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RESEARCH PAPERS ON WOMEN AND PEACE IN IRAQ

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Project Manager: Michaela Eckart
Editor: Donald Scott Peterson
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Illustrations and Cover Design: Abraham Zeytoun

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List of Abbreviations

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CoR: Council of Representatives

FGM: Female Genital Mutilation

IHEC: Independent High Electoral Commission

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

KP: Kurdistan Iraq Parliament

KRI: Kurdistan Region of Iraq

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

NAP: National Action Plan

MP: Member of Parliament

SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

UNSCR 1325: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, on Women, Peace, and Security

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

PDCs: Provincial and Districts Councils

EU: European Union

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

GBV: Gender Based Violence

ICFJ: International Centre for Journalists

IFES: International Foundation for Electoral Systems

IHEC: Independent High Electoral Commission

KDP: Kurdish Democratic Party

LSE: London School of Economics

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

MOI: Ministry of Interior

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

UN: United Nations

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls

BWA: Baghdad Women Association

INAP: Iraqi National Action Plan

INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organizations

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

IT: Information Technology

MVI: Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Index

UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution

Foreword

The following book presents five research papers on women empowerment and peacebuilding in Iraq with the goal to promote the participation of women in peacebuilding processes. Overall, the following papers serve to complement existing knowledge gaps in the field of women empowerment, political participation and peacebuilding in Iraq.

Dr. Rejna Alaaldin contributed to this work with an analysis of the legislative framework in Iraq regulating the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes, as well as political participation and protection of women against violence. By undertaking a gender analysis of the Iraqi law and identifying the gender gaps within the legal framework, Dr. Alaaldin's study aims to contribute to the progress and promotion of female political inclusion and participation through a set of key recommendations.

For this publication, Dr. Mohamed Al-Mosly analysed women's participation in legislative institutions and political parties in Iraq. The paper aims to examine whether the Constitution of Iraq and certain laws establish a minimum threshold for women representation in the Council of Representatives, the Provincial and District Councils and the political parties. It also assesses whether representation of women belonging to minority groups is guaranteed by existing laws and whether women are legally entitled to run for election independently from political parties.

Dr. Aida al-Kaisy contributed with a paper on online sexist hate speech and women's participation in public and political life in Iraq. The paper explores the interplay and reciprocal influences between sexist/misogynist speech online and women's participation "offline" in public and political life in Iraq.

A researcher, who preferred to remain anonymous, explored the linkages between economic empowerment and the inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes. The paper focuses on the ways through which the economic empowerment of women enhances women's participation in peacebuilding processes. Additionally, the paper outlines challenges and best practices in pursuing peacebuilding through economic empowerment.

Finally, this compilation of research papers includes a paper by Dr. Janan Aljabiri on best practices and lessons learned of engaging women in peacebuilding processes in Iraq. The central objective of this research paper is to map the different successful interventions that address the pillars of UNSCR 1325 whether at the community or national level, or through formal or informal channels.

The research papers presented in this book are the result of several months of extensive research by experienced Iraqi and international researchers. The individual papers were produced within the framework of the implementation of the "Women Talking Peace" project of elbarlament. "Women Talking Peace" is funded by the programme "Strengthening the Participation of Women in the Rehabilitation and Peace Process in Iraq" (SPW) of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Government.

This book would not exist without the constant support of Susan Leichtweiß (GIZ) and the funding programme SPW who supported the idea of our research work in a year of worldwide lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

We would also like to thank Abraham Zeitoun for the creative artwork of the collages at the beginning of each chapter; Solo Creative Studio for layouting the publication, Donald Scott Peterson for editing the English versions as well as our translators for contributing to the final versions in both Arabic and English language.

Our special thanks goes to Magdolin Harmina from the elbarlament team for coordinating the whole process of the research papers' production and publication.

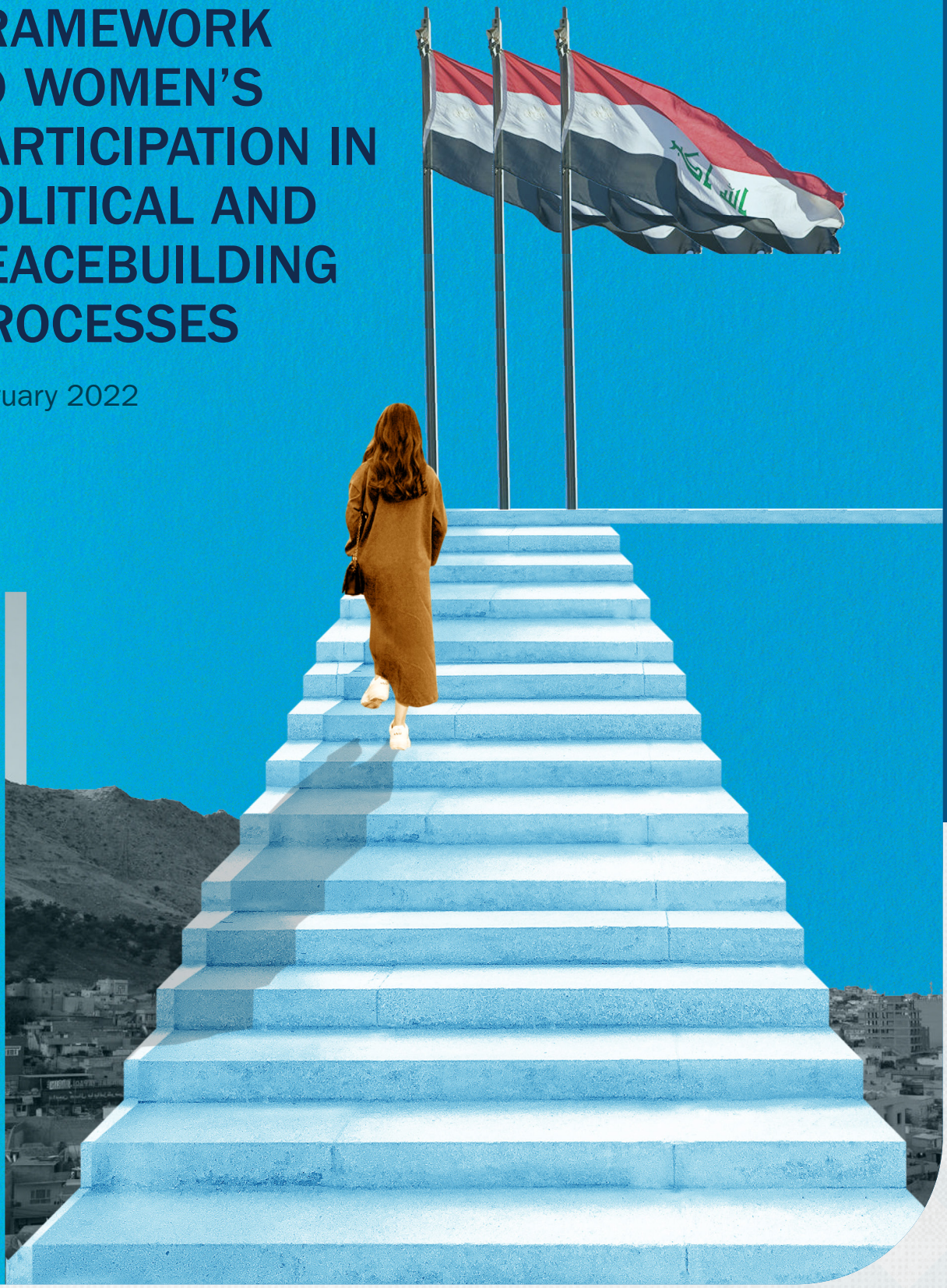
Dr. Birgit Laubach
Executive Board, elbarlament

Michaela Eckart
Project Manager, elbarlament

Dr. Rejna Alaaldin

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AND PEACEBUILDING PROCESSES

February 2022



Executive Summary

Iraq has suffered immense devastation and degradation after two decades of armed conflict and political instability. While this has far-reaching implications for the social fabric of the country, it has also increased the vulnerability of women. Women in Iraq remain underrepresented, excluded from peacebuilding negotiations and in the margins of politics. This paper examines the existing legislative framework and policies adopted in Iraq regarding women's participation in political and peacebuilding processes. Furthermore, it analyses whether or not existing laws protect and promote women's rights, as well as identifies the areas that need to be improved.

Section 1 of the paper provides an introduction and Section 2 analyses the provisions of the Constitution of Iraq and the laws governing women's rights and women representation in the legislative and executive institutions at the federal, regional, provincial and district levels. It found that while the Constitution does include articles guaranteeing equal rights for Iraqi citizens irrespective of their sex and requiring the provision of social security to Iraqi citizens, particularly women and children, further legislation is still required to be enacted by the Council of Representatives (CoR), also known as Iraq Parliament, to effectively apply such provisions. In addition, the federal government needs to adopt policies ensuring the provision of social security to women, children and those of age.

Section 2 studies women's representation in the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and identifies the need to establish a minimum threshold for the representation of women in the Board of Commissioners. In addition, Section 2 analyses Law No. 36 of 2015 on Political Parties. It found that the Law on Political Parties lacks a precise threshold for the minimum representation of women in the leadership committees of political parties and the membership of those parties. Further to highlighting the need to strengthen women representation in political parties, Section 2 identifies the necessity to guarantee women a minimum representation in executive positions of the Iraqi Government at the federal, regional, provincial and district levels. In this regard, Law No. 21 of 2008 on Provinces that have not joined a Region, stipulates that a Governor shall have five Deputies, however, this is without guaranteeing women a minimum representation. Therefore, it is recommended to introduce gender quotas to at least 40 per cent at all leadership levels. Political parties should be obliged to have a gender quota of at least 40 per cent for the founding members and leadership councils. However, it is necessary to empower and assign competent women rather than just increase the number of women present in decision-making positions irrespective of whether such representation will actually further strengthen the government's ability to perform its duties. To improve women capacities, long-term education opportunities should be provided to women in all fields.

Section 3 scrutinises the laws relating to violence against women and the need for the effective implementation of such laws. The provisions of the Iraqi Penal Code that are relevant to violence against women are dissected and the chapter emphasises the need for the CoR to adopt the Family Violence Protection Bill (also known as the Domestic

Violence Law). The number of domestic violence victims has increased over the past years. Therefore, the Domestic Violence Law is urgently required to legally safeguard women and ensure that perpetrators are not immune from punishment.

It is recommended in this paper that a focal point is appointed at the General Prosecutor's Office to allow victims of al-fasliya (forced marriage) and al-nahwa (prevention of marriage) to privately and safely submit cases and request the General Prosecutor to file a claim on their behalf. This also protects victims against the stigma associated with taking legal action against a husband or a family member. Section 3 also highlights the necessity to tackle human trafficking and to fight sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. The gaps in the provisions of the federal Personal Status Law are highlighted. This paper explains how the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has attempted to overcome them to protect women in the Kurdistan Region. Finally, it examines the recently adopted Law on Yazidi Female Survivors and its importance and shortcomings.

The protection of women is a prerequisite to increasing women's political and peacebuilding participation in the country. A lack of adequate legislation to protect women's rights and insufficient implementation of existing laws are major contributing reasons for violence and a lack of female participation in politics and peacebuilding. Women lack sufficient protection in laws and regulations, and are vulnerable to social norms and biases that risk prolonging the shortcomings in existing laws that urgently need to be addressed if gender violence and discrimination is to be tackled. This paper identifies policy recommendations that could enable greater political inclusion for women and foster an environment of accountability. This analysis is also based on a series of interviews with civil-society actors, academics and members of parliament.

Addressing the legal gaps for the advancement of women in the political sphere and promotion of gender equality, pursuant to international standards, requires political will and a long-term effort by both the government, the political elite and civil society. Women face institutional, legal and political challenges. Iraq should review all laws and provisions that are discriminatory against women and adopt laws that protect women from violence, such as the Domestic Violence Law, to prevent harmful practices and further killings of women.

1. Introduction

Iraq's political and social environment has undergone a seismic change since the fall of the Baath regime in 2003. While there has been substantial international focus on post-conflict reconstruction efforts, the fragile political system and the precarious security environment, coverage and attention on the plight of women in the country has been insufficient in comparison amid the tumult and devastation over the past two decades. Gender inequalities in Iraq have been ongoing, and pre-dates the 2003 invasion. In the Kurdistan Region, the struggle underwent significant changes after the region achieved autonomy in 1991. Women's rights and broader gender equality issues were integrated into KRG policies and state-building efforts. The efforts to gain international legitimacy and the state building of the Kurds in the Kurdistan Region has meant that gender equality was promoted and this reflected in some of their laws[1], compared to the rest of Iraq.

In the rest of Iraq, although Iraqi women have been an integral part of women rights organisations, they have come under increased pressure after the dismantling and reconfiguration of governing and social structures in the country in the aftermath of a plethora of armed conflicts in recent years. While their rights are enshrined in the Constitution, these have come under pressure from the security environment and militant armed organisations. Scholars Nadje Sadig al-Ali and Nicola Pratt argue Iraqi women's lives and rights have been exploited since 2003 for competing political agendas that have put them on the centre stage, producing the regression of women's empowerment and keeping patriarchal structures alive.[2] Women were marginalised in political institutions due to sectarian and ethnic divisions between political parties and the deteriorating violent fragmentation of political authority.[3]

Since 2003, women have been mobilising to secure a better future. A lack of political will from the major political parties is evident in the number of women in leadership. Women are also under-resourced due to insufficient financial funds and have a lack of economic capacity to fund their political careers and electoral campaigns. Women experience notable differences, for example, 24 per cent of Iraqi women are illiterate compared to 11 per cent of men.[4]

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1 For example: Article 1, Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009 and Law No. 8 of 2011, Combating Domestic Violence in Kurdistan Region-Iraq.

2 al-Ali, Nadje and Pratt, Nicolla, "Between Nationalism and Women's Rights: The Kurdish Women's Movement in Iraq," Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication 4 (2011): 337–53.

3 Ibid.

4 Breaking Out of Fragility, A Country Economic Memorandum for Diversification and Growth in Iraq, World Bank Group, 2020, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34416/9781464816376.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

The 2019 protest movement amplified the urgency of addressing gender inequalities but it still remains the case that Iraqi legislation does not comply with international norms and laws. In addition to facing continued violence and abuse, women in Iraq also struggle to gain access to justice and accountability, which results from the persistence of patriarchal norms, flaws in the legal system and legislation and a weak judiciary. Due to the weak enforcement of existing laws, women are still subject to archaic customs such as al-nahwa practice (prevention to marry)[5] and the fasliya marriage (forced marriage), which are criminalised under Article 9 of the Personal Status Law No. 15 of 2008 and Articles 430 and 431 of the Penal Code.

Furthermore, as a result of weak and inadequate protection at the structural level, Iraqi women are vulnerable to gender biases that underscore much of the problems and gaps in existing legislation and decision-making processes.

Although Iraq's Constitution emphasises equality in Article 14 and contains other articles that lay the foundation for women's political participation, legislation fails to promote women's participation in politics and peacebuilding processes and does not fully address their involvement and protection against various forms of violence. Nevertheless, Law No. 9 of 2020 on the Election of the Council of Representatives and Law No. 12 of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and District Councils require at least 25% representation for women in the CoR and the Provincial and District Councils.

Despite being a signatory to the Convention on Eliminating Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)[6] and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security, Iraq has failed to frame their advocacy on women's rights and gender equality around these two main international instruments and include women in political and peacebuilding processes. Iraq has launched a number of national strategies and the National Action Plan (NAP) 2014 – 2018 for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.[7] The NAP was published in 2014 and set a strategy for four years. The first NAP consists of 6 pillars, namely participation, protection and prevention, promotion, social and economic empowerment, legislation

5 Al-Nahwa allows for a block of a women's marriage plans by a male family member; the fasliya marriage forces a woman or several women to marry a man or men from an enemy tribe in order to "reconcile" a harm convicted by the women's tribe; Haley Bobseine, Tribal Justice in a Fragile Iraq, p. 16, https://tcf.org/content/report/tribal-justice-fragile-iraq/?agreed=1

6 Iraq is signatory with reservations: "Approval of and accession to this Convention shall not mean that the Republic of Iraq is bound by the provisions of article 2, paragraphs (f) and (g), nor of article 16 of the Convention. The reservation to this last-mentioned article shall be without prejudice to the provisions of the Islamic Sharia according women rights equivalent to the rights of their spouses so as to ensure a just balance between them. Iraq also enters a reservation to article 29, paragraph 1, of this Convention with regard to the principle of international arbitration in connection with the interpretation or application of this Convention." Reservations and declarations made by the Republic of Iraq to CEDAW, https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&clang=_en#75.

