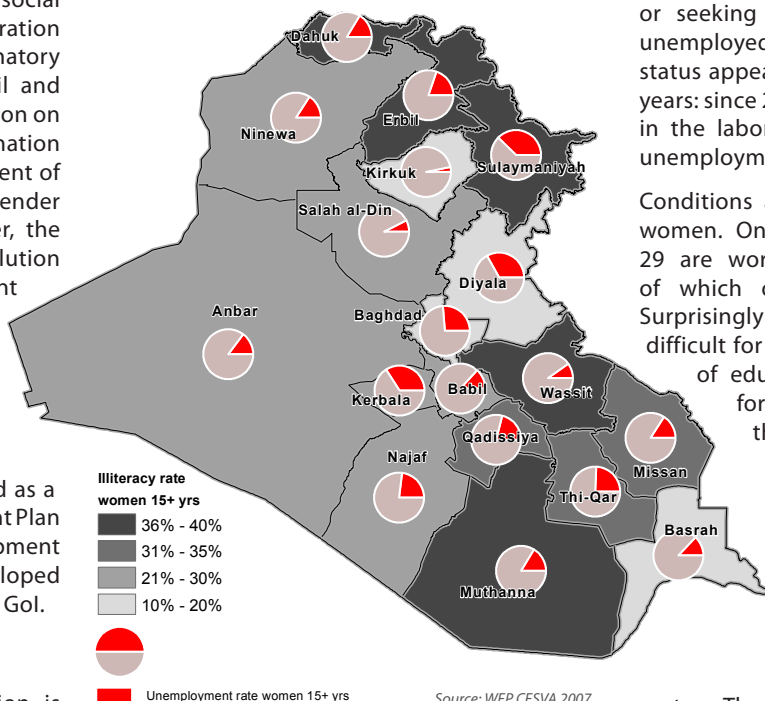
INTRODUCTION

Years of dictatorship, international sanctions, and armed conflict have affected Iraq's social fabric and contributed to a deterioration in the lives of Iraqi women.¹ As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Government of Iraq (GoI) is committed to improving gender equality and women's rights. Moreover, the United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325 as well as Millennium Development Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women both underline the importance of progress in the status of women in attaining human rights and development objectives. As such the protection and empowerment of women was identified as a priority in the GoI's National Development Plan (2010-2014), as well as in the Development Assistance Framework (2011-2014) developed by the UN in close cooperation with the GoI.

Literacy & Education

Achieving gender equality in education is integral to achieving both women's rights and sustainable economic and social development. The illiteracy rate among Iraqi women (24%) is more than double that among Iraqi men (11%).² In functional literacy tests (when asked to read a sentence out loud) illiteracy rose above 50% for women aged 15-24 living in rural areas.³ Iraq has some way to go in reaching the Millennium Development Goal targets of 100% for both net enrollment and male-to-female enrollment ratios: one in three girls aged 12-14 is not enrolled in school, while one in ten of the same age group has never attended school, according to the Iraq Knowledge Network Survey. Traditional

Illiteracy and Unemployment among women 15 years and above



cultural and social factors often remain obstacles to improvements in girls' access to education.⁴ Early marriages remain prevalent, and familial concerns and parental objection have been identified as a main reason behind non-enrollment.⁵

Labor Force and Employment

Girls' low levels of education have a negative impact on the current and future participation of women in Iraq's labor force. Across the country, only 14% of all women are

either working or actively seeking work, and of those more than one in five is unemployed.⁶ In comparison, 73% of men are employed or seeking work, of which one in ten is unemployed. Moreover, women's labor force status appears to have deteriorated in recent years: since 2008 the number of women active in the labor force has decreased while the unemployment rate has increased.⁷

Conditions appear to be hardest for young women. Only a tenth of women aged 15-29 are working or actively seeking work, of which over a third are unemployed. Surprisingly perhaps, access to work is most difficult for young women with higher levels of education: the unemployment rate for young women climbs to 41% for those with a diploma or more and as high as 68% for those with a bachelor's degree.

