

Paths to Security, Peace, and the Rights of Minority Women in Iraq

This report focuses on the status quo of minority women in Iraq by reviewing the most significant forms of discrimination and inequality they face in both public and private spheres. It also emphasizes the procedures and measures of improvement to guarantee the fundamental protection for minority women and to adjust practices and policies that violate their rights.

This report was prepared with the contributions of a select group of Iraqi women from minority communities, activists, and women's rights advocates, under the supervision of the Iraqi Women's Network.

First: Status quo of minority women and the paths to security and peace in Iraq

A- Integrating minority women issues into Iraqi national women's strategies and policies

- 1- Responding to ISIS invasion to Nineveh Governorate and other areas of Iraq in 2014 and the large wave of displacement and the sexual and physical violence that women, especially minority women, were exposed to, the government of Iraq adopted several national plans and policies related to women, including the Iraqi National Plan on the Implementation of Resolution 1325 (INAP) in 2014, the Emergency Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 in May 2015, the Second National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 (NAPII) in 2021 and the Joint Statement in 2021-2024, the Third National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325/2025-2030 (INAPIII), and the National Strategy for Iraqi Women in 2025.

Although on paper, no plans have responded by effective implementation to the situation of women and girls during and after conflicts. Some factors have contributed to the dispersal of national resources and efforts in following up on the implementation of national plans and programs for the advancement of women, especially women in minorities. These factors include slow pace of security reform, absence of adequate infrastructure and basic services, lack of addressing the legal status of survivors and their children, absence of a national mechanism to follow up on women's issues, weak cooperation and coordination among government relevant institutions, and the exclusion of representatives of civil society organizations.

2. Early in 2024, the Iraqi government announced its intention to close down the remaining IDP camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and encourage displaced persons to return to their areas of origin. It promised to offer a resettlement grant of 4 million Iraqi dinars to each family leaving the camp and returning home. However, the lack of infrastructure and basic services in conflict-affected villages and areas, coupled with the fragile security situation, forced displaced persons to seek refuge in other informal camps, outside government oversight, thus increasing overcrowding. This newly emerged situation prompted the governmental authorities to postpone their decision to close down

all IDP camps and form a committee to address specific issues related to security and reconstruction.¹

3. Despite the government's declared commitment to rebuilding the provinces and regions after their liberation², and according to its estimates that the process of rebuilding the affected areas will take ten years or more³, the process of removal and disposal of ISIS remnants and the damages of the war, process of reconstruction is still very slow. This delay is due to the lack of allocations and the absence of a clear implementation plan that responds to the priorities in reconstruction, provision of services, the rehabilitation of the infrastructure that was destroyed by the war, and ensuring the safe and voluntary return of displaced women to their homes and rehabilitating them to participate in the reconstruction of their afflicted areas.
4. The Higher Committee for Relief and Support of Displaced Persons clarified that considering families residing in camps as integrated and settled within society⁴, as a prelude to permanently closing the displacement dossier by the end of 2025. This decision constitutes a reneging on the government's obligations and creates legal and humanitarian complications. This involves removing the status of displaced persons from thousands of families, threatening their human security by halting aid and reducing allocations, and depriving them of opportunities to compensate for destroyed property, thus making their return to their original areas even more difficult.

B- Practices That Emerged Due to Conflicts 2014-2025 (Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Rape, Harassment)

5. On August 3, 2014, ISIS attacked Sinjar, massacring thousands of men and abducting 6,417 Yazidis. Women and girls were subjected to various forms of brutal sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. The fate of the abducted Yazidi women and other minorities' women (Turkmen and Shabak) is still unknown. According to the latest statistics from the Office of Abductees in the Kurdistan Region, the number of missing and abducted persons whose fate remains unknown is 2,560: 1,225 females and 1,335 males.