7 National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/final_draft_Iraq-_nap_1325_eng.pdf.

and law enforcement as well as resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation and included a number of objectives, such as gender mainstreaming. However, there was a lack of implementation across Iraq, as reported by the Iraqi Women's Network.[8] The Second NAP for 2021-2024 officially entered into force on 14 April, 2021. The recent NAP focuses on increasing women's participation in the leadership and decision-making roles, humanitarian relief efforts and the post-war rebuilding processes at the local and national level. In addition, it addresses the protection of women and young girls from gender-based violence, and sets mechanisms that ensure perpetrators do not remain unpunished. The NAP 2021-2024 is structured around 3 pillars, namely participation, protection and prevention.[9]

Iraq also launched a National Plan to implement the Joint Communique on Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, that was signed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2016.[10] The KRG and federal government in Baghdad formed a working group to combat sexual violence as part of the Joint Communique. However, we have yet to see the results of this agreement due to a number of factors, including lack of funding and the volatile and polarised political environment.

This research adopted a mixed-method approach combining secondary data review with primary data collection. A comprehensive desk review of the laws, regulations and policies related to women, peace and security and women's political participation was carried out. Interviews were conducted with civil society actors, activists and academics and members of parliament to assess the political, economic and social environment in Iraq and how it impacts women's political inclusion and participation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted over the phone or online. A focus group discussion was attended by representatives from women's groups, the media, government, parliament and civil society organisations. The analysis of the legislative framework builds mainly on the desk review of the laws and legal literature and the political, economic and social factors are considered due to the extreme impact they have had on women's lives and their involvement in the political arena. Therefore, focus group discussions and interviews underpinned the legal analysis to further understand the gender inequalities in Iraq.

Each section of this paper starts with a legal analysis and is further complemented by the social and political factors that play a role in Iraq. An analysis of the Iraqi Constitution was carried out followed by an analysis of the legal framework for the political participation

8 Women, Peace and Security Recommendations for the UPR of Iraq, 2019, https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/iraq/session_34_-_november_2019/iraqi_women_network_submission.pdf.

9 Department of Women Empowerment Iraq, second National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, 2021

10 Joint Communique of the Republic of Iraq and the United Nations on the Prevention and Response to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/joint-communique/join-communique-of-the-republic-of-iraq-and-the-united-nations-on-prevention-and-response-to-crsv/Joint_Communique_of_the_Govt_of_Iraq_and_UN_9_2016_ENG.pdf.

of women in Iraq. The law regulating political parties and the political participation at the local, regional and federal level were also considered. It is not possible to assess the political participation of women in Iraq without considering the violence and threats women face. Therefore, this paper also focuses on the legal framework in place to protect women from violence, including domestic violence and trafficking.

2. Women's Participation in Political and Peacebuilding Processes

Women are able to participate in political processes as candidates, elected officials and voters in Iraq.[11] However, their participation has been detrimentally impacted by years of conflict and structural and cultural barriers. There is still a lack of women in leadership positions and their participation in politics has been limited. The political scene in Iraq is dominated by the major political parties, which are primarily formed and based on religious and tribal values. Women are faced with tremendous challenges when participating in politics and peacebuilding processes and it can be difficult to secure key decision-making positions.

Women candidates are frequently targeted, facing threats and online abuse.[12] The protests that emerged in late 2019, saw women protestors take to the streets demanding their rights and fundamental freedoms to be respected. However, there were a series of targeted killings of prominent women protestors, bloggers and activists.[13] Women are often deterred from participating in elections and political processes and the entrenched violence, patriarchal attitudes and cultural norms discriminate against women's involvement in politics and securing positions of leadership. There is no support for women to become political and peacebuilding leaders in Iraq. Elham Maki, a writer, researcher and women's rights activist, explains that "women's participation in peacebuilding is almost non-existent, and the Iraqi government's efforts are weak and the formal procedures are ineffective."[14]

This section analyses the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution and laws related to women's rights and women's representation in legislative and executive institutions at federal, regional, provincial and district levels.

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11 Chapter Two and Three, Law No. 9 of 2020, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives.

12 For example, Intidhar Ahmed Jassim withdrew from the 2018 elections after a fake video of her having sexual relations with a Saudi man was circulated. "Candidate Steps aside after Sex Tape Allegation in Iraq," Mohammed Tawfeeq and Joe Sterling, CNN, April 20, 2018, https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/20/middleeast/iraq-parliament-candidate-withdraws/index.html

13 Female Iraqi activist killed in Basra as gunmen target protestors, 20 August 2020, BBC News, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53847648.

14 Interview with Elham Maki, writer, researcher and women's rights activist (26 November, 2020).

2.1 Rights Guaranteed to Women by the Constitution of Iraq

Formed in 2005, Iraq's Constitution contains a number of articles that relate to women's rights and guarantee basic human rights to all Iraqis. Although there are articles in the Constitution that mention or give women certain rights, there are also articles that overlap and contradict this. The Preamble states:

"We the people of Iraq...are determined...to...pay attention to women and their rights."

It is important to firstly note that the preamble is not legally binding, however, it does play an important part in the interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution. The words used in the preamble of the Constitution does not guarantee women's rights and do not oblige the government to protect women's rights. The words "pay attention to" merely promises that women's rights will be considered rather than impose action points on the state. The reference here provides the government with a loophole that, rather than making changes for women and enhancing gender equality, it can simply "pay attention" to it.[15]

The stipulation that the state is compelled to simply "pay attention" to women and their rights creates a superficial safeguarding of women. These shortcomings and ambiguities are inherent in other provisions and laws that have been formulated and implemented since the Constitution was first enacted in 2005, which also reflects the composition of the constituency that devised the Constitution and the near-total absence of women in the process. "The principle of equality exists in the Constitution, but it has not been reflected in laws," says Elham Maki.[16] Article 16 of the Constitution of Iraq guarantees "equal opportunities" for all Iraqis, however, does not focus on the empowerment of women.

Article 14 of the Constitution stipulates, "Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination because of sex, ethnicity, nationality, origin, religion, sect, belief, opinion or social or economic status." According to this provision, all Iraqis are equal before the law regardless of their sex and the state is obliged to apply laws equally to all people. Women should, therefore, be treated equally. Iraqis must not discriminate on the basis of race, religion or gender. The principles of equality and non-discrimination are merged together in a catch-all pursuant to Article 14 of the Constitution. However, one can argue that the principle of equality does entail prohibition of discrimination. As Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees the equal treatment of all Iraqis before the law, the same article means that discrimination is prohibited.

Furthermore, the Constitution states in Article 2 that "Islam is the official religion of the state and is a basic source of legislation and no law can be passed that contradicts the undisputed rules of Islam." [17] In addition, and perhaps in contradiction, the Constitution

15 See Constitution of the Republic of Iraq, United States Institute of Peace (USIP), available at https://www.usip.org/ruleoflaw/projects/unami_iraq_constitution.pdf.

16 Interview with Elham Maki, writer, researcher and women's rights activist (26 November, 2020).

17 Article 2, Constitution of Iraq, 2005.

goes on to state that "Iraqis are free in their adherence to their personal status according to their own religion, sect, belief and choice, and that will be organised according to the law."[18] Certain interpretations of Islam as a source of legislation may have an impact on the provision and fulfilment of women's rights, as stated in the Constitution and according to Iraq's international legal obligations to promote and protect women's rights.

According to Article 20 of the Constitution, "Iraqi citizens, men and women, shall have the right to participate in public affairs and to enjoy political rights including the right to vote, elect, and run for office." Although this allows for women's political participation, a separate provision and a gender quota was needed to ensure the representation of women. Article 49 of the Constitution states that "[t]he elections law shall aim to achieve a percentage of representation of not less than one-quarter of the members of the Council of Representatives."[19]

The quota mentioned in the Constitution only applies to the representation of women in Iraq's parliament and not in government or across other offices. In government, leadership posts are based on alliances between the political parties and power-sharing. Women have faced many obstacles due to this specific system, as Dr. Safia Al-Suhail explains, "The most important challenge I had to face was the quota system that the Iraqi political factions adopted to determine who could assume responsibility in various ministerial and political post. When a government is formed according to political compromise, its composition depends on the choices made by the different political parties and priority is given to men."[20] Some argue that although women may have a presence, they can still fail to protect the interests of women. Female members of parliament attempted to adopt strict Sharia Law and demolish the Iraqi Family Law.

One female Iraqi member of parliament proposed a law that encourages men to marry multiple women.[21] Dr. Bushra explains, "Empowerment cannot take place without political parties, which is the political base for women to start...the women they choose are weak...this weakened the political participation of women and the poor political performance of women left a bad imprint that women are not qualified for political and governing work."[22]

According to Article 29(First)(b), the Constitution protects motherhood and mentions women specifically as mothers, "The State shall guarantee the protection of motherhood, childhood and old age, shall care for children and youth, and shall provide them with

18 Article 41, Constitution of Iraq, 2005.

19 Article 49 (Fourth), Iraq Constitution, 2005.

20 Interview with Safia Al-Suhail, 26 May, 2014, https://www.ipu.org/news/2014-05/safia-al-suhail-iraq.

21 Female Iraqi MP proposes law that encourages men to marry multiple women for financial benefits, The Independent, 13 March 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-marriage-women-ploygamy-mp-legislation-jamila-al-ebeidi-a7627071.html.

22 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

the appropriate conditions to develop their talents and abilities." This provision fails to outline what exact protection will be afforded to women, for example, whether it should be legislative or social, highlighting the vagueness of the Constitution to have any real and meaningful influence on the everyday lives of women and women's rights. This exposes the provisions of the Constitution in their entirety to conservative and politicised interpretations that have a high probability of reflecting the preferences of conservative members of the ruling class who drafted the terms of the Constitution. However, one could also argue that a Constitution lays down the general principles based on which laws shall be enacted. Hence, as Article 29(First)(b) guarantees the rights of motherhood and childhood, the CoR is required to enact a law to fully achieve such a protection. This is particularly needed if one also considers Article 30 of the Constitution of Iraq, which states that "The State shall guarantee to the individual and the family - especially children and women – social and health security, the basic requirements for living a free and decent life, and shall secure for them suitable income and appropriate housing."

When it comes to nationality and citizenship, the Constitution guarantees Iraqi mothers to pass on their Iraqi nationality to children.[23] However, nationality and citizenship are governed by the Iraqi Nationality Law 2006[24] and women are faced with restrictions. Article 3 of the Iraqi Nationality Law, sets out that a person is considered Iraqi if he/she is born to an Iraqi father or an Iraqi mother or if he/she is born in Iraq to unknown parents.[25] The nationality law limits the ability of a woman to confer nationality to their children born outside of Iraq from an unknown father or a father that does not have a nationality,[26] violating the Constitution and can be challenged before the Federal Supreme Court (i.e. the Constitutional Court). The child can only apply for Iraqi nationality within one year of reaching majority, provided that the child is residing in Iraq at the time of the application for Iraqi nationality.[27] Hence, while the Constitution stipulates that nationality is acquired from the mother or father, Iraq's nationality law restricts this right for children born outside Iraq from an Iraqi woman and an unknown father or a father that does not have a nationality. In contrast, men do not have any restrictions imposed on them to pass on nationality to their children. For example, children born out of sexual violence or forced marriages in Iraq during the ISIS conflict exposed the complexities of Iraq's nationality laws and the restrictions which prevent women from passing on nationality to their children risking their welfare, security and education.[28] There are also complexities for Yazidi women who bore children by rape from ISIS members. The women are unable to register their children due to the restrictions of the nationality law and, furthermore, the Yazidi community will not recognise the children born from rape and who are also registered as Muslims.

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23 Article 18(Second), Iraq Constitution, 2005.

24 Law No. 26 of 2006, Iraq Nationality Law.

25 Article 3, Nationality Law No. 26 of 2006.

26 Article 4, Nationality Law No. 26 of 2006.

27 Article 4, Nationality Law No. 26 of 2006.

28 Children of the Caliphate, what to do about kids born under ISIS, Nadim Houry, 22 November, 2016.

It can be stated that the Constitution of Iraq does provide certain principles that can be considered a basis for the adoption of further measures guaranteeing women's rights. It guarantees equality and equal opportunities between all Iraqis irrespective of their sex. However, the lack of legislation implementing the provisions guaranteeing women's rights in the Constitution can lead to discrimination against women and a lack of representation for women. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt legislation and amend existing ones to outline more detailed provisions that apply the Constitution, such as Article 29(First) (b) on the protection of the rights of motherhood and childhood and Article 30 on the provision of social and health security. The adoption of new laws and regulations will be an important step to progressing and increasing women in political and peacebuilding processes, and will in turn impact laws relating to nationality, personal status and family.

Much more emphasis should be placed on the Constitution's articles that guarantee women's protection and involvement in politics and they can act as a trigger to enhance gender equality across government agencies. The quota guaranteeing 25 per cent female representation in the CoR should be increased to at least 40 per cent and be applicable to all levels of government. This is not a short-term recommendation and will be a long-term objective. In the short term, the 25 per cent quota should be applied to all government departments. This will increase the number of women in leadership and in politics.

Additionally, Iraq is a party to CEDAW, however, with reservations. To enhance the status of women, international treaties on the protection of women should be adhered to entirely without any reservations. According to Article 61 and 73 of the Constitution international treaties are binding as they have to be approved by the CoR with a two-thirds majority and enacted by the President.

2.2 Representation of Women in the Independent High Electoral Commission

Every Iraqi citizen, who has reached eighteen years of age, has registered as a voter in accordance with the law and holds an electronic voter card, is entitled to vote regardless of sex, race, colour, sect, belief, opinion and economic or social circumstances and who is an Iraqi citizen.[29] There are no legal restrictions that prevent women from voting and women can also be nominated to become elected officials. The requirements to become an elected official are to be at least twenty-eight years of age, not be convicted of any felonies or misdemeanours, hold a middle school certificate, be from the governorate or be a resident of the elected district position, be supported by at least five-hundred voters from the electoral district that they are running for and not be a member of the armed forces or a member of the IHEC.[30]

29 Article 4, Chapter Two: Voting Rights, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives.

30 Chapter Three: The Right to be Nominated, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives.

The IHEC is the electoral authority responsible for conducting all referendums and elections in Iraq.[31] It is subject to the supervision of the CoR and has a management board with nine board commissioners. There is no gender quota for commissioners and the only reference made in legislation to ensure women are represented is in the Law of the Independent High Electoral Commission is that "[t]he representation of women shall be taken into consideration in choosing the Board of Commissioners for the nine members."[32] There is currently only one woman on the IHEC board[33] and without an obligatory number of women as commissioners, there is no guarantee women will be represented on the board in the future. The lack of female representation and a gender quota would mean it would also be difficult to push forward gender equality agendas.

Women's political participation is seriously low, with a notable absence of women in decision-making structures within key government institutions and within the most powerful political factions. The IHEC could play a fundamental role in changing this and ensuring that more women are included in the elections. Furthermore, the IHEC does not allocate a serious budget for gender equality programmes, mainstreaming and gender working groups, which can have a serious positive impact for the future of women's political participation and gender equality in Iraq. Other amendments could also include additional broadcasting times and coverage for women candidates.