The difficulties faced by young educated women may be tied to the limited opportunities for women in the labor market. The vast majority of employed women (94%) are in the public sector. The private sector offers little for women: of all private sector employees, only 2% are women. Of those women with private sector jobs, 71% have little or no education and most work in agriculture. With four out of five rural women working in agriculture, the Iraqi government has identified the high reliance on women for agricultural labor as a specific obstacle to development in rural areas.⁸

Female Headed Households

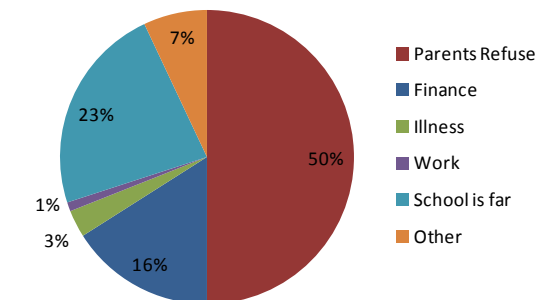
Following years of conflict in Iraq, female-headed households

"Across the country, only 14% of all women are either working or actively seeking work, and of those more than one in five is unemployed."

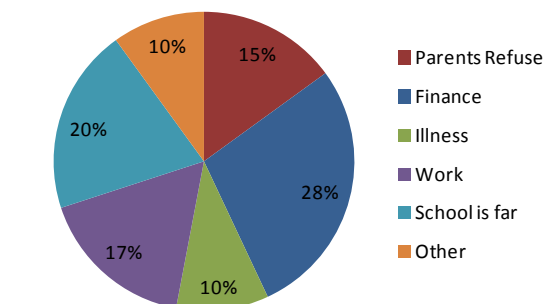
Reasons for Not Attending School

Source: Government of Iraq, Iraq National Youth & Adolescents Survey 2009

Young Illiterate Women

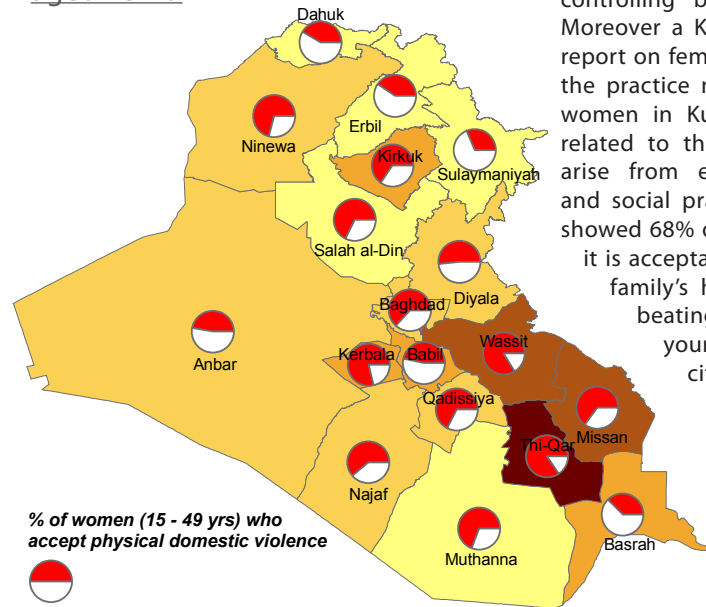


Young Illiterate Men



constitute a highly vulnerable segment of the Iraqi population. Close to one in ten Iraqi households is female-led, corresponding to approximately 450,000 households. Nine out of ten women heading households are widows.⁹ Government programs intended to support widows suffer from corruption, outdated systems, and administrative obstacles.¹⁰ Assessments of female headed households conducted by the IOM in 2011 confirmed critical issues related to access to work, food insecurity, and inadequate shelter, all of which make women headed households vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.¹¹ Despite

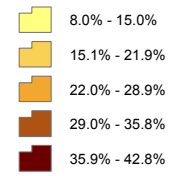
Experience and acceptance of domestic violence among women aged 15-49



49 has suffered physical violence at the hands of husbands, 33% have suffered emotional violence, and 83% have been subjected to controlling behavior by their husbands.¹³ Moreover a Kurdistan Regional Government report on female genital mutilation indicates the practice may affect as many as 41% of women in Kurdistan.¹⁴ Many of the issues related to the violation of women's rights arise from entrenched cultural traditions and social practices.¹⁵ A 2009 youth survey showed 68% of young Iraqi men believe that it is acceptable to kill a girl for profaning a family's honor, while 50% believe wife beating is acceptable.¹⁶ Meanwhile, young Iraqi women and men cited family upbringing (40%), religion (37%) and the law (35%) as major factors that would help prevent violence against women, considerably more than the media (6%) or schools (3%).¹⁷ Despite encouraging legal reforms by the KRG, the Iraqi penal code continues to offer reduced sentences for 'honor killings', and to authorize husbands to 'discipline' their wives.¹⁸