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/iq/ar/internally-displaced-people>

² The World Bank (17, Oct. 2017) International Bank For Reconstruction And Development: Proposed Additional Loan In The Amount Of Us\$400 Million To The Republic Of Iraq For The Emergency Operation For Development Project; Report No: PAD2525: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/224371509674450419/pdf/Iraq-Final-EODP-PP-AF-SECPO-comments-Clean-10192017.pdf>

³ Ministry of Planning in Iraq (2017) Document of the General Framework of the National Plan for Reconstruction and Development of Damaged Governorates due to Terrorist and Military Attacks https://iraqdurablesolutions.net/Uploads/static/The%20Government%20of%20Iraq's%20National%20Plan_Final%20unofficial%20translated%20version.pdf

⁴ Ministry of Immigration and Displaced (2025) The Higher Committee for Relief and Support of Displaced Persons is considering whether families living in camps should be considered integrated into society. <https://imn.iq/archives/125660>

Of these, 148 were killed in captivity, and 3,598 Yazidi survivors were identified. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the survivors reported being raped. Reports also indicate that 600 Turkmen women were abducted, yet only 42 of them were freed after the liberation of areas previously held by ISIS.⁵ The management of this issue of abductees and missing persons lacks professional methodology, official consideration, and high-level coordination with international bodies in revealing the fate of these victims.

6. Despite the adoption of Security Council Resolution 2379 in September 2017, the formation of the ISIS Accountability Team was delayed until February 2019. Its procedures were slow, leading to the loss or destruction of evidence and weakening the chances of accountability, especially for women and their families. Criminal justice procedures still contain many gaps that contribute to the lack of respect for the rights of women and children who have been subjected to sexual violence, failing to provide them with sufficient protection, and hindering their access to justice⁶. This is associated with the absence of professional documentation and investigation mechanisms by security institutions, and the failure to hold perpetrators accountable and bring them to justice. Hundreds of women who were raped and enslaved by ISIS face societal rejection, along with their children, and are not allowed to return to their families unless they agree to give their children up and move on. For example, the Supreme Yazidi Spiritual Council in Iraq refused to accept the children of survivors born due to rape incidents during the ISIS invasion of Sinjar on August 3, 2014⁷. This provoked many of them to remain in Al-Hol camp, or to migrate to Turkey with their children instead of returning to their homes.⁸
7. Five years after the enactment of the Yazidi Survivors Law No. 8 of 2021, a positive step towards strengthening transitional justice measures, the Yazidi Survivors Department confirms that 2,126 Yazidi survivors have benefited from the law. However, these women still encounter significant challenges in accessing and institutionalizing comprehensive

⁵ Center for Middle East Studies (2021) ISIS's endless injustice: kidnapped Turkmen women; <https://orsam.org.tr/ar/yayinlar/%D8%B8%D9%84%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%B4-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B0%D9%8A-%D9%84%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%87%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86/>

⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission For Iraq (UNAMI, 2017) Promotion and Protection of Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence Captured by ISIL/or in Areas Controlled by ISIL in Iraq; https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMIRReport22Aug2017_EN.pdf

⁷ France 24 (April 28, 2019) Iraq: The Yazidi Council rejects the inclusion of children of Yazidi women raped by jihadists into the sect.; <https://www.france24.com/ar/20190428-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%8A%D8%B2%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A3%D8%B7%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%A7%D8%BA%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%B8%D9%8A%D9%85-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9>

⁸ CEDAW Report (2019)

services (health, psychological, social, and legal), in ensuring their full protection and economic well-being, and in revealing the realities and achieving certainty and accountability within the judicial system concerning the crimes and violations committed against women, girls, and children by ISIS and its associates. This is crucial for assessing the harm suffered and determining appropriate compensation. Furthermore, the female survivors still lack access to personal documents for themselves and their children. This necessitates further efforts to address the needs and rights of survivors.

Testimonies of Yazidi survivors reveal the enduring pain and the difficulty of rebuilding life after abduction.