2.3 Women in Political Parties

Although women have the right to participate in political life in Iraq, their access and rights are restricted. The Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015 guarantees Iraqis the right to participate in founding a political party, to affiliate with one, or to withdraw from it.[34] It is the primary legislation regulating political party formation and membership. When a political party is formed, there must be seven founding members and at least two thousand members from different governorates. Women's representation should be taken into account when forming a political party.[35] However, the law does not make any references to how many women should be founders or how many female members must represent the political party. In other words, there is no obligation for a political party's founding members to be women. Therefore a provision in the law to ensure women's representation, especially as part of the founding members, could positively contribute to their participation and that their rights will be guaranteed.

The law goes on to state that political parties and their members should be committed to achieving equality and equal opportunities for citizens when they assume responsibility or participate in it. However, without a gender quota for their own political party, there is

31 Law of the Independent High Electoral Commission No. 31 of 2019.

32 Article 3(5) Law of the Independent High Electoral Commission No. 31 of 2019.

33 Dr. Ahlam Adnan Al-Jaberie is the only female and is the Head of Electoral Administration, https://ihec.iq/.

34 Article 4, Chapter 2 (Basic Principles), Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015.

35 Article 11(1)(A), Chapter 4 (Registration Process), Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015.

no guarantee that political parties will be committed to achieving gender equality or will have a gender equality agenda. There are no other references made to women's political participation in the Political Parties Law meaning the provisions within the law do not oblige political parties to include a certain percentage of women.

Women who participated in this research stated that there are obstacles to reaching leadership positions within political parties.[36] Tribal factors and cultural norms restrict women and play a great role when deciding leadership roles, which are usually given to men. Without any connections and personal links, it is difficult for women to be promoted to a leadership level within political parties.[37] The traditional gender roles in Iraq stand in the way of women entering politics and reaching leadership level and decision-making roles.[38]

Research conducted at the beginning of 2020 showed the figures of the number of women members and women in leadership in political parties.[39] Only one out of 11 political parties had 50 per cent women members and 46 per cent women in leadership positions. Two political parties had no women in leadership. The average for women members was 27.7 per cent and 18.3 per cent for women in leadership.[40]

The constitutional requirement that women must represent no less than one-quarter of the CoR, means that political parties in Iraq are required to place a woman in every third position on its lists of candidates. This proportional representation system meets the constitutional guarantee. Although political parties are subject to this quota for women, the number of women at the leadership level is poor. There is no political party in Iraq that has gender equality as an objective or a gender equality agenda.[41] Elham Maki explains that "the status of women changed superficially. Women within political parties have instead been used to obtain an extra seat by the quota."[42] The Political Parties Law should therefore be amended to provide for a quota for women of at least 40 per cent in the leadership bodies of political parties.

2.4 Representation of Women in the Council of Representatives

The CoR in Baghdad consists of 329 seats and members are elected for a period of four years.[43] The Constitution of Iraq guarantees the right to elect to every Iraqi citizen.[44]

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36 Focus Group Meeting with stakeholders in Iraq, 27 September, 2020.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Political Exclusion in Iraqi Political Parties, How Women, Youth and Components Strive to Change Politics, National Democratic Institute, May, 2020, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Political%20Exclusion%20in%20Iraqi%20Political%20Parties_EN.pdf.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Interview with Elham Maki, writer, researcher and women's rights activist (26 November, 2020).

43 Article 13, First, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives. You can cite the articles in the footnote

44 Article 4(1) Law on Election of the Council of Representatives.

Eligibility criteria to elect and be elected do not discriminate against women nor negatively impact women's political participation. Nevertheless, women voters are at a disadvantage because voters must go to registration centres twice to obtain biometric voter cards, a process that is sometimes difficult for most women to undertake because of childcare responsibilities.

The law requires a minimum of 25 per cent of the seats in the CoR to be held by women, this translates into a minimum of 83 seats.[45] Therefore, political parties must submit candidate lists that include 25 per cent women candidates. When this list is submitted to the IHEC for candidate approval, there must be at least one female candidate listed after each three male candidates.[46] The IHEC will reject candidate lists that do not meet this requirement and should the number of women fall below 25 per cent of the seats in the CoR, a special mechanism is applied to re-rank candidates in governorates with the lowest share of elected women.[47]

Iraq uses a proportional representation system, whereby a voter can select both a political entity and a specific candidate or a political party only. Under the old election law, the electoral system uses the governorates as constituencies. Each governorate is one electoral constituency and assigned a number of seats proportional to its estimated population. Seats are then awarded based on each list's share of the valid votes in a constituency. This was done through calculations set out in the IHEC's seat allocation regulations, utilising the modified Sainte-Laguë method.[48]

In October 2020, the CoR approved a new elections law to replace the old elections law[49] and was officially signed by the President in November 2020.[50] The main amendment of this new law is the change in the use of proportional representation and establishes each district as a small constituency. The new law moves away from the use of the Sainte-Laguë method. The distribution of electoral constituencies for eighteen of Iraq's governorates was approved and changed Iraq's eighteen governorates into several electoral districts.

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45 Constitution of Iraq, Article 49, Fourth: "The election law shall aim to achieve a percentage of representation for women of not less than one-quarter of the members of the Council of Representatives."

46 IHEC Decision, 2018, https://ihec.iq/ihecftp/2018/en/sys12en.pdf.

47 IHEC Decision, 2018, https://ihec.iq/ihecftp/2018/en/sys12en.pdf.

48 The use of the Sainte-Laguë method means that seats will be distributed among the candidates on the open list. The seats are first allocated to participating political entities based on the number of votes they have received. The candidates within each open list will then be re-ranked based on the number of votes obtained. The candidate who secures the highest number of votes shall be deemed the winner and so on for the rest of the candidates. The counting system has been changed slightly from the previously used largest remainder method due to a ruling by the Supreme Court that stated the previous method discriminated against smaller parties. See: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/2018_ifes_iraq_council_of_representatives_elections_faqs_final.pdf

49 Iraqi parliament votes on final version of electoral law, Omar Sattar, 2 November, 2020, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/11/iraq-elections-law-parliament.html

50 "President Salih signs Iraq election reforms into law," Dilan S. Hussein, 5 November, 2020, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/051120201

The governorates are divided into several constituencies, the number for each governorate corresponding to its number of seats reserved for female parliamentarians, a total of 83 constituencies. There will be three to five parliamentary seats for each constituency, and one will be reserved for a female MP, according to population density. Seats are allocated to candidates who receive the highest number of votes. Despite the change in the electoral system, there are no major differences in the allocation of seats to women. The new law prevents parties from running on unified lists and the seats will go to the candidates who get the most votes in the electoral districts. However, women have voiced concern for the new Elections Law as Suhad Al-Khateeb states, "the new law will be an obstacle to the rise of women, because it relies on dividing the governorates into a number of districts. This encourages tribalism and religion to interfere and it will not be in the interests of women. It is better for the governorate to be a single electoral district."[51]

In the opinion of Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, "changes in the new law somewhat opened a door for increasing women's political participation through the electoral district distribution... the gain in this law is that there is a table showing the seats with two columns separating the highest votes from the female quota. The IHEC, however, must clarify this point to encourage women who have gained a higher number of votes to hold seats outside of quota to prevent manipulation and misinterpretation of the law."[52]

The women's minimum quota is determined for each governorate as follows:[53]

- Baghdad: 17 out of 69 seats
- Basra: 6 out of 25 seats
- Dhi-Qar: 5 out of 19 seats
- Maysan: 3 out of 10 seats
- Babylon: 4 out of 17 seats
- Al-Muthanna: 2 out of 7 seats
- Wasit: 3 out of 11 seats
- Diwaniyah: 3 out of 11 seats
- Karbala: 3 out of 11 seats
- Najaf: 3 out of 12 seats

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51 Interview with Suhad Al-Khateeb, President of the Iraqi Women's Association in Najaf, Member of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party and former Iraqi politician (29 November, 2020).

52 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

53 Article 16, Third, Chapter Five: The Electoral System, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives; https://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=14768:elections-for-iraq-s-council-of-representatives-fact-sheet-1&Itemid=740&lang=en

- Diyala: 4 out of 14 seats
- Saladin: 3 out of 12 seats
- Duhok: 3 out of 11 seats
- Erbil: 4 out of 15 seats
- Slemani: 5 out of 18 seats
- Anbar: 4 out of 15 seats
- Nineveh: 8 out of 31 seats
- Kirkuk: 3 out of 12 seats

Article 16 of the new law does not change the quota percentage for women and sets out that the percentage of women's representation in the CoR shall be no less than 25 per cent[54] and representation of women shall also be no less than 25 per cent in each province.[55] This will depend on the density of the population and how many seats are allocated to each constituency. Should the quota for women not be achieved, one (hypothetical) seat is added to the number of women who win in each electoral district[56] and this number is divided by the total number of seats allocated to the electoral district to determine the percentage of female winners.[57] One seat is added to the number of female seats for the electoral district that obtained the lowest percentage.[58] If this again does not fulfil the quota criteria for the number of females in the CoR, a new process is started with the calculation of the increase[59] and this is repeated until the total number of women reaches 25 per cent representation.[60]

Furthermore, should a seat belonging to a female member become vacant, it does not necessarily mean that this seat will be replaced by another woman. The seat will only be replaced by a woman should the 25 per cent of women representation in the CoR be affected.[61] This has become a loophole for political parties who fulfil the 25 per cent criteria in their candidates list and then later decide to replace seats filled by women with men, should it not impact female representation.[62] It is recommended to amend the Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives to require the replacement of a vacant seat that was assumed by a woman with another woman candidate.

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54 Article 16, First, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

55 Article 16, Second, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

56 Chapter Five: The Electoral System, Article 16, Fifth, (A), Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

57 Article 16, Fifth, (B), Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

58 Article 16, Fifth, (C), Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

59 Article 16, Fifth, (D), Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

60 Article 16, Sixth, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

61 Article 16, Ninth, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives

62 Interview with Elham Maki, writer, researcher and women's rights activist (26 November, 2020).

There have been four parliamentary terms since a gender quota was adopted for the CoR in 2005. The change in the number of women has increased, however, not a significant one. The first session saw 78 women out of 275 seats participate as parliamentarians, the second session had 81 women out of 325 seats, the third session with 83 women out of 329 seats and the current session has 84 women out of 329 members of parliament. The number of women elected without a quota was low. The elections in 2018 saw 22 seats given to women without a quota. Women can stand as independent candidates in the elections. However, their chances of being elected are slim compared to the well-organised parties, they could easily be outrun by them, especially the larger electoral lists.

The low participation of women at the executive (one female minister out of 22 ministers) and legislative levels is very weak. Given that women make up half the population, these numbers lack the necessary representation of women. Initially, women's organisations had requested 40 per cent representation in the CoR back in 2010.[63]

Minority groups are also underrepresented. Nine seats are reserved for minority groups[64]. Five seats are allocated to Christians in Baghdad, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Dohuk, Erbil; one seat to Yazidis in Ninewa; one seat to Sabean-Mandeans in Baghdad; one seat for Shabaks in Ninewa; and one seat for Fayli Kurds in Wassit. However, it is unclear whether a percentage of the nine seats should be given to women, meaning that women belonging to minority groups may not be represented at the national level if all nine seats are given to men. Furthermore, there has also never been an Afro-Iraqi woman[65] in a high-level political position. It is clear that there is an urgent need for anti-discrimination laws and enhancement of women from minority groups. As things stand, there is no guarantee of minimum representation for them.

2.5 Representation of Women at Provincial Level

At the provincial level, there are still a series of shortcomings within existing legislation that has impeded female political participation. The electoral law for the 2009 provincial elections, for example, failed to commit to a 25 per cent gender quota,[66] the result of an ambiguity within the following provision in Law No. 12 of 2018 on Governorates, Districts and Sub-District Council Elections, Article 12 (while the Constitution contains a quota for the Parliament, no such provision exists in relation to provincial council elections), "The seats shall be distributed to the candidates of the open list and the candidates shall be re-ranked according to the number of the votes obtained by a candidate." The candidate who secures the highest number of votes within the open list shall be deemed the winner

63 Zainab Salbi, "Foreign Policy: Iraq's Forgotten Women," NPR, March 15, 2010, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124687123.

64 Article 13, Second, Law No. 9 of 2020, Election of the Council of Representatives.

65 Afro-Iraqis are the descendants of sailors, traders and mostly slaves that were brought to Iraq from the region of Sansibar.

66 Alissa J. Rubin and Sam Dagher, "Changes in Iraq Election Law Weaken Quota for Women," New York Times, January 13, 2009, https://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/14/world/middleeast/14iraq.html.

and so on for the rest of candidates. A woman candidate shall have a seat following each of the three winners regardless of the number of male winners."[67]

It was consequently left to IHEC to interpret the above provision and IHEC passed a decree for the 2013 provincial elections to ensure 25 per cent of the representatives on each provincial council would be women.[68] The CoR approved amendments to the existing provincial council elections on 29 July, 2019, however, did not include any amendments regarding the implementation of a gender quota. Furthermore, provincial councils were abolished towards the end of 2019,[69] except for those in the Kurdistan Region. This means that women do not have the guarantee that they will be represented at local levels. Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi states that the "parliament elections laws and the provincial council elections law encourage political participation of women, while the political parties do not. It only has one provision referring to women's representation in political parties without further explanation." Unfortunately, the rights of women seen in articles 14, 16[70] and 20 in Iraq's Constitution has not translated into laws and provisions, despite women's rights activists and organisations repeated requests.[71]

Governorates are made up of a number of districts, sub-districts and villages.[72] Governorates that are not incorporated in a region have broad administrative and financial authorities.[73] There is no gender quota or constitutional guarantee for female representation at these levels. No minimum threshold is set for women to be represented at the provincial level, including district, and sub-district level. The law on provinces that have not joined a region sets out that a Governor shall have five Deputies, however, there is no gender quota set for this and does not set out that women should be included.[74]

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67 Article 12(2), Election of the Provincial and Districts Council Law No. 12 of 2018, amended by Law No. 27 of 2019.

68 With Some Electoral Gains in Iraq, Women Candidates Work towards Change," United Nations Women, May 16, 2013.

69 Iraq parliament votes to dissolve provincial councils, look at amending constitution, Karwan Faidhi Dri, 28 October 2019, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/281020192.

70 "Equal opportunities shall be guaranteed to all Iraqis, and the state shall ensure that the necessary measures to achieve this are taken." Article 16, Iraq Constitution, 2005.

71 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

72 Article 122, First, Chapter Two, Governorates not incorporated in a region, Constitution of Iraq.

73 Article 122, Second, Chapter Two, Governorates not incorporated in a region, Constitution of Iraq.

74 Article 33(1), Law No. 21 of 2008, Provinces that have not joined a Region.

2.6 Political Participation of Women in the Kurdistan Region

It is the case that Iraq's territorial and power-sharing configurations mean that there are some parts of the country where more progressive laws are implemented and enforced, and others where there has been a severe regression in the protection of women and their rights. As noted above, this is exemplified by the differences between how Baghdad and the KRG have engaged the issue, and the overall different cultures and norms that separate.

However, it is implausible to argue that any one single region or province is free from major shortcomings. The Kurdistan Region has made more positive progress in combating gender inequalities. It is a comparatively more secular culture and relative stability has opened up the space for public debates and policy-making.

The Kurdistan Region established its legislative branch, Kurdistan Parliament in 1992. The Kurdistan National Assembly Elections Law was adopted in 1992[75] and was later amended by Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009. There are 111 seats in Kurdistan Parliament[76], ten are reserved for minorities and 30 per cent of the seats are allocated to women.[77] Candidate names are arranged in a way that guarantees the representation of the required percentage of women in Kurdistan Parliament and each list must have three candidates as a minimum.[78] There are currently thirty-four female parliamentarians in the Kurdistan Parliament.[79] The current Speaker of Kurdistan Parliament is a woman and the Committee on Protection of Women's Rights consists of 7 females and 1 male.

Women's political participation in the Kurdistan Region remains limited. Female politicians rely on male leaders of their political party for nomination. Again, views and attitudes on women's rights also depend on the party's agenda. In a panel event and report, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Kwestan Mohammed stated that the KRG's efforts are slow and symbolic and political blocs do not trust women to lead them.[80] A review of the structural barriers is required at local, regional and national levels in order for women to gain more senior positions.