Source: Iraq Knowledge Network 2011

% of women (15 - 49 yrs) who experience physical domestic violence



the burden of caring for often-large families by themselves, the vast majority are not working and are dependent on aid from the state and community.¹²

Violence against women

Iraqi women continue to face widespread instances of gender based violence, including domestic violence, honor killings, and trafficking. One in five women (21%) aged 15-

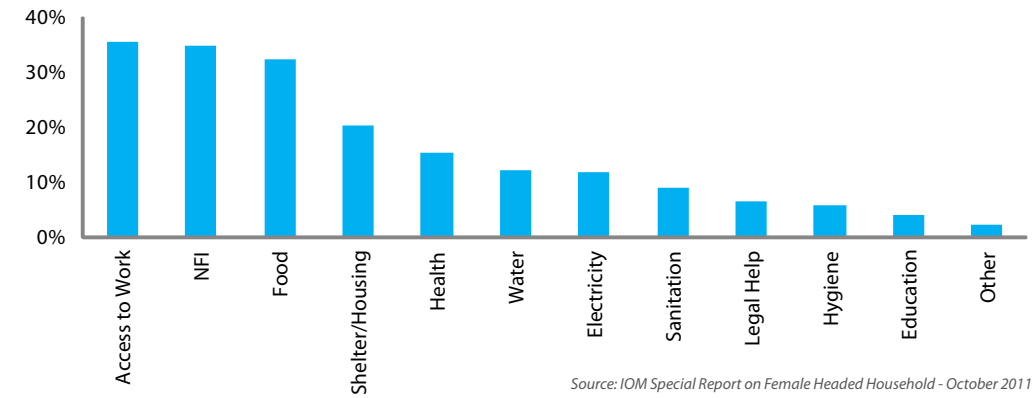
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Civil Society Response

NGOs and civil society organizations are joining forces to advance the gender equality and women empowerment agenda. At the federal level, NGOs have come together to work on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 reaching out to both the government and the UN to support this concerted effort. The government is working to develop fully-fledged women's ministries, both at the federal and the KRG level, while the KRG parliament passed the anti-domestic

“NGOs and civil society organizations are joining forces to advance the gender equality and women empowerment agenda.”

Priority Needs of Assessed Vulnerable Female Headed Households



Source: IOM Special Report on Female Headed Household - October 2011

violence bill with support of NGOs, civil society activists and government officials.

UN Response

The Gol and UN agencies are working to implement the comprehensive framework needed to promote gender equality through a combination of legal reforms, governmental policies and support programs, and civil society capacity building. The UN currently has more than seventeen national and local projects focused on gender issues with a total budget surpassing \$20 million. Implemented by UN Women, UNESCO, UNICEF, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, and WHO, the projects include combating violence against women, improving women's access to education and employment, livelihood and psychological support to female-headed households, gender-focused governance and institutional capacity building programs with Gol, and support to legal reform and civil society initiatives for women's rights and women's health.

Endnotes

- 1 Gol National Development Plan (NDP) 2010-2014; UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR 2011
- 2 World Food Program, CFSVA 2007
- 3 United Nations Children's Fund, MICS 2006
- 4 Gol National Development Plan (NDP) 2010-2014
- 5 UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009; Gol National Development Plan (NDP) 2010-2014
- 6 Iraq Knowledge Network 2011; Relaxed definition of unemployment (includes women not actively looking for work)
- 7 COSIT Labour Force Survey 2008
- 8 Gol National Development Plan (NDP) 2010-2014
- 9 World Food Program, CFSVA 2007
- 10 IOM Iraq Special Report on Female Headed Households October 2011
- 11 Ibid
- 12 CSO/KRSO/UN/Iraq Knowledge Network 2011
- 13 WHO/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Health Iraq Family Health Survey 2006-2007
- 14 KRG Ministry of Health cited in UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR 2010 Report on human rights in Iraq
- 15 UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR 2010 Report on human rights in Iraq, Gol National Development Plan (NDP) 2010-2014
- 16 UNFPA/COSIT/KRSO/Ministry of Youth and Sport Iraq National Youth Survey 2009
- 17 Ibid
- 18 UNAMI Human Rights Office/OHCHR 2011