Thuraya, who spent four years in ISIS captivity, recalls being humiliated in court when the judge sarcastically asked her, "What were you doing for four years? Preparing hookahs for ISIS?" She emphasized that she felt as though she **went through the trauma of being enslaved again.**

Widad explains that she still lives in constant fear: "Every time I go to Sinjar or Mosul, I feel afraid. No one knows what we are going through. They think that receiving a salary is the end of the problem." She adds sadly, "We met with officials and the Prime Minister, and they made promises, **but as soon as we return home, they are forgotten.**"

Rana describes an attempt **to free her through a ransom**: "An ISIS member contacted my family and demanded \$10,000... If it weren't for the support of the regional government, we would still be held captive." She emphasizes that the greatest pain is thinking about the women whose fate is unknown: "I know what they are going through because I lived through those days."

8. Even with the government's launch of the National Committee for Coexistence and Social Peace program, its activities lacked a coherent and solid role for minorities in promoting stability and social peace, and in addressing the impact of extremism and terrorism in all liberated areas. Furthermore, the participation of minority women was low, marginalized, and ineffective in the Peace Mediators' program⁹ and the National Women's Team¹⁰, which

⁹ The Peace Mediators Network, under the auspices of the National Women's Department, aims to support women in the governorates to achieve stability and sustainable development, and to enhance their status as agents of positive change.

¹⁰ The Iraqi National Women's Team, under the auspices of the Supreme Council for Women's Affairs, aims to bring about positive and effective change in the lives of Iraqi women and enhance their leading role in building society.

lacked sufficient support and proper utilization of women's positioning to work for achieving its goals.

9. Minorities' women face cross-sectoral violence within the family and community, exacerbated by the absence of legal protection mechanisms and by the dominance of a patriarchal social system, which reinforces inequality and discrimination against women. Reporting these crimes is often associated with social stigma. While the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRI) has made some progress by enacting a domestic violence law, establishing a directorate dedicated to domestic violence protection, and opening shelters for victims, at the federal level, a domestic violence protection directorate has been established within the Ministry of the Interior. However, a comprehensive domestic violence protection law has yet to be passed, and the shelters themselves come across significant challenges in terms of service sustainability and resources (both human and financial) due to the lack of a legal framework governing them.

Recommendations:

We recommend that the esteemed CEDAW Committee urge the Government of Iraq to:

- Establish mechanisms to ensure systematic quantitative and qualitative assessment and measurements of progress in implementing national plans and government programs relating to minority women, while providing the necessary financial and human resources.
- Take measures to strengthen transitional justice programs for reparations and compensation, effectively implement the Yazidi Survivors Law, institutionalize psychological, health, and social services, and reintegrate victims of extremism and terrorism, including internally displaced women, forcibly displaced women, raped victims and their children, and families of the missing and forcibly disappeared.
- Ensuring the safe and voluntary return of the internally displaced women, and their participation in the High Committee for Coexistence and Community Peace, as well as at the local community level, through the development of awareness, education, and rehabilitation programs.
- Combating all forms of violence and discrimination against women in and post conflict zones, meeting their humanitarian needs, and guaranteeing their rights and those of their children's to legal documentation and access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, education, and economic empowerment.
- Ensuring the participation of minorities' women in peacebuilding and reconciliation programs, promoting peaceful coexistence, and combating extremism and terrorism.

Second: Equality and equal opportunities in political participation

10. Minority's women's political participation and decision-making in the public and private spheres is very limited and encounters significant challenges, because the gender gap in public sphere and political work is widening, tending in favor of men. The social settings, traditions, and customs reduce women's opportunities for political participation, increase male dominance over political parties, and worsen the fragile and unequal economic situation. Moreover, it intensifies the low-level women's education, and it reinforces the failure of many minority women to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue, or to learn the official language (Arabic), and augments the weakness of women's political expertise. These factors have contributed to their distancing themselves from influencing political work.