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75 Kurdistan National Assembly Elections Law – Iraq (KNA) No. 1 of 1992, amended by Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009.

76 Article 1, Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009.

77 Article 22(1), Section Six: Nomination, Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009.

78 Article 22(2), Section Six: Nomination, Kurdistan Parliament – Iraq (KIP) Law No. 2 of 2009.

79 Kurdistan Parliament official website, https://www.parliament.krd/english/members-and-parties/

80 Panel Five: Women in Positions of Leadership: Opportunities for Empowerment, Ending Wars – Winning Peace in the Middle East, Middle East Research Institute, MERI Forum, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, 4 - 2019.

2.7 Challenges to Women's Political Participation

Women face a number of challenges and obstacles when participating in political and peacebuilding processes in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region. The Iraqi Women's Network found that in 2017 only 3.9 per cent of judges and 18 per cent of public prosecutors were women.[81] Female members of parliament are often excluded entirely from committees. Suhad Al-Khateeb points out that "there is marginalisation of the role of women and deliberate failure to include them in reconciliation committees and peacebuilding committees, at all levels."[82] For example, the Committee on Security and Defence in Iraq's parliament has 21 members with no female members.[83]

The political sphere in Iraq is dominated by the major political parties, which are largely conservative and based on their religious backgrounds. Therefore, female participation and positions may be difficult to secure. During campaigns and elections, posters of women candidates are often taken down or defaced.[84] Dr Bushra states, "The biggest challenge is political and moral defaming that aims to force women to withdraw from running in elections."[85]

In 2018, many women were faced with abuse and threats. A female candidate for the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Dr. Heshu Rebwar Ali, had her mobile phone stolen, and a video was then circulated of her wearing a short dress at a private party. However, she remained in the race.[86] Although the law does not prevent female political participation, women are faced with abuse and challenges. The UN condemned the defamation and violence against women candidates after one candidate resigned over a fake sex tape. Dr. Intidhar Ahmed Jassim, a university professor, was running in the electoral race when a fabricated short video clip went viral on social media.[87] She was moved by her own party leadership. Defamation and threats are criminalised by the Iraqi Penal Code, specifically by Articles 433, 438 and 430. However, perpetrators who have used social media to defame or threaten female candidates have not been convicted. This has had negative implications for women's participation in politics and trust in the electoral process and in political parties to ensure the protection of women.

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81 Women, Peace and Security Recommendations for the UPR of Iraq, 2019, https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/iraq/session_34_-_november_2019/iraqi_women_network_submission.pdf.

82 Interview with Suhad Al-Khateeb, President of the Iraqi Women's Association in Najaf, Member of the Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party and former Iraqi politician (29 November, 2020).

83 Women MPs in the Iraqi Parliament, 18 March 2019, Rend Al-Rahim, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/women-mps-the-iraqi-parliament

84 "Tough road for Iraq's female candidates in May 12 elections." Ali Abdul-Hassan and Sinan Salaheddin, 3 May 2018, AP NEWS, https://apnews.com/article/a5a8de8d7a9e4c4ea2ff5062b61d38f8

85 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

86 Iraqi women election candidates targeted for abuse gain UN support, BBC News, 25 April 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43894391.

87 "Iraqi women election candidates targeted for abuse gain UN support," BBC News, 25 April 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43894391.

The challenges do not stop there. Financial challenges also exist for women. They are disadvantaged when it comes to accessing finance for campaigns. The majority of funding from political parties goes towards their male candidates and access to employment impacts their job opportunities.[88] Dr. Bushra states, the "financial challenge, which forces women to fall under the mantle of parties...they [the political parties] neglect them when campaigning and focus only on male candidates."[89]

When it comes to voting, men also control who the family votes for during elections, "unfortunately, men accompany women to the election centres, especially in tribal areas, and the commission does not intervene because of fear of tribal retaliation."[90]

The ISIS conflict exacerbated the situation and obstacles for women. They were left without identity cards because male members of their family were brutally murdered. Abducted by ISIS fighters and married by force, they and their children were left without documents. Women are, therefore, unable to vote if they do not hold valid paperwork and ID cards.

Single women and widows now have many problems registering their children's birth and obtaining identification documents. This causes difficulties in accessing public services like food distribution, employment, healthcare and education.[91] This discriminatory practice restricts women and gives them no choice but to require the need or the support of a male family member in order to access different services and to exercise certain rights.

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88 Women Running for Elected Office in Iraq: Needs and Challenges, 2020, United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00382_women-political-participation-iraq-executive-summary-en-web-full.pdf.

89 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

90 Interview with Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi, member of the Baghdad Women's Association, former member of the High Commission for Human Rights, former director of the independent Electoral Commission and human rights activist (23 November, 2020).

91 Women, Peace and Security Recommendations for the UPR of Iraq, 2019, https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/document/iraq/session_34_-_november_2019/iraqi_women_network_submission.pdf.

3. Violence Against Women

This section analyses the provisions of the Iraqi Penal Code relevant to violence against women and discusses the need for the CoR to adopt the Family Violence Protection Bill[92]. It highlights the issues of human trafficking and sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace. Certain provisions of the federal Personal Status Law are analysed and measures taken by the Kurdistan Region to protect women are discussed. Finally, it examines the recently adopted Law on Yazidi Female Survivors by the CoR, and its success and shortcomings.

3.1 Iraqi Penal Code

Violence against women is a prevalent issue in Iraq. Conflicts, discrimination, tribal customs, culture and gender inequality have all created an environment that enables violence and have prevented women from participating in politics and peacebuilding processes. Women are often victims of abuse, threats, and killings. The atrocities committed against women by ISIS elevated the issues of sexual violence in the country. Iraq has made slow progress addressing violence against women and addressing shortcomings in existing laws that make women vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. Tackling violence against women must be made a priority by Iraq as "there is a direct link between the weak political participation of women and the existing violence against women at all levels, whether in the family, the street or at work."[93] Women may feel intimated and threatened when considering a political career in Iraq and the vast number of violence against women is a great deterrent for them to pursue a political path and to actively engage in politics.

The Iraqi Penal Code was adopted in 1969[94]. It is an archaic law that fails to adequately account for crimes committed against women and girls today. There have been no real and effective changes to this law in Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Region. The Penal Code does criminalise certain types of violence, such as rape, murder, abduction and other forms of violence, however, it still includes discriminatory articles that allow for loopholes and immunity for perpetrators.

Rape is criminalised in Article 393 of the Penal Code and defines rape as follows, "sexual intercourse with a female without her consent or commits buggery with any person without their consent." This definition is flawed, excluding other forms of sexual violence such as martial rape and does not provide the definition of consent. Nevertheless, marital rape seems to be implicitly criminalised by Article 3(A)(3) of the Iraqi Criminal Procedure Code No. 23 of 1971, which provides that "[a] criminal case may not be initiated without the submission of a complaint by the victim or the one who can legally act on behalf of the victim in the following crimes: [...] rape ... if the offender was the spouse of the victim. [...]."

92 Also known as Domestic Violence Bill.

93 Interview with Elham Maki, writer, researcher and women's rights activist (26 November, 2020).

94 Iraq Penal Code No. 111 of 1969.

Based on Article 393 of the Penal Code, the penalty of a perpetrator of rape ranges between 6 and 20 years of imprisonment.[95] However, pursuant to Article 398 of the Penal Code, if a correct marriage occurs between the perpetrator and the victim of rape, such a marriage shall be considered to be a mitigating legal excuse to reduce the penalty imposed on the perpetrators of rape crimes. The perpetrator of rape would still be prosecuted for the crime committed whether that perpetrator marries the victim or not. In addition, the victim would need to consent to such marriage in order to consider it to be a mitigating legal excuse. Theoretically, therefore, the rapist would be prosecuted for the offence committed even if he marries the victim or not. In reality, this is often not the case. In addition, the victim would have to agree to such a marriage in order for it to be considered a mitigating reason, for example, for a complete waiver of punishment. This consent is often required of the victim by the family. However, it can be argued that the definition of the crime of rape needs to be widened to include other forms of sexual violence. Furthermore, should a woman become pregnant, it would be illegal for her to undergo an abortion and if she does, it will be considered a crime punishable by up to a year detainment.[96] A much more comprehensive definition of rape is required should Iraq want to safeguard women.

A model for changes could be the Istanbul Convention. It defines rape as follows: Article 36 – Sexual Violence, including rape:

1. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the following intentional conducts are criminalised:

- engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object;
- engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person;
- causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person.

2. Consent must be given voluntarily as the result of the person's free will assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances.

3. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the provisions of paragraph 1 also apply to acts committed against former or current spouses or partners as recognised by internal law.[97]

One must also clarify that the Iraqi Penal Code stipulates a more severe penalty against perpetrators of rape if such a crime is committed in conjunction with a kidnapping crime.

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95 Read Article 393 of the Penal Code in conjunction with Article 87 of the same code.

96 Article 417(1), Penal Code, Law No. 111 of 1969.

97 The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe was negotiated by its 47 member states and adopted on 7 April 2011 by its Committee of Ministers. It is known as the Istanbul Convention after the city in which it opened for signature on 11 May 2011. Three years later, on 1 August 2014, it entered into force.

Article 423 of the Penal Code penalises with capital punishment, rape committed under those circumstances or the plan to rape a kidnaped women. However, Article 427 allows for suspension of the case of rape committed if the offender marries the victim, stating that,

"If a valid marriage is concluded between the perpetrator of one of the crimes mentioned in this chapter [i.e. kidnapping crimes among others] and the victim, the case shall be suspended, the investigation and other procedures, and if a judgment has been issued in the case, the execution of the judgment shall be suspended.

The lawsuit or execution procedures shall be resumed - as the case may be, if the marriage ends with a divorce issued by the husband without a legitimate reason or a divorce occurred based on a ruling of the court due to the husband's mistake or misbehaviour, before the lapse of three years from the suspension of procedures."

However, to allow for the suspension of a rape case or the execution of a judgment issued in this regard, the consent of the victim is required.

So-called "honour" killings still occur in Iraq, which are practices stemming from culture and tribal customs. The motives of "honour" remain a legal loophole for perpetrators of "honour killings". Article 128[98] lists a number of defences that either result in the reduction or discharge of a penalty, among them offences committed with "honourable motives."[99] The limited accountability measures mean that victims are not protected and violence against women is not prevented. There have been no amendments made or provisions abolished in the Penal Code by the federal government. The KRG amended certain provisions that were discriminatory and harmful towards women and girls and "honour" was removed in 2004 as a defence. This needs to be reflected in the rest of Iraq to protect women across the country.

Article 409 provides that a person who catches his wife in the act of adultery can assault or kill her, "[a] penalty of no more than three years detention shall be imposed on any person who catches his wife or any of his maharams [i.e. close relatives] in the act of adultery or in the act of being in the same bed with her partner and kills both or one of them immediately or assaults both or one of them to the extent that the latter dies or is left permanently disabled. It is not permissible to exercise the right of legal defence against any person who uses this excuse nor do the rules of aggravating circumstance apply against him." According to this article in the Penal Code, any man who finds his wife in an act of adultery and kills her will only face imprisonment of up to three years. The

98 Art. 128: (1) Legal excuse either discharges a person from a penalty or reduces that penalty. Excuse only exists under conditions that are specified by law. Notwithstanding these conditions, the commission of an offence with honourable motives or in response to the unjustified and serious provocation of a victim of an offence is considered a mitigating excuse. (2) The court must identify in its decision the excuse that discharges a person from a penalty.

99 Article 128(A), Iraq Penal Code, Law No. 111 of 1969.

article does not mention or cover when a woman finds her husband committing adultery. Therefore, no punishment exists for men committing the same act.

Although the Constitution "prohibits all forms of violence and abuse within the family,"[100] the Penal Code provides that "[t]here is no crime committed while exercising a legal right," including the "punishment of a wife by her husband, the disciplining by parents and teachers of children under their authority, within the limits prescribed by or custom."[101] This provision legalises the use of violence by husbands and permits them to beat their wives and discipline their children. There is a clear contradiction between the Constitution and the Penal Code. Unlike legislation in the Kurdistan Region,[102] the CoR has yet to adopt a national domestic violence law to protect women and children.

3.2 Domestic Violence and the Family Violence Protection Bill

As discussed, Iraq has a number of laws and provisions that reinforce and crystallise a status quo that becomes resistant to much-needed reforms needed to protect women. According to interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch, victims of domestic violence in Iraq rarely make criminal complaints to the police, who play a mediatory rather than a law enforcement role, which inevitably favours the perpetrator and allows them to escape culpability.[103] The Family Violence Protection Bill, also known as the Domestic Violence Law, has the potential to address serious shortcomings in existing laws and enforcement mechanisms. The urgency for this law to be adopted was intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdowns. Iraq's community police reported that their domestic violence cases log saw an increase of an average of 30 per cent since the lockdown, and with some areas as high as 50 per cent increase of cases. Confinement has heightened the risk of women being abused, beaten and killed.[104]

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100 Article 29(Fourth), Constitution of Iraq, 2005.

101 Article 41(1), Iraq Penal Code, Law No. 111 of 1969.

102 Law No. 8 of 2011, Combating Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq, http://www.ekrg.org/files/pdf/combat_domestic_violence_english.pdf.

103 Iraq: Urgent Need for Domestic Violence Law 22 April 2020, Human Rights Watch, available at https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/22/iraq-urgent-need-domestic-violence-law

104 Spike in domestic abuse cases hits Iraq, Arab Weekly, 28 April 2020, available at https://thearabweekly.com/spike-domestic-abuse-cases-hits-iraq; Aljazeera, https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/12/iraqi-women-struggle-to-escape-abuse-as-domestic-violence-rises

While the law was drafted by a committee of experts and presented in October 2012, and despite the Women, Family and Childhood Committee in the CoR advocating for its implementation ever since, the CoR has failed to pass the law due to resistance from powerful political and social factions that believe the law undermines customs and traditions, and goes against the laws of Sharia.[105] These are not marginal actors but informal authorities who have considerable support from local communal structures, powerful political elites and religious institutions. Speaking to one member of the Iraqi parliament, it became clear that this needs a collective response of its own. Member of Iraq Parliament and leading the adoption of the Domestic Violence Law, Dr. Abdulbari Al-Mudarris explained that,

"There needs to be a powerful statement and signatures from powerful figures, including politicians, leading academics and well-known respected figures. Getting the main signatures first for the adoption of the domestic violence law, others will be likely to sign too."[106]

He explained that any attempts to expedite the implementation of the law requires strategic communication, an effort to mobilise public opinion and that statements should not contain anything controversial "if you want people to sign it." Fundamentally, he explained, it is important to have a unified position so that there is one single voice that represents the campaign as opposed to having disparate actors and voices, which would impede a campaign and create opportunities for its critics to slow its implementation.[107]

Other interviewees explained the challenges that emanated from the political environment. Dr. Intisar Aljiboury explained that political elites are occupied with preparing for elections or contesting political rivalries but also highlighted that this can be turned into an opportunity since there are candidates and powerful figures who use women's rights as an electoral platform, meaning that this may provide an opening to accelerate the push to have the domestic violence law implemented, provided there was an organised effort to ensure the law was actually approved. She states,

"We can turn this challenge into an opportunity, because most candidates focus on women and women's rights, violence and families. One of the slogans for the elections can be pushing for the domestic violence law. The opposition will be supporting the law and they can make the law part of the electoral campaign, we can take advantage of this. Particular parties can have the domestic violence law part of their programme.

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105 Iraq unrest fuels spike in domestic violence cases, Moayed Al-Torfi, 3 December 2020, The Independent, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iraq-domestic-violence-abuse-laws-b1765959.html.

106 Interview with Dr. Abdulbari Al-Mudarris, Member of Parliament and Member of Legal Committee, 28 November 2020.

107 Interview with Dr. Abdulbari Al-Mudarris, Member of Parliament and Member of Legal Committee, 28 November 2020.

Should the Prime Minister insist on the election date next year, then we only have three months to work on pushing for the approval of law...Parliament conducts sessions for a week and then conducts a campaign. Two weeks are dedicated to the committee. We have to consider this in our campaign and we have to intensify our efforts."[108]

Like Dr. Abdulbari, the need for strategic communication was highlighted, "if people are rejecting the law because they have not understood it, then it is necessary for us to raise awareness around the actual terms of the law, which requires us consulting the media and communication experts."[109] That said, the level of resistance from the political class may be too strong as it stands. More than twenty-one meetings have been held by the women's rights committee in the Iraqi parliament and the legal committee, according to the interviewee, and yet the law has not been properly studied and assessed. Since these committees are dominated by powerful political forces, in some respects the whole process is a charade since the law is rejected from the outset.[110] Also, there are flaws within the draft law, it does not repeal any provisions in the Penal Code, including the provision that a husband has the right to punish his wife and that children can be disciplined.[111]

Women and girls are pressured to bring cases of sexual violence to alternative dispute mechanisms due to a fear of shame, which are often played out through tribal customs and norms that have more of a focus on maintaining the reputation of the family, as opposed to achieving justice for the victim.[112] When Iraq ratified CEDAW in 1986, it submitted reservations and failed to eliminate laws and practices that discriminated against women.

3.3 Sexual Harassment

The Iraqi Labour Law of 2015[113] prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace and any other behaviour that is offensive or results in intimidation in the work environment. Penalties for sexual harassment during employment, the search of work, or vocational training are punishable for up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of one million Iraqi Dinars.[114] It should be emphasised, however, that there is still a need to establish mechanisms allowing for safe and confidential complaints be made against sexual harassment in the workplace, such as a focal point or an ombudsman.

There are no specific statistics available on sexual harassment in Iraq. A survey was conducted in 2015 by the Iraqi Women Journalists' Forum, finding that 8 in 10 women in

108 Focus Group Meeting with stakeholders in Iraq, 23 September, 2020.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 In Iraq, tribal traditions rob women, girls of rights, 18 April, 2019, France24, https://www.france24.com/en/20190418-iraq-tribal-traditions-rob-women-girls-rights.

113 Iraq Labour Law No. 37 of 2015 replaced the Iraq Labour Law No. 71 of 1987.

114 Article 10 and 11, Iraq Labour Law No. 37 of 2015.

Iraq reported having suffered some form of sexual harassment.[115] The study concluded that harassment in the workplace should be recognised and should have serious consequences. This has not translated into action in Iraq, as women are still hesitant to report harassment due to fear of losing their jobs and stigma associated.

There is no official data in Iraq presenting the rate of sexual harassment in the workplace, in both the public and private sector. A conference was convened by Iraqi civil society organisations to publish a report stating that 77 per cent of Iraqi women are exposed to harassment.[116] Consequently, in 2017, women in the public sector started to speak up about harassment in the workplace. Parliament members and ministers revealed having received complaints of sexual harassment.[117] Parliament member, Aaliyah Nasif, revealed she was receiving complaints of sexual harassment of female employees in a number of ministries. One member of parliament, Rezan Sheikh Dler, was interviewed and she stated that "women are perceived as inferior by the male politicians. This is why women MPs have had to deal with harassment during parliamentary sessions."[118]

The Iraqi Journalists Forum Sharazad, proposed the following legal changes[119]:

1. Revise and activate what has been stated in the Iraqi Penal Code no. 111 of 1969 in Articles 400 to 404. It currently has a weak definition of criminal conduct, and a punishment that is not an effective deterrent to harassment in any form, and will not help to prevent sexual harassment.

2. The application of those articles that work to resolve issues surrounding the harassment of female workers in the labour law which was recently passed in the CoR.

3. Amend the law for government employees on the issue of discipline (No. 14 for the year 1991), as it is devoid of any meaningful penalty against an employee who might harass his colleagues on the job.

4. Organise workshops to raise awareness among law officials and the police force, and encourage women who are subjected to harassment to file a complaint and to call upon support from the law.

5. Harmonise national laws, policies and practices to conform to international standards and obligations of human rights, including the repeal of all legislation is discriminatory.

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115 A New Study Reveals Facts about the Phenomenon of Sexual Harassment in Iraqi Society, Iraqi Women Journalists Forum – 2015, https://www.iraqicivilsociety.org//wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Shahrazad-Study-FINAL.En_.pdf.

116 A call to increase the penalties against harassers, 77% of Iraqi women experience sexual harassment, https://elaph.com/Web/News/2015/9/1037165.html.

117 Sexual harassment common even for Iraqi women professionals, Adnan Abu Zeed, 1 February 2017, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2017/02/iraqi-elite-sexual-harassment.html.

118 Sexual harassment common even for Iraqi women professionals, Adnan Abu Zeed, 2 February 2017, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/02/iraqi-elite-sexual-harassment.html.

119 A New Study Reveals Facts about the Phenomenon of Sexual Harassment in Iraqi Society, Iraqi Women Journalists Forum – 2015, https://www.iraqicivilsociety.org//wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Shahrazad-Study-FINAL.En_.pdf.

3.4 Human Trafficking

Human trafficking has contributed to the high levels of violence against women. It has become a widespread issue in Iraq and the problem exacerbated after the ISIS conflict in 2014. Iraq adopted the Law on Combatting Human Trafficking No. 28 in 2012 to tackle and prosecute perpetrators and trafficking networks. Human Trafficking is defined as "recruiting, transporting, housing, or receiving individuals by force, threat to use force, or other means, including by coercion, kidnapping, fraud, deception, misuse of power, exchange of money, or privileges to an influential person in order to sell, exploit the trafficked individuals by means of prostitution, sexual abuse, unpaid labor, enslavement, beggary, trading or human organs, medical experimentation."[120] Enslavement in all forms is criminalised and includes sexual slavery.

The Iraqi government has been slow and ineffective to respond to human trafficking. During 2013, the government investigated several trafficking cases and did not manage to prosecute any perpetrators.[121] Rather than prosecuting perpetrators, women have fallen victim to trafficking and prostitution and are treated like criminals and convicted.[122] Yanar Mohammed, Director of the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, stated that "the women who are in the brothels, they are the ones who are thrown in the prisons, they are the ones who are thought of as perpetrators."[123]

Shelters in Iraq are needed to protect the many victims of violence, including victims of trafficking. A government shelter was opened in 2013 in Baghdad, however, it is hardly functioning and is sitting mostly vacant. There is a dire shortage of shelters and the few NGOs who do manage shelters in Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Region, must do so clandestinely. Without a legal framework to protect NGOs managing shelters and allowing for the operation of those shelters for all victims of violence, women and girls fall under constant threat. It has been reported that first responders and judges do not enforce laws accordingly and are insensitive to trafficking cases.[124]

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120 Article 1, First, Law No. 28 of 2012, Combatting Human Trafficking.

121 Minority Rights Group International & Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, No Place to Turn: Violence against women in the Iraq conflict, February 2015.

122 Minority Rights Group International & Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, No Place to Turn: Violence gainst women in the Iraq conflict, February 2015.

123 Interview with Yanar Mohammed, 17 December 2014, Minority Rights Group International & Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, No Place to Turn: Violence against women in the Iraq conflict, February 2015.

124 Finnish Immigration Service, Overview of the Status of Women Living Without a Safety Net in Iraq, May 22, 2018.

3.5 Personal Status Law

The Personal Status Law was adopted in 1959 and was one of the first pieces of liberal legislation in the Middle East.[125] Provisions in this law gave equal rights to women in divorce, forbid child and forced marriages and restricted polygamy. However, there are restrictions within the law that discriminate against women.

The Personal Status Law sets the legal age for marriage at 18 years old, and 15 years old with parental and judicial permission.(126) The law provides exceptions for minors when their parents or legal guardians provide agreement.(127) The KRG amended certain provisions in the Personal Status Law to give women more rights. For example, the Domestic Violence Law in Kurdistan prohibits any type of forced and early marriages.(128) However, the increase of IDPs and recent conflicts has meant that there was a growing trend of marrying daughters for financial security and reducing economic hardship.(129) Studies carried out in 2019, showed that 27.9% of women aged between 20 to 24 years old were married before 18 years of age and 7.2% were married before 15 years of age.(130)

Article 9 (1) of the Personal Status Law criminalises forced marriage, "No relative or non-relative has the right to force marriage on any person, whether male or female, without their consent." The contract of forced marriage is considered void if the marriage is not yet consummated. An exception is made if the marriage is consummated. This is a harmful legal provision and one that does not consider marital rape. Moreover, no person has the right to prevent the marriage under the provisions of this law. There are no other articles explaining this provision, to define what consent means and to protect women whose marriages have been consummated. The law lacks clarity and does not account for women and girls who underwent forced marriages to ISIS members or who were forced into marriage and raped. This leaves a large gap in the legal framework and women and girls can also be punished by their husbands under Iraqi law, should they speak out.

Children who were born out of sexual violence during the ISIS conflict are unable to obtain identity documents, where proof of paternity is impossible. Article 28(1) of the Personal Status Law states, "the child born out of wedlock and one of the parents is known, shall be registered in the birth register after providing a decision from the personal status court that includes a proof of paternity, the name of the child, birth date and place. The court chose the name of the foundling whose both parents are unknown and to transfer the child's register from the birth register to the civil register." The civil register is where

125 Law No. 188 of 1959, Personal Status Law, published in the Iraq Official Gazette Issue No. 280, dated 20 December 1959.

126 Article 7-8, Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959.

127 Article 8, Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959.

128 Article 2, Law No. 8 of 2011, Combating Domestic Violence in Kurdistan Region-Iraq.

129 With no money or security, Iraqi IDPs turn to child marriage, 26 January, 2019, https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/260120195.

130 UN Women, Women Count Data, Iraq, https://data.unwomen.org/country/iraq

all citizens are listed. There are no provisions for children born of rape and mothers will have difficulties to register their children for education, health and other services. No protection is afforded to them under the current legal framework and, again, they are at risk and made vulnerable.

The Constitution allows for each religious group to govern their own personal status matters, meaning that rules related to marriage, rights over children and divorce can be based on the interpretation of religion.[131] People are free to determine their personal status according to their own religion, sect, belief and choice. This may mean that women from different sects will be subject to different laws imposed on them according to religion, sect, belief and choice of their religion or tribe. The serious risk this represents was shown when the Jaafari Law was proposed by Shia Islamic Parties, headed by the Fadhila party, allowing for girls to be married as young as 9 years old and inheritance and divorce provisions to be changed.[132] This was rejected by parliament; however, many attempts have been made and it still poses a threat to Iraq's women and girls. In July 2021, another initiative to amend the Personal Status Law was adopted in the first reading[133] in Parliament. The amendment provides for children to be separated from their mothers in the event of divorce from the age of 7.

There is a need to adopt measures guaranteeing women's protection when making a claim to nullify a forced marriage (al-fasliya) or to prevent a marriage (al-nahwa). The Government of Iraq should coordinate with the efforts of women's non-governmental organisations who are on the frontlines of these issues. It should be noted here that both al-fasliya and al-nahwa crimes are criminalised under Article 9 of the Personal Status Law No. 15 of 2008 and Articles 430 and 431 of the Penal Code. Furthermore, based on Article 9(2) of the Personal Status Law, if the perpetrator was a relative of first degree to the victim, that perpetrator shall be penalised with detention that could reach up to three years or with a fine or with both penalties. If that perpetrator is not a first -degree relative, he or she shall be penalised with a penalty that ranges between three years detention and ten years imprisonment. However, the problem lies in the difficulty women face when making a claim in court and the fear of being shamed by society. In other words, women often lack the ability to stand against their family and cultural norms. Therefore, it is necessary to appoint a safe and reliable focal point person at the General Prosecutor's Office who can be contacted by victims of al-nahwa and fasliya crimes. Through the focal point, the General Prosecutor can file a claim on the victim's behalf. This is legally possible as the General Prosecutor's mandate includes protecting public interest. The claim made by the General Prosecutor will relieve women from the burden associated with approaching the courts and can protect them from the stigma associated.

131 Article 41, Iraq Constitution 2005.

132 Iraq: Parliament Rejects Marriage for 8-Year-Old Girls, 17 December 2017, https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/17/iraq-parliament-rejects-marriage-8-year-old-girls.

133 To enter into force, adoption in a second reading is needed.

3.6 Measures taken by the Kurdistan Regional Government

The debate over violence against women is a major public debate, and it was an issue that catapulted to the top of the national agenda under successive administrations. The KRG has established the Directorate of Combatting Violence Against Women (DEVAW) that follows up on cases of violence against women, domestic violence courts in three governorates and new institutional bodies to support gender mainstreaming in policy-making.[134] In parallel to this, the High Council of Women's Affairs in the Kurdistan Region advises ministries on gender-mainstreaming and the KRG also ratified the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women in 2013.

The position of women in the Kurdistan Region, compared to the rest of the country, has legally improved. The KRG has abolished some of the discriminatory laws and provisions against women and have adopted laws that protect them. "Honour" was removed as a defence and as a mitigating circumstance in Iraq's Penal Code,[135] as well as article 409 on mitigation.[136] The Personal Status Law was amended to restrict polygamy[137] and to consider forced marriages void, even when consummated. Forced marriage is a crime under the Domestic Violence Law in Kurdistan. However, this has not entirely translated into eradication of violence. Women are still being killed in the name of so-called "honour."[138]

Post-2003, violence against women dominated KRG policy making in respect of women's rights, resulting in a law in 2011, Combatting Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region,[139] including several provisions covering assault, female genital mutilation (FGM) and other forms of violence. This law was a milestone in the Kurdistan Region to hold perpetrators accountable, however, enforcement has not yet been the resounding success the government had initially hoped. Although, the above amendments were made and this law was adopted, violence is still prevalent and so-called "honour" killings still occur.[140] FGM is also still widespread. That said, the passing of the law has been followed with a comprehensive capacity building strategy that includes awareness campaigns, the training of judges, police training tied to ensuring officers of the law enforce its provisions and developing a stronger understanding of the law and the norms it sets out to promote. The Kurdistan Region is the better example for the rest of the country to follow in order to heighten safety for women.

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134 Law No. 8 of 2011, Combatting Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq.

135 Resolution No. 59 of 2002.

136 Law No. 3 of 2015, amending the Penal Code No. 111 of 1969.

137 Law No. 15 of 2008, amending the Personal Status Law.

138 Three men in Kalar arrested for hanging their sister to death: police, Dilan Sirwa, 23 November 2020, https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/23112020.

139 Law No. 8 of 2011, Combatting Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region – Iraq.

140 Iraqi Kurdistan struggles to end violence against women, Fazel Hawramy, 18 December 2018, https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2018/12/iraq-kurdistan-violence-women.html.

3.7 Yazidi Female Survivors Law

It was not until April 2019, that a bill, the Yazidi Female Survivors Law, to secure reparation for Yazidi female survivors was proposed to the Iraqi parliament. This was regarded as a major step towards addressing and redressing the suffering endured by the minority group in the wake of ISIS' emergence in 2014 in Iraq. The legal framework and reparation scheme under Law No. 20 of 2009, Compensation of Victims of War Operations, Military Mistakes and Terrorist Operations, is insufficient to cover the ISIS conflict as it only identifies specific categories for reparations.[141] The Yazidi Female Survivors Law was passed by the Iraqi parliament on 1 March 2021.[142]

The law offers psychological and medical care,[143] as well as housing and land,[144] compensation[145] and education.[146] However, there is scepticism that the Yazidi Female Survivors Law will meet expectations, raising concerns and confusion, which will require amendment before its enactment.

Article 1 defines the female survivor as follows: "Every woman or girl who has been subjected to crimes of sexual violence from her kidnapping, sexual slavery, selling her in slavery markets, separating her from her family, forcing her to change her religion, forced marriage, pregnancy and forced abortion or inflicting physical and psychological harm to her by ISIS since the date 3/8/2014 and was freed afterwards." The definition does not cover all aspects of crimes against humanity, such as torture, imprisonment, persecution based on religion, gender, political or racial grounds, the forcible transfer of populations and the enforced disappearance of persons. Conflict-related sexual violence should also be clearly defined to ensure that survivors are not outside of the law's scope. This means that the law does not address the entirety of the atrocities committed and every victim of ISIS.