C - Women's participation in the Federal Parliament and the National Assembly in the Kurdistan Region

11. The Iraqi Elections Law stipulates the membership of minorities in the Parliament according to the quota system. A maximum of nine seats over each Parliamentary Term at each five terms, distributed as follows: Five seats for Christians in (Baghdad, Nineveh, Kirkuk, Dohuk, and Erbil), and one seat each for the Yazidis in Nineveh, the Faili Kurds in Wasit, the Mandaean Sabeans in Baghdad, and the Shabaks in Nineveh. Iraq is considered a single electoral district for minority candidates, both males and females.
12. Women often encounter stiff competition for these seats due to the difficulty of reaching all voters in every governorate, as well as the increased financial burden of campaigning. They sometimes prefer to join lists of larger political blocs with political and ethnic orientations that differ from those of the minorities, thus diminishing the quota's actual value and importance in amplifying the voices of these smaller groups and their influence on the political process and the defense of their citizens' rights. Furthermore, the competition for a single seat allocated to the Kurdish Faili, Mandaean, and Shabak minorities increases the difficulty of the competition and does not provide women with equal opportunities; given the cultural and social norms that these groups have regarding women's participation in political life.
13. The Federal Court issued a decision in February 2024 nullified the 11 members of quota seats in the Kurdistan Region's National Assembly, allocated as follows: Five seats for the Turkmen, five for Chaldean-Assyrians, and one for Armenians. These seats were established under Law No. 1 of 1992 and its amendments. This decision is considered a violation of the constitution, which guarantees the rights of national, religious, and ethnic minorities and their participation in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of

government.¹¹ This undermines the foundations of democracy, principles of diversity, and peaceful coexistence among ethnic and religious groups. It also restricts freedom of expression, and narrows the scope of public participation in politics and the public sphere. Moreover, it significantly affects the participation of women from minority groups in political life, placing them at an unequal disadvantage compared to men. It should be noted that women's quota in the Kurdistan Region's National Assembly is 25%, yet this quota does not guarantee seats for women from minority groups.

14. Women's political participation within parties remains significantly lower than that of men among minority groups. This is due to the lack of accurate statistics disaggregated by gender, age, education, and work experience, which severely impacts minority women's ability to achieve effective representation in the political party's senior management structures, decision-making powers, campaign management, and access to resources. Besides, political parties have failed to provide women with leadership training programs, negatively affecting their overall participation. Some ethnic and religious groups with tribal affiliations still consider women's involvement in politics unacceptable; therefore, female candidates and those women involved in political work face escalating hate speech and smear campaigns, hindering women's political participation and damaging their social and political networks within the political parties.

D. Participation in the Federal Government, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and the Executive Administration

15. Women's participation in executive or ministerial positions remains very low and ineffective. It does not reflect on their expected role and participation in the political course. Party leaders do not nominate women from minority groups to participate in managing senior government positions, which are often subject to partisan and sectarian quotas in addition to male dominance. Regardless of the above challenges, a woman from the Christian minority heads the Ministry of Migration and Displaced within the federal government¹², and the head of the High Council for Women in the Kurdistan Region is a woman from the Turkmen community. A woman from the Yazidi community also heads the Yazidi Survivors' Affairs Department in the Nineveh Plain district.

Recommendations

We recommend that the esteemed CEDAW Committee urge the Government of Iraq to:

- Amend the Iraqi Elections Law and the Political Parties Law to guarantee the participation of minorities in all three authorities of government, as stipulated in the Constitution;

¹¹ Kurdistan Chronicle (12 April, 2024) Christian parties criticize the Federal Court's decision on the "regional quota": A decision that undermines the foundations of democracy; <https://kurdistanchronicle.com/babat/3019>

¹² ROJ News (8 June, 2024) Women's political participation in the Kurdistan Region is "a step towards true democracy"; <https://rojnews.news/ar/?p=191361>