A large part of the problem is also that the law risks focusing the debate on victims of sexual violence with the definition in Article 1, putting every abductee into the category of a victim of sexual violence regardless of the fact that there are some individuals

141 Article 2, Law No. 20 of 2009, Compensation of Victims of War Operations, Military Mistakes and Terrorist Operations, can be found at https://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=5e4579204

142 Iraqi parliament passes Yazidi survivor bill after years of delay, Sura Ali, 1 March 2021, https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/010320214.

143 Article 5(Sixth), Yazidi Female Survivors Law 2021.

144 Article 6(Second), Yazidi Female Survivors Law 2021.

145 Article 4(First), Yazidi Female Survivors Law 2021.

146 Article 5(Fourth), Yazidi Female Survivors Law 2021.

who were not necessarily victims of sexual violence. There have, for example, been documented cases of abducted disabled women who were subjected to other gross human rights violations and who are not accounted for in the law. Furthermore, although, the law covers "inflicting physical and psychological harm" by ISIS there is a danger that not all gender-based crimes are recognised.

Indeed, the broader issues that have underpinned attempts to address sexual violence in the country and remedy holes in the legal system remain. In failing to cover other forms of conflict-related violence, the inequality fault lines are intensified, creating a two-tier system that may ignite intra-community tensions and conflicts.

The law requires further clarification in Article 2 (First), stating that the law applies to every Yazidi woman who was kidnapped and freed by ISIS, and in Article 2 (Second), which goes on to state that the "law shall apply to Turkmen, Christian and Shabak women and girls who were subjected to the same crimes mentioned in Article 1."[147] An interpretation of this Article surely comes to the conclusion that the law is also covering the mentioned minorities. A clarification as to who is eligible for reparations. would avoid misinterpretations. It is recommended to clarify if non-Yazidi women are included in the Yazidi Female Survivors Law and if Article 1 covers all crimes or only sexual violence.

There has clearly been an absence of victim participation in the drafting of the law. It appears that the Iraqi government has taken a "one-size fits all" approach, with general provisions and has fallen short of addressing the unique impacts of different violations and abuses. Women and girls were undoubtedly disproportionately subjected to SGBV; however, men and boys were also victims. A more inclusive law could have been prepared with the consultation of victims and one that responds better to the expectations of survivors.[148]

By excluding crimes committed against men and boys, and women and girls of other religions or ethnic groups, the bill more generally fails to account for all victims of human rights violations under ISIS. It should be noted that, first, the State of Iraq is a Party to the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the 1949 Four Geneva Conventions. Thus, Iraq is bound by the provisions of these Conventions, which are applicable before the Iraqi courts. Second, Iraq has established a court mandated to investigate and prosecute war crimes, genocide and crimes against

147 Article 2, Yazidi Female Survivors Law,

148 Güley Bor, Iraq's Reparation Bill for Yazidi Female Survivors: More Progress Needed, LSE, 12 June 2019, available at https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/06/12/iraqs-reparation-bill-for-yazidi-female-survivors-more-progress-needed/

humanity committed between 17 July 1968 and 1 May 2003, namely the Supreme Criminal Court of Iraq (المحكمة الجنائية العراقية العليا), which functions based on Law No. 10 of 2005. This can be renewed with amendments made. Third, Iraq has many Penal Codes covering many crimes whether committed during war or not, such as the 1971 Penal Code, the 2007 Penal Code of Military Forces (see e.g. Article 61) and the 2008 Penal Code of National Security Forces. In addition, the CoR issued Decision No. 126 on 24 March 2015 that considered crimes committed by ISIS as genocide crimes.[149]

149 The decision of the Council of Ministers is available on the Iraqi Legislations Database at <http://iraqld.hjc.iq/LoadLawBook.aspx?page=1&SC=&BookID=38901.

4. Conclusion

This paper analysed the current legal framework applicable to the participation of women in political and peacebuilding processes and studied the laws regulating the protection of women against violence. The research identified many legal gaps that must be addressed to allow women to actively participate in political affairs and to be represented across all leadership levels. Institutionally, reform attempts have often failed because they were resisted by powerful political and social forces. To strengthen women's participation, it is necessary to promote equal representation in the executive positions of the Iraqi Government at federal, regional, provincial and district levels. Unfortunately, the Law on Provinces that have not joined a Region No. 21 of 2008 sets out that a Governor shall have five Deputies without guaranteeing women minimum representation.[150] It is crucial to require a quota for the representation of women in the Deputy-Governor positions. In addition, it is necessary to introduce a quota for women's representation in the IHEC Board. The IHEC could play a fundamental role in ensuring that more women are included in the elections and in creating training programs for women who wish to pursue a political career.

There is no quota for women in the membership of political parties in Law No. 36 of 2015 on Political Parties. This law also lacks a precise threshold for women representation in the leadership committees of political parties. Therefore, the Political Parties Law should be amended to provide for a quota for women of at least 40 per cent in the leadership bodies of political parties. Furthermore, it is crucial to guarantee women belonging to minority groups an adequate representation in the CoR and Provincial Councils, as the 2020 Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives does not clarify whether a representation of those groups shall be guaranteed.

The Iraqi government must increase the level of female political participation and protect women from abuse and harassment. Women are frequently attacked online during election campaigns. During the 2018 elections, the UN condemned the defamation and violence against women candidates after one candidate resigned over a fake sex tape, while others suffered rampant online harassment. It is necessary to create effective means to help victims of sexual violence. The government should legalise and help fund the establishment of shelters that are operated by civil society organisations and to establish transparent supervision mechanisms on the functioning of government shelters.

Amending Article 393 of the Iraqi Penal Code is a must to widen the definition of rape to cover all forms of sexual violence against women, such as martial rape. The definition of the Istanbul Convention could serve as a model here. In addition, sexual harassment should be addressed, particularly at the workplace. To tackle sexual harassment, it is recommended that mechanisms are established for women to make safe and confidential claims, such as appointing focal points or an ombudsman.

150 Article 33(1), Law No. 21 of 2008, Provinces that have not joined a Region.

To guarantee women better protection and access to justice, it is fundamental to adopt the Domestic Violence Law. It is equally important to establish effective mechanisms ensuring proper implementation of the Domestic Violence Law, such as shelters and legal protection of non-governmental organisations operating shelters. Other measures can also be taken such as guaranteeing women protection when filing a claim in court, for example, to nullify a forced marriage (al-fasliya) or to prevent marriage (al-nahwa). A focal point can be appointed at the General Prosecutor's Office allowing a victim of al-fasliya or al-nahwa to submit a complaint and to request the General Prosecutor file a claim in court. This will protect women from the stigma associated and help the course of justice.

The balance of power in Iraq shifts substantially in favour of men, at both the political and societal level. This makes it imperative that women's organisations and groups forge alliances and coalitions, which can be supported by the international community. Long-term strategies must be set that enhance existing campaigns and plans. Efforts should also be focused on raising awareness amongst the most conservative communities and political factions. Working with tribal leaders is an important part of reform and increasing women's political and peacebuilding participation.

At the top-down level, international organisations and civil society should pressure the government to open up access to resources and information for the most vulnerable, including the poor, unemployed, IDPs and the widowed. The social fabric of the country will continue to come under pressure as a result of political instability and conflict, and measures like this will empower the most vulnerable to, at the very least, mitigate the detrimental consequences that they suffer in the absence of appropriate legal protection.

The emphasis on campaign effectiveness is an area that warrants further attention. Given the centrality of social media platforms to the protest movement in the country, it is plausible to argue that women's rights campaigners need to develop a more effective strategic communication strategy. However, this constitutes only one part of the puzzle that needs to be solved. There are broader structural problems that inhibit both the promotion and implementation of the laws that enable gender equality and protect women, and that inhibit the mobilising capacity of civil society actors and international NGOs.

In short, addressing the legal, political and social gaps in the protection of women and the promotion of gender equality in Iraq, pursuant to international norms and the objectives set out in UNSCR 1325, requires a long-term and concerted effort by both the government, civil society and the wider political class including religious and tribal leaders. The incremental progress proposed above, like taking steps to increase the level of female political participation or devising more effective campaigning and strategic communication, can produce momentum and the guiding principles that allows the country to eventually implement a broad-spectrum of policies and laws that protect women. Since Iraq is a conflict-plagued country and at risk of conflict relapse, incorporating International Criminal Law into the penal code, in direct consultation with

the victims of these crimes, will both provide these victims with justice and contribute toward creating an environment of accountability and respect for international norms.

Iraq would do well to review all laws and provisions that discriminate against women and promote inequality, particularly those articles in the Penal Code that do not protect women. The Domestic Violence Law should be developed and passed by parliament as soon as possible to both reduce the domestic violence rates and the killings it leads to.

Local and international organisations working on women's rights and empowerment can offer further training and support parliament to adopt laws and amend provisions that increase women's political participation and promote gender equality. Unfortunately, harmful practices in Iraq remain and women in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, face many institutional, social, political and economic challenges. There is an absence of adequate protection in law and all stakeholders must work together and use their efforts to overcome challenges facing women and girls.

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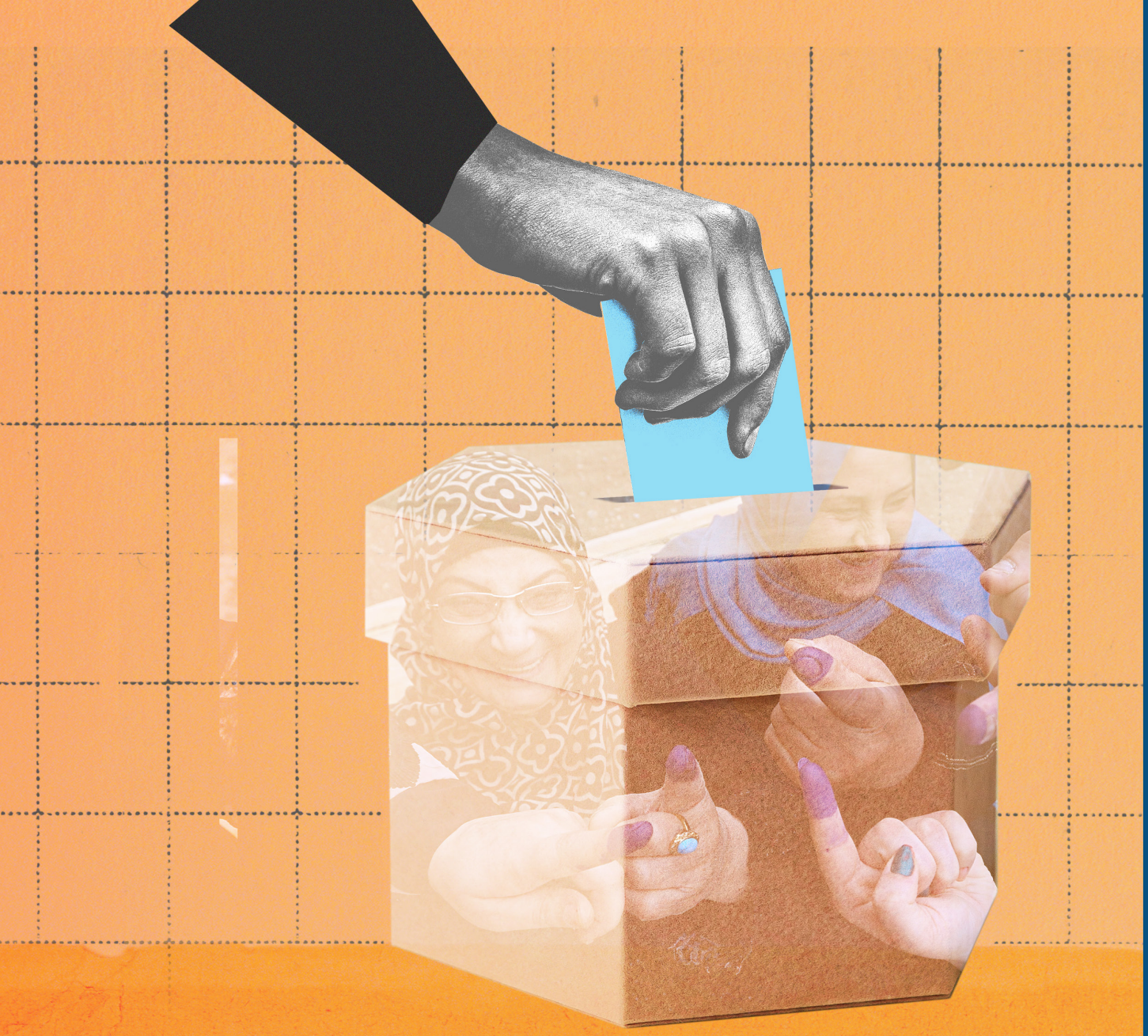

Dr. Mohamed Riyad M. Almosly

ANALYSIS OF FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN LEGISLATIVE INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES IN IRAQ

February 2022

Executive Summary

As a federal State, the Republic of Iraq established several legislative institutions at federal, regional, provincial and district (Qadhaa) levels, which are the Council of Representatives (CoR) and Provincial and Districts Councils (PDCs). The Constitution of Iraq guarantees the rights of citizens to participate in the formation of the CoR and the PDCs, which include the rights to elect and to run as a candidate for election. This paper aims at analyzing whether the Constitution of Iraq and the existing laws establish a minimum threshold for women representation in the CoR, the PDCs and the political parties. It also scrutinizes whether representation of women belonging to minority groups is guaranteed by existing laws. Finally, it assesses whether women are legally entitled to run for election independently from political parties. Due to the complexity of the analyzed legal framework covering several legislative and executive institutions at many levels, a general conclusion is difficult. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that, first at federal level, while the Constitution of Iraq states that at least 25% of the members of the CoR shall be women, it does not require minimum representation for women in the Federation Council. Second, similar to its approach regarding the Federation Council, the Constitution of Iraq lacks obligation for minimum representation for women in the PDCs. In this respect, the Law on the Election of the PDCs implies that the minimum representation of women at the PDCs shall be 25%. Third, the Political Parties Law lacks precise definition of the required percentage of women representation in the membership of a political party. Furthermore, the Political Parties Law does not stipulate that women shall participate in the drafting of the program and rules of procedure of political parties.

Dr. Mohamed Almosly
mohamed.almosly@yahoo.com

Note:

The translation of any legal text quoted in this paper is unofficial, as it was done by Dr. Mohamed Almosly himself.

1. Introduction:

As a federal state, the Republic of Iraq has established several legislative institutions at the federal, regional, provincial and district (Qadhaa) levels. At the federal level, the legislative authority is supposed to be exercised by the Council of Representatives (CoR) and the Federation Council. While the constitution of Iraq established the CoR, it lacks a detailed framework regulating the Federation Council.[1] In addition to the federal legislative institutions, Provincial and Districts Councils (PDCs) were established in provinces that have not joined a region. The Constitution of Iraq guarantees the rights of citizens to participate in the formation of the CoR and the PDCs, which include the right to elect and to run as a candidate for election.[2] To regulate the exercise of political rights of its citizens, the CoR adopted three laws, namely the 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR[3] that replaced the 2013 Law[4], the 2015 Political Parties Law[5] and the 2018 Law on the Election of the Provincial and District Councils (PDCs).[6] Furthermore, the CoR adopted a law in 2008 that regulates many aspects related to the legislative and executive institutions of the provinces that have not joined a region.[7]

This paper aims to analyze whether the Constitution of Iraq and the above-mentioned laws establish a minimum threshold for female representation in the CoR, the PDCs and the political parties of Iraq. Moreover, it scrutinises whether existing laws sufficiently guarantee representation of women from minority groups. Finally, this paper seeks to assess whether women are legally entitled to run for election independently from political parties.

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1 Article (65) of the Constitution of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4012 on 28 December 2005. Available in Arabic at <http://iraqld.hjc.iq:8080/LoadLawBook.aspx?page=1&SC=&BookID=25626> An English version of the Iraqi Constitution can be found at <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005?lang=en>

2 Article (20) of the Constitution of Iraq,

3 Law number (9) of 2020 on the Election of the Council of Representatives, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4603 on 5 November 2020, p. 1.

4 Law number (45) of 2013 on the Election of the Council of Representatives (as amended by Law number (15) of 2018), adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4300 on 2 December 2013, p. 1.

5 Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4383 on 12 October 2015.

6 Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of the Provincial and Districts Councils (as amended by Law number (27) of 2019), adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4494 on 4 June 2018, p. 1.

7 Law number (21) of 2008 on Provinces that have not Joined a Region (as amended), adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4070 on 31 March 2008.

2. Women Participation based on the Law of the Election of the Council of Representatives (COR Election Law):

The CoR is composed of 329 seats, 320 of which are distributed among the provinces based on a table annexed to the Law on the Election of the CoR.[8] The additional nine seats are allocated to minority groups as shall be detailed below. The Constitution of Iraq states that "the Electoral Law aims at making women representation in the Council of Representatives equal to at least 25 percent of the total number of members."[9] To regulate the exercise of the right to elect the members of the CoR and the right to run for election in the CoR, the CoR adopted the 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR, which replaced the 2013 Law. The Law on the Election of the CoR aims at achieving equality among citizens in the participation in elections.[10] It guarantees the right to elect for every Iraqi citizen, who qualifies to vote, without discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, origin, colour, religion, sector of religion, belief, opinion or economic or social situation.[11] It defines the eligibility criteria to exercise the right to elect by stating that any person is entitled to vote in an election if that person is an Iraqi citizen, has legal capacity, turned eighteen years of age during the year in which the election is conducted and has been registered to vote.[12] In order to exercise the right to run for election in the CoR, a candidate must meet the eligibility criteria of the right to elect in addition to other conditions stipulated in Article (8), such as the condition that the candidate shall be at least twenty eight years of age and shall not be among those that are covered by the Law of the Supreme National Committee for Accountability and Justice. What is important is that **neither the eligibility criteria to elect nor those determining the ability to run for election could negatively impact women participation in the exercise of their rights to elect and to be elected for the CoR.** In contrast, the eligibility criteria to exercise the right to elect outlawed all forms of discrimination.

The 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR divided Iraq into 83 electoral constituencies, in which candidates individually run for election. This new election system has repealed the system that was used pursuant to the previous Law number (45) of 2013 on the Election of the CoR, namely the Sainte-Laguë method. The adoption of a new election system was one of the measures adopted by the CoR to satisfy the demonstrators in Iraq who argued that the Sainte-Laguë method used under the 2013 Law was beneficial only for big political parties and made it difficult for independent candidates to compete against major political parties. Hence, the 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR changed the election system and defined 83 electoral constituencies in tables annexed to the Law in question.

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8 Article 13(First) of the Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives.

9 Article 49(Fourth) of the Constitution of Iraq.

10 Article 2(Second) of that Law on Election of the Council of Representatives, op. cit.

11 Ibid., Article 4(First).

12 Ibid., Article (5).

Another question that needs to be answered here is whether the 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR allows women representation in the CoR to exceed 25% of the total membership of the CoR. Article (16) of the Law on the Election of the CoR sets a minimum threshold for women representation. Paragraph (1) of that article provides that "the percentage of women representation shall not be less than 25% of the number of members of the Council of Representatives." To achieve that percentage, the Law on the Election of the CoR stipulates that at least one woman shall be elected from each electoral constituency in Iraq.(13) Hence, as 83 electoral constituencies were created by the 2020 Law on the Election of the CoR, at least 83 out of the 329 seats of the CoR shall be filled by women. Therefore, as the Law on the Election of the CoR only sets the minimum threshold for women representation in the CoR, women candidates can achieve more than 25% representation in the CoR if voters are willing to vote for more women candidates.

The gap that can be identified in the Law on the Election of the CoR is that it does not guarantee a minimum representation of women belonging to minority groups. Although it gives Christians five seats in five provinces (Baghdad, Ninawa, Kirkuk, Duhok and Erbil),(14) the Law on the Election of the CoR did not clarify how at least 25% of the five seats will be allocated to female Christian candidates. Likewise, each of the following ethinic groups were awarded only one seat, Yezidis, Sabian Mandaeism, Shabaks and Faili Kurds. If the one seat allocated to these entities is given to a male candidate, women belonging to these groups will not be represented and vice versa. However, it shall be mentioned that candidates from minority groups are legally entitled to run for election within their electoral constituency irrespective of the above-mentioned seats. In other words, as an Iraqi citizen who fulfils the eligibility criteria to vote and to be elected, a Yezidi candidate may individually run for election. The success of that person would then depend on the voters.

The other issue that can be noted is that Article 16(Ninth) of the Law on the Election of the CoR states that if a seat becomes vacant and that seat belongs to a woman, such seat shall not necessarily be filled by a woman, unless this will affect the 25% of women representation in the CoR. While this can be considered to be fair as seats vacated by a male member shall not necessarily be filled by another male member, it could also be argued that it is better to install a condition stipulating that a seat held and vacated by a female member is filled with a female candidate to increase the representation of women in the CoR.

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13 Ibid., Article (16).

14 Ibid., Article 13 (Second).

3. Women Participation in the Federation Council

Pursuant to the Constitution of Iraq, the federal legislative authority shall comprise two institutions, namely the CoR and the Federation Council.[15] While the Constitution of Iraq establishes a legal framework defining many aspects related to the CoR, it lacks details regarding the Federation Council. It simply mentions that "[a] legislative council shall be established under the name the Federation Council, which comprises representatives of regions and provinces that have not joined a region."[16]

The Constitution of Iraq does not require the Federation Council to be composed of a specific number of women members. In other words, it does not establish minimum representation for women in the Federation Council, unlike its approach regarding the CoR, whose members shall comprise at least 25% of female members. In contrast to many Constitutions of Federal States detailing the mandate of the Houses of the Federal Parliament, the Constitution of Iraq defines some necessary aspects related to the CoR only. The Constitution of Iraq states that "[t]he Council of Representatives shall enact a law by a two-thirds majority of its members defining the formation and competencies of the Federation Council, the eligibility criteria to become a member in the Federation Council and all other aspects related to it."[17] As such law has not yet been enacted by the CoR, it is not yet known whether the Federation Council shall comprise minimum representation for women.

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15 Article (48) of the Constitution of Iraq.

16 Article (65) of the Constitution of Iraq.

17 Article (65) of the Constitution of Iraq. See also Article (137) of the Constitution of Iraq.

4. Women Participation in the Provincial and Districts Councils in the Provinces that have not Joined a Region

The Constitution of Iraq states that the Provinces shall be composed of districts (Qadhaa), sub-districts (Nahiyas) and villages (Qaryas).[18] It does not require membership of the PDCs to comprise a minimum representation for women. It simply mentions that the election of the Provincial Councils and the competencies of such Councils shall be regulated by law.[19] In other words, while there is a constitutional guarantee for a minimum representation for women in the CoR, such obligation was not stipulated by the Constitution with respect to the PDCs. Hence, it is necessary to assess whether existing laws stipulate a minimum threshold for women representation in the legislative and executive organs of Provinces, Districts and Nahiyas, i.e. the PDCs, the Governor, Deputies Governor, District Managers (Qaem Maqam) and Nahiyas Managers. For that purpose, it is essential to examine at least two laws, namely law number (21) of 2008 on the Provinces that have not Joined a Region[20] and law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of the PDCs. Before answering the main question, it is crucial to clarify that only Provinces and Districts have their own Councils, unlike Nahiyas (Sub-Districts) the Councils of which were demolished in 2018, as will be detailed below.

4.1 Women Participation based on Law number (21) of 2008 on the Provinces that have not Joined a Region

Similar to the Constitution of Iraq, the Law number (21) of 2008 on the Provinces that have not Joined in a Region **does not set a minimum threshold for women representation in the PDCs as well as in the executive positions at Provinces, Districts and Nahiyas (Sub-Districts) levels.** For instance, while Article 33(First) of that Law states that the Governor shall have a maximum of five deputies, it does not stipulate that women shall be represented in these five positions.

4.2 Women Representation based on Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils in Provinces that have not Joined a Region

To regulate the election of the PDCs in the Provinces that have not joined a region, Law number (12) of 2018 was enacted. However, the CoR enacted Law number (27) which amended Law number (12) and **"stopped the work" of the PDCs** (hereafter referred to as the 2nd Amendment Law).[21] The 2nd Amendment Law lays down that the Governor and the Managers of Administrative Units shall continue exercising their competencies

18 Article 122(First) of the Constitution of Iraq.

19 Article 122(Fourth) of the Constitution of Iraq.

20 Law number (21) of 2008 on Provinces that have not Joined a Region, op. cit.

21 Law number (27) of 2019 on the Second Amendment to the Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of the Provincials and Districts Councils, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4566 on 9 December 2019, p. 7.

and fulfilling their duties as stipulated by Law number (21) of 2008 on the Provinces that have not joined a Region.[22] It further states that the members of the CoR, each with respect to his own Province, shall supervise the work of the Governor and Deputy Governors.[23] The 2nd Amendment Law was adopted by the CoR in an attempt by the latter to accommodate the demands of the demonstrations started in October 2019 in many Iraqi Provinces, who accused the Provincial Councils of being ineffective Councils. The demonstrators believe that the salary of the members of the PDCs forms a heavy burden on the general budget.

Several provinces considered the 2nd Amendment Law to be unconstitutional, as the Constitution of Iraq explicitly mentions that the Governor shall be elected by the Provincial Council and that a law shall be enacted to regulate the election of Provincial Councils and to define their competencies.[24] It further stipulates that the Provincial Council has an independent budget and shall not be subjected to the control or supervision of any Ministry or an institution not affiliated to a Ministry.[25] However, the Constitution of Iraq does not explicitly mention that there shall be elected Districts and Sub-District Councils. Some Provinces filed a case before the Federal Supreme Court, in which the former requested the latter to declare the 2nd Amendment Law as unconstitutional on the aforementioned grounds.[26] The Federal Supreme Court has not yet issued a judgment on the request of the Provinces, due to the political sensitivity of the case. Any ruling declaring the 2nd Amendment unconstitutional will maintain the Provincial Councils thus causing more demonstrations.

However, because the Federal Supreme Court may rule in favour of maintaining the existence of the PDCs, further examination of whether a minimum female representation in these Councils is guaranteed remains relevant. At the outset, the 2018 Law on the Election of the PDCs seeks to "achieve equality in the electoral participation."[27] It states that the PDCs shall be elected for a 4-year term starting from the day on which the first session of these Councils is held.[28] The Law also takes into consideration the special situation of Ninawa and Kirkuk. It requires the Independent High Electoral Commission to take appropriate measures enabling the persons internally displaced within Ninawa and Kirkuk to vote.[29] The number of members represented in the PDCs is determined based on the population of that Province and District. The minimum number of members for the Provincial Councils is 10, whereas for the District Councils that number is 7.[30] It is necessary to mention that Sub-Districts (Nahiyas) used to have their own Councils

22 Article (2) of Law number (27) of 2019 on the Second Amendment to the Law number (12) of 2018, op. cit.

23 Article (3) Law number (27) of 2019 on the Second Amendment to the Law number (12) of 2018, op. cit.

24 Article 122 (Third and Fourth) of the Constitution of Iraq.

25 Article 12 2(Fifth) of the Constitution of Iraq.

26 See the Arabic website of the Federal Supreme Court <https://www.iraqfsc.iq/news.4551/>

27 Article 3 (Second) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

28 Article (49) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

29 Article (47) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

30 Article (3) of Law number (21) of 2008 on Provinces that have not Joined a Region, op. cit.

based on the first version of Law number (21) of 2008 on Provinces that have not Joined a Region. In 2018, **the CoR amended Law number (21) and abolished the Nahiyas (Sub-Districts) Councils.**[31]

The Law on the Election of the PDCs guarantees the right to elect any Iraqi citizen who has legal capacity and is at least 18 years old during the year in which the election is organised. It prohibits discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity, origin, colour, religion, sector of religion, belief, opinion, or economic or social situation.[32] Moreover, Article (7) of the Law in question stipulated the eligibility criteria to exercise the right to run for election in the PDCs. These criteria do not affect female representation in the PDCs. However, the Law on the Election of PDCs does not explicitly establish a threshold for minimum representation for women in the PDCs, compared to the Law on the Election of the CoR providing that "the percentage of women representation shall not be less than 25% of the number of members of the Council of Representatives."[33] But the Law on the Election of the PDCs seems to imply that the minimum representation of women shall be 25% of the total membership of the PDCs. Article (12) of that Law described the methods based on which the votes and seats shall be distributed among the candidates. Paragraph (2) of Article (12) of the Law on the Election of the PDCs states that

> *[t]he seats are distributed on the candidates within a list, and the candidates will be re-ranked based on the number of votes they receive in the election. The first winner is the candidate who receives the greatest number of votes in the open list, and so is the case for the rest of the candidates, providing that a female candidate shall be placed after each three winner candidates, irrespective of the male winner candidates.*

In addition, it can also be argued that a minimum representation is required in the PDCs based on Article 14(Third) of the Law on the Election of the PDCs, which states that *"[i]f a seat filled by a female member becomes vacant, such a seat shall not be necessarily filled by a female candidate, unless the replacement with a male candidate affects the percentage of women representation."* Despite this implied requirement for a minimum representation of women in the PDCs, **the Law on the Election of the PDCs still needs to explicitly mention the exact percentage below which women representation in these Councils may not drop. In addition, Article 14(Third) could be amended in a manner requiring the replacement of a female member with another female to increase women representation as much as possible.**

Similar to the problem identified regarding the Law on the Election of the CoR, the Law on the Election of the PDCs does not guarantee female representation for minority groups. Article 15(First) allocates a certain number of seats in the Provincial Councils to

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31 Law number (10) of 2018 on the Third Amendment to Law number (21) of 2008, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4487 on 16 April 2018.

32 Articles (4) and (5) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

33 Article 16 (First) of the Law on the Election of the CoR.

some social entities in the Provinces that have not joined a region, as follows: 1 seat each to Christians, Faili Kurds and Sabian Mandaeans in Baghdad; 1 seat each to Christians, Yezidis and Shabaks in Ninawa; 1 seat to Christians in Basra; 1 seat to Faili Kurds in Waset; and 1 seat to Sabian Mandaeans in Missan. Article 35(5) of the Law on the Election of the PDCs provides 1 seat to Christians in the Provincial Council of Kirkuk. **As each of the above-mentioned groups were given only one seat, representation of women belonging to these groups is thus not guaranteed.** In this respect, Article 15(Second) states that the seats allocated to the above-mentioned groups shall be given to the electoral list receiving the greatest number of votes and then to the candidate within that list that secured the greatest number of votes. Hence, if a male received the highest number of seats, women belonging to the group of that candidate will not be represented in the Provincial Council of the concerned Province.

Another question that needs to be addressed is whether the Law on the Election of the PDCs guarantees women the right to run for election independently of a political party. In addition to the possibility to run for election in an open list alongside several candidates, the **Law on the Election of the PDCs allows any candidate irrespective of the candidate's gender to run for election in a "single list,"**[34] which is defined as "a list containing one candidate based on which that candidate can run for election providing that the candidate is registered with the Independent High Electoral Commission."[35] It bears reiterating here that **although a (female) candidate is legally entitled to run for election to the PDCs independently from a political party, such candidates may not be reasonably expected to achieve any substantive result.** The methods used by the Law on the Election of the PDCs to distribute seats among the electoral lists favours the large electoral lists. It states that "the correct votes for each list shall be divided by the following numerals (9, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 ... etc.) and based on the seats allocated to each electoral constituency. Then, the highest results shall be chosen until all the seats allocated to the electoral constituency have been awarded."[36] This means that seats will be distributed based on the overall results each electoral lists achieve, i.e. the lists are first ranked based on the number of votes they achieve in the election and then the seats will be divided among the lists based on their rank. It has been advocated in demonstrations that started in Iraq in October 2019 that the methods used by the Law on the Election of the PDCs to distribute seats among the electoral lists only favours large political parties as the system enables them to remain in power. This has made it difficult, if not impossible, for independent candidates or technocrats, to get elected.