- Incorporate an effective representation for women within minority seats in the quota system, in accordance with the state's commitment to the principles of equality and non-discriminatory representation;
- Activate mechanisms to protect free voting, prevent proxy voting, and develop governmental and civil mechanisms to monitor electoral practices that violate women's right to a secret and direct vote, and establish clear penalties to deter such violations;
- Activate the role of civil society organizations in raising awareness and politically empowering women candidates, and develop programs in cooperation with local governments, with a focus on minority organizations;
- Enhance cooperation with the Iraqi political parties to adopt internal policies that guarantee the nomination of minority women for leadership and decision- making positions, and ensure their participation in formulating party programs and policies;

Third: Personal status and the rights of minority women

16. In reference to inheritance, divorce, marriage, and child custody, the rights of religious and ethnic minorities in Iraq are governed by a combination of civil law and Islamic Sharia (Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959). However, some exceptions are governed by special regulations that contain explicit discriminatory provisions against women and contradict the principles of equality and equitable rights guaranteed by the Iraqi Constitution and Iraq's international obligations to ensure freedom of belief and religion, and respect for women's rights.
17. Article 2 of the Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959 stipulates that the provisions of this law apply to all Iraqis, except those exempted by law. It confirms that, in case of conflict of laws, an alternative shall be made to the provisions of the Civil Code. This reflects on discrimination and a lack of consideration for the circumstances of religious minorities, especially women, with regard to the provisions of inheritance, marriage, and custody. The law presumes the enforcement of Islamic Sharia law to non-Muslims, which constitutes a violation of the rights of minorities.
18. The Personal Status Court takes into consideration all cases of all non-Muslim Iraqi sects. It is part of the Court of First Instance, and the judge of the Court of First Instance is responsible for considering cases of the non-Muslim communities as a binding part of his work. The Court of First Instance is assigned to seeing personal status cases for non-Muslims, endowments, appointing a guardian, issuing a will, proving lineage and missing persons, or matters related to marital furniture. There are two Courts of First Instance: One in the Sheikhan district in Nineveh, which manages the cases of the Yazidi sect, and the

Personal Status Court in Maysan Governorate, which considers the cases of the Sabean sect¹³, while there is no court for the Kakai sec.

19. The role of religious practices for non-Muslim minorities is limited to regulating marriage and divorce according to their religious laws. As in Christianity, the validation of marriage and the granting of divorce fall under the jurisdiction of the religious authority. However, for other religions that do not have specific procedures for concluding marriage or divorce contracts, the matter falls under the jurisdiction of the Personal Status Court. This court resorts to general rules according to Courts Statement No. (1) of 1918, which stipulated that in the absence of laws specific to the sect., the Hanafi school of thought is adopted as the reference. This procedure directly affects the rights of women, who are faced with discrimination and inequality under the law on the subjects of custody and inheritance.
20. Female child marriage rates have continued to rise, particularly during and after conflicts in areas inhabited by religious and ethnic minorities, which are often unregistered marriage contracts or informal, which are registered by religious clerics. These early marriages lead to high dropout rates at girls' schools. Furthermore, the absence of official marriage contracts' registration deprives the wives of their rights under the Iraqi Personal Status Law. Additionally, without official registered marriage contracts, women are unable to give birth in government hospitals and are forced to deliver at home, exposing them to health risks and endangering their lives and the lives of their unborn and/or newly born children.¹⁴
21. Worries among minority women have intensified following the enactment of Law No. 1 of 2025, which regulates the Iraqi Personal Status according to the Jaafari Personal Status Code. The Jaafari Law negatively impacts women's rights to inheritance, custody, and marital rights guaranteed by the former Iraqi Personal Law No. 188 of 1959. The Jaafari Law permits the marriage of girls as young as nine years old and boys as young as fifteen years old, strips mothers of their custody rights, and deprives them of inheritance, constituting a clear violation of the rights of women, children, and the entire society.¹⁵

Recommendations

We recommend that the esteemed CEDAW Committee urge the Government of Iraq to:

¹³ The formation of a court for non-Muslims was regulated by Statement No. (1) of 1918, and the courts shall be competent to consider and investigate matters, with the exception of marriage, separation, and divorce.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch (03 March 2024) Iraq: Unregistered marriages harm women and children: Clergymen conduct marriages in violation of Iraqi law; <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2024/03/03/iraq-unregistered-marriages-harm-women-and-children>

¹⁵ ANF News (19 February, 2025) The Yazidi Women's Freedom Movement in Sinjar expresses its dissatisfaction with the approval of the amendment to the Personal Status Law; <https://arabic.anf-news.com/lmr-wlhy/hrkt-hryt-almrat-alayzydyt-fy-shnkak-tbdy-astyaha-aza-aqrar-tdyl-qanwn-alahwal-alshkhsyt-115787>

- Remove the reservation on Article No. 16, and adhere to the General Recommendation No. 29 on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their termination, by avoiding the enactment of personal status laws that perpetuate gender based discrimination and are based on sectarian identity.
- Count out minority women from religiously based laws and adopt a civil legal framework to regulate the personal status of minorities, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination before the law.
- Take the required measures to address the gap between legislation and implementation, ensuring women's access to their rights and achieving justice by simplifying and accelerating legal actions and procedures.
- Take measures and procedures to amend legal provisions that include gender based discrimination, reviewing and strengthening marriage registration procedures, and preventing early marriage, which endangers women and violates their legal rights.
- Strengthen raising awareness campaigns within the Iraqi communities around women's legal rights, including the right to inheritance, and the necessity to put an end to cultural customs that exclude women from family property.

Women's Right to Education

22. Article 34 of the Iraqi Constitution stipulates that education is a right guaranteed by the state, compulsory at the primary level and free for all Iraqis at all levels. However, the Ministry of Education's budget reached only 2.1% of the total Iraqi government's budget in 2019 ¹⁶ due to several factors including the ongoing armed conflicts, which has resulted in displacement, internal migration, destruction of properties, recruitment of underage students, occupation of schools by terrorist organizations, the politicization of the education system and its subordination to sectarian quotas, and a shortage of financial and human resources. Moreover, fragile governmental monitoring mechanisms that were supposed to enforce compulsory primary education as well as the pervasive financial and administrative corruption have led to the deterioration of the education sector and its loss of even the most basic standards of educational quality.
23. The accumulative rates of illiteracy among Iraqi women and girls is a direct consequence of wars and displacement, which has deprived them of educational opportunities, particularly at the elementary level. Statistics of UNESCO for 2024 indicates that the illiteracy rate in Iraq ranges from 18% to 20%, especially in rural areas. Females have the highest illiteracy rate at 28%, compared to 13% for males, with the highest rate in Dohuk at 18%. These rates reflect on gender disparity and highlight a significant gap, emphasizing

¹⁶ Iraqi Gazette (February 2019) Law No. (1) of 2019: Federal General Budget Law of the Republic of Iraq for the fiscal year 201; <https://moj.gov.iq/upload/pdf/4529.pdf>

the prevalent denial of the right to education for women and girls.¹⁷ This denial stems from socio-economic factors and the lack of prioritization of education within the humanitarian aid system¹⁸. Destruction of educational infrastructure, the use of schools by combatants, overcrowding, weak government procedures and measures, and bureaucratic obstacles have all contributed to girls losing access to schooling and dropping out during displacement. Furthermore, due to age gaps, the governmental measures have hindered girls' coming back to schools and their integration into daytime classes or schools near their homes.

24. Elementary school curricula and programs do not include concepts and approaches of human rights, equality, non-discrimination, peacebuilding, and awareness raising on the perpetuated traditional gender stereotypes relevant to women's roles in the family and society.¹⁹ The National Development Document 2018-2022 identified several challenges to women's knowledge and skills' development, including:

- The hegemony of masculinity and patriarchal stereotypes that reinforce gender based discrimination in the field of education and knowledge;
- High dropout rates among girls;
- Early marriage stemming from prevailing societal norms, coupled with high poverty rates;
- A severe shortage of school buildings and teaching staff, and difficulty accessing schools in rural areas;
- Lack of gender-responsive policies.

25. In the Eighth Special Report on the progress made in implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the government of Iraq indicated that the Ministry of Education's laws and regulations, as well as the National Education Strategy, emphasize that the minorities should not be deprived of the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue and to acquire their own knowledge and culture. Special literacy curricula have also been printed for minorities in their respective languages. However, the lack of suitable curricula and teaching staff remains one of the most significant challenges to studying in the mother tongue of minorities.²⁰ Similarly, the education system in the Kurdistan Region has provided opportunities for learning in languages other than Kurdish, such as Syriac, Turkmen, and Arabic. Appropriate curricula

¹⁷Takleef, Ali Kadhum; (2015) On the occasion of International Literacy Day, the Ministry of Planning reports that the illiteracy rate among displaced persons in 2014 was 14.3%.; Association of Young Media Professionals and Journalists; <https://www.aa-news.iq/?p=4401>

¹⁸ Central Bureau of Statistics Report on the Conditions of Displaced Persons 2015

¹⁹ Paragraphs 206 and 208 of the seventh national report to the CEDAW Committee

²⁰ Paragraph 161 of the eighth periodic report submitted by Iraq under Article 18 of the Convention, due in 2023

have been developed for teaching in minority languages. However, these plans remain insufficient and limited due to deficient institutional support and the necessary personnel.

Government's Education Policies for Minorities

26. Aimed at enhancing inclusive quality and providing equal opportunities for all, Iraq adopted a National Education Strategy (2021-2031) and set strategic goals for improving the education sector. The government ratified the strategy, which identified the reasons for the deterioration in education based on statistics and studies. Nevertheless, the essential financial allocations were scarce, and an action plan and timeline for its implementation are missing. Besides, the strategy lacked specific measures to protect the rights of minorities in the education sector. The missing parts include the development of curricula that promote the cultural identity of minorities and respect their rights, and the provision of equal opportunities for all to access higher education, which is a crucial factor in achieving social justice, participation in the socio-economic development and stabilization of their communities.

Shabak minority villages, the girls encounter significant challenges concerning their enrollment in middle and high schools due to the long distances to schools, the deteriorating security and economic situation, and predominant social norms that prohibit girls from attending co-educational schools. Even when schools are available, they often suffer from teachers' shortage, and families are reluctant to hire male teachers for girls' schools. Shabak social norms reinforce stereotypical views of women in education, considering it as an inessential or excessive matter. They believe that "males are more productive than females, and therefore, only males deserve to get enough education." Furthermore, girls lose educational opportunities due to displacement, which accumulates the difficulty of their access to education in addition to the early dropout rates.

Although there are no legal obstacles preventing girls of color and/ or Roma (Gypsy) from attending schools, the social and cultural environment, poverty, gender stereotypical roles, family ties, and lack of official documentation hinder their education, leading to widespread illiteracy among these groups.

Recommendations

We recommend that the esteemed CEDAW Committee urge the Government of Iraq to:

- Take the necessary measures to improve the infrastructure and services of the educational sector in conflict-affected areas. Facilitate girls' access to education, and implement accelerated and enhanced learning, literacy, and vocational training programs (TVET) in coordination with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry Labor and Social Affairs;
- Ensure the availability of educational curricula for all grades and levels in the native languages of various religious and ethnic minorities, including materials on human rights and women's rights;
- Constantly monitoring the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law and regulating return procedures with an age-based exception to prevent school dropout, especially in conflict-affected areas, develop a local policy to reduce girls' dropout rates, and activate the literacy law to encourage women to enroll in school;
- Provide a safe and violence-free environment for girls and raise community awareness of the importance of education for them;
- Activate and support the role of civil society organizations to contribute to raising community awareness of the importance of girls' right to education.