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34 Article (9) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

35 Article 1 (Seventh) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

36 Article 12 (First) of Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, op. cit.

5. Women Participation in Political Parties Law

Article 4(First) of Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties states that all citizens have the right to establish and join political parties or withdraw from such parties. The Political Parties Law details the eligibility criteria to establish and to join a political party. What is important is that none of these criteria appear to affect female participation in political parties. To be entitled to establish a political party, a person shall simply be 25 years of age; have completed a bachelor degree; hold Iraqi citizenship; have legal capacity; not be convicted of committing certain crimes; must not hold the membership of other political parties at the time of establishing a political party and must not be employed by certain authorities such as the judiciary and military institutions.[37] As for the right to join a political party, a person may exercise such a right if that person has Iraqi citizenship and legal capacity, is 18 years of age and is not employed by certain authorities.[38]

The Political Parties Law also requires political parties to **"take into account female representation"** in political parties. It provides that a person willing to establish a political party shall submit a request to that effect and with that request enclose two lists: one comprising the names of the members of the "founding committee" of the political party that shall be composed of at least 7 members and a list containing the names of the members of the party in question from different provinces, who shall be at least 2000 members providing that female representation is taken into account.[39] The rest of **the provisions of the Political Parties Law does not establish a precise threshold for minimum representation for women in the membership of political parties as well as in the "founding committees" of political parties.** In other words, the Law lacks precise guidelines on how the requirement to "take into account female representation" can be fulfilled at membership and leadership levels. Furthermore, the Political Parties Law does not require female participation in the drafting of the program and the rules of procedure of political parties.[40] Therefore, the Political Parties Law could be amended to define a clear percentage for the required minimum representation for women in the leading committee of a political party and in its membership.

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37 Article (9) of Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties, op. cit.

38 Article (10) of Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties, op. cit.

39 Article 11 (First) of Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties, op. cit.

40 Article (28) of Law number (36) of 2015 on Political Parties, op. cit.

6. Concluding Remarks

The current study aimed at assessing whether female representation is guaranteed at the federal and provincial legislative authorities as well as in political parties. It also analyzed whether women can run for federal and provincial elections independently from political parties. For that purpose, this paper scrutinized the Constitution of Iraq, the 2020 Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives, the 2018 Law on the Election of the Provincial and Districts Councils and the 2015 Political Parties Law. It also took into consideration the 2008 Law on Provinces that have not Joined a Region. The complexity of the analyzed legal framework covering several legislative and executive institutions at many levels makes reaching a general conclusion difficult. Nevertheless, it can be noted that, with the notable exception of the Council of Representatives, the analyzed legal instruments do not explicitly define a precise percentage for the required minimum threshold for female representation in other legislative institutions.

Several conclusions can be drawn based on the current study. **First**, at a federal level, where the Constitution of Iraq states that at least 25% of the members of the Council of Representatives shall be women, it does not require minimum representation for women in the Federation Council. As the Council of Representatives is required by the Constitution of Iraq to enact a law defining the membership of the Federation Council, the former could use this opportunity to encourage women representation in the latter. **Second**, similar to its approach regarding the Federation Council, the Constitution of Iraq lacks an obligation pertaining to minimum representation for women in Provincial and District Councils. **Third**, the 2018 Law on the Election of the Provincial and Districts Councils does not explicitly define a minimum threshold for female representation but does requires the electoral lists running for election to place a female candidate after each three candidates that win an election.

Thus, the Law on the Election of Provincial and Districts Council implies that the minimum representation of women shall be 25%. However, this would still need to be explicitly defined in the law in question. **Fourth**, neither the Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives nor the Law on the Election of the Provincial and Districts Councils guarantee the minimum representation of women belonging to minority groups. Both Laws simply grant one seat to certain groups in Iraqi society thus representation of women belonging to those groups is not guaranteed. **Fifth**, although women are legally entitled to run for election independently from political parties based on the Law on the Election of Provincial and Districts Councils, the method followed to distribute seats among electoral lists based on that law favours large political parties over independent candidates. This would make it incredibly difficult for women and independent candidates in general to compete in elections, which was one of the grievances that triggered social demonstrations in Iraq and leading the Council of Representatives to adopt a law that "stopped the work" of Provincial and Districts Councils in November 2019.

This law was appealed before the Federal Supreme Court by several Provinces but the former has not yet issued its judgment in this respect. **Finally**, although the Political Parties Law stipulates that, as a requirement to establish a new political party, the new party shall "take into account female representation" for its membership, it does not state how this condition is to be respected. In other words, the Political Parties Law lacks a precise definition on the required percentage of women representation in a political party. Furthermore, it does not stipulate that women shall participate in the drafting of the program and rules of procedure of political parties.

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Law number (10) of 2018 on the Third Amendment to Law number (21) of 2008, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4487 on 16 April 2018.

Law number (27) of 2019 on the Second Amendment to the Law number (12) of 2018 on the Election of the Provincials and Districts Councils, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4566 on 9 December 2019, p. 7.

Law number (9) of 2020 on the Election of the Council of Representatives, adopted by the Council of Representatives of Iraq, published in the Iraqi Official Gazette (Alwaqayi'i) number 4603 on 5 November 2020, p. 1.

Dr. Mohamed Riyad M. Almosly
E-mail: mohamed.almosly@yahoo.com

Dr. Aida Al-Kaisy

ONLINE VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN IN IRAQ

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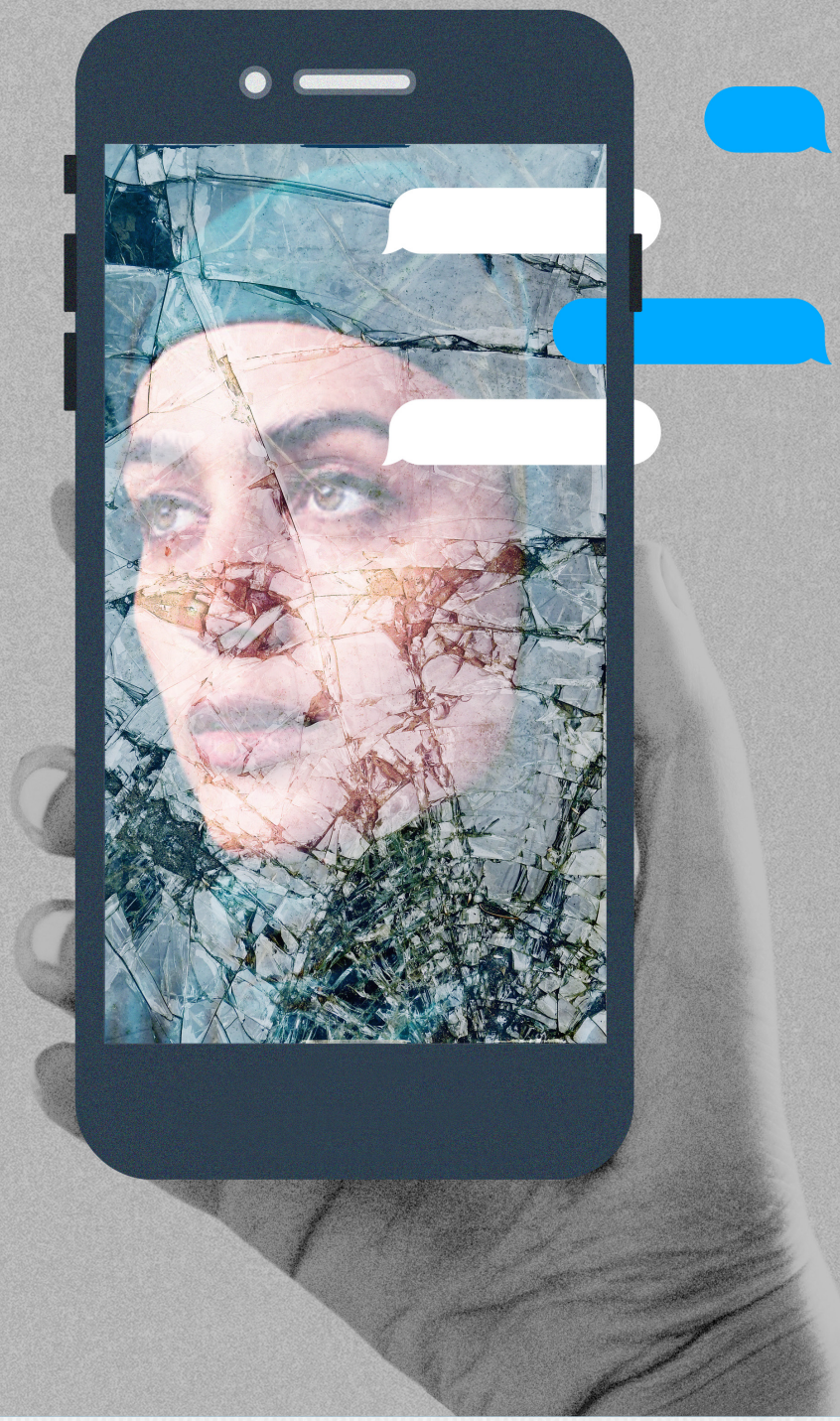

Executive summary

Online threats and violence have become entrenched in Iraq and are increasingly threatening political processes and prospects for democracy. Journalists, activists and those campaigning for change to what has become a deep-rooted corrupt political system are all facing online intimidation for their efforts. The protest movement and related political actors have been subjected to campaigns of online harassment and abuse. Disinformation campaigns are aimed at discrediting and undermining those who seek change.

In a society such as Iraq, where conservative and patriarchal norms are entrenched and dominate interpersonal and professional relations, women continue to face opposition and challenges to their presence outside of the household. For women in the public sphere, the situation is particularly treacherous. Misogyny, abuse, prejudice, and discrimination are punctuated with threats of extortion, blackmail, and violence. Hate speech, harassment and gendered disinformation are rife.

Using case studies and examples gathered through interviews with survivors of gendered online violence, the following report examines the prevalence of online violence towards women in Iraq. It assesses the predominant forms of gendered online violence in the Iraqi social media sphere and how this varies according to women as its target groups. It identifies the main targets for violence as well perpetrators and argues that official responses to online violence are then devised accordingly.

1. Introduction

On 19 August 2020, Iraqi human rights advocate and trained medic, Riham Yacoub, was assassinated by unidentified gunmen on Al Tijari Street in Iraq's second-largest city, Basra. The three other women with whom she had been travelling were also shot and injured. The murder of Yacoub was the third in a series of killings that had taken place in Basra that week. These killers had been targeting activists, in particular those who they believed had been participating in the protest movement which began in Iraq in October 2019[1]. Although Yacoub had indeed taken part in initial protests in Basra, she had withdrawn from the movement after receiving threats to her life following the circulation of pictures of her at the US Embassy on social media platforms. A fake video of her as a leader in the protests has continued to circulate even after her untimely death. She was depicted as part of a network of protestors who were promoting violent protests as a means of change, a conspiracy theory aimed at discrediting the protest movement. This narrative was further enhanced with additional pictures on social media linking Yacoub to a project funded by the US Embassy in Baghdad and suggestions of collaboration in a US strategy to coordinate violent protests in Iraq.

Online threats and violence have become entrenched in Iraq and are increasingly threatening political processes and prospects for democracy. Journalists, activists and those campaigning for change to what has become a deep-rooted corrupt political system. Individuals calling powers to account in its many forms are all facing online intimidation for their efforts. The protest movement and related political actors have been subjected to campaigns of online harassment. These consist of mis- and disinformation campaigns aimed at discrediting and undermining those who seek change. With significant resistance to this change from some sectors and actors, prospects for significant change continue to diminish in Iraq.

For women in the public sphere, the situation is particularly treacherous. Misogyny, abuse, prejudice, and discrimination are punctuated with threats of extortion, blackmail, and violence. Hate speech, harassment and gendered disinformation are rife—this in a society where gender-based violence (GBV) and patriarchal attitudes have framed the treatment of Iraqi women for decades as well as informed legislative and constitutional reforms. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that such attitudes are continually playing out online. However, there is more to this growing phenomenon than misogynistic attitudes.

Much of the gendered online behaviour and violence is politically motivated, aimed at silencing dissenting voices and encouraging women to retreat from public life. This behaviour has also been seen at a more familial and community level, with what in many cases can be described as online intimate partner violence.

1 BBC (2020). Female activist killed in Basra as gunmen target protestors. BBC News online. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-53847648 [Accessed November 6 2021]

Men—husbands, brothers, and fathers—are mimicking the scare tactics seen at a macro level, emboldened, perhaps, by the culture of impunity that exists around political harassment online. As a result, microaggressions against women online are becoming dangerously commonplace.

The following report will examine the prevalence of online violence towards women in Iraq. It will begin by defining online violence. It then goes on to identify the predominant forms of gendered online violence in the Iraqi social media sphere and how this varies according to target groups. It will consider the main targets for such violence as well its perpetrators and argue that official responses to online violence are then devised accordingly. Using case studies and examples gathered through interviews with survivors of gendered online violence, it will consider the relationship between online and offline violence and its impact on women's political participation in Iraq as well as their long-term safety and security.

2. What is Gendered Online Violence?

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women defines gender-based violence (GBV) as 'violence which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionality and, as such, is a violation of their human rights.' This definition includes physical, sexual and psycho-social forms of violence as well as threats of violence, control, and oppression.[2] The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) as '[a]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.' This includes the most prevalent form of violence, intimate partner violence, as well as sexual and physical violence.[3]

Online GBV occurs in comparable situations to that where violence occurs offline in the physical world. Violence and harassment of women online, mainly through social media channels and online communications platforms, includes everything from threats of physical and sexual violence, gendered hate speech, bullying, trolling, and stalking to sharing private information (doxing) or synthetically generated videos commonly known as 'deep fakes', as well as gendered disinformation,[4] each of which are often used as part of a concerted attack on women, known as a 'pile-on'. These attacks can come from unknown sources and networks, 'trolls' and 'electronic armies', or from people who are frequently personally known male partners, colleagues or family members. In some cases, online attacks are politically motivated, often driven by governments and those in power.

Although men experience online violence and harassment, when women are targeted, it becomes gendered, with misogynistic hate speech and intimidation predominant. A research study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2021 found that the global incidence of online violence against women was 85%, but that the figure for the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region was much higher at 98%. The study also found that countries with entrenched patterns of gender inequality tended to have a higher incidence of online violence towards women. It demonstrated that in the majority of cases women knew the perpetrators of the online violence, which suggests that the lines between on and offline violence are no longer distinct.(5)

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2 UN Women (2021) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Available at: https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm [Accessed October 25 2021].

3 United Nations (2021) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Available at: https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/48/104 [Accessed October 25 2021].

4 Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. Available at: https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

5 Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. Available at: https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

Online violence differs from offline in several ways. Online violence can happen at any time or any place as the need for physical contact is removed. Social media and online tools are available to anyone, which enables a greater number of bad or malicious actors. While many perpetrators of online violence are known to their targets, it is possible to remain unknown, which can see many abusers go unchecked and puts the onus on the target to remove herself from an abusive space. While it is essential to differentiate between on and offline violence, there is evidence suggesting that the two are interconnected. Online abuse and violence often mimic the gendered language and forms of offline violence, particularly in societies characterised by structural and cultural violence through the use of newer technologies. High-profile incidents such as the murder of the British MP Jo Cox in 2016 have been linked to subsequent online abuse and have resulted in devastating consequences[6]. Although it might be farfetched to suggest that online violence leads directly to offline violence without comprehensive research, social media and online abuse are playing an integral role in the blueprint for gendered violence.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) acknowledges cyberbullying as a form of violence against women in elections, as well as its impact on women's participation at all levels in election periods, from voting to candidacy to activism.[7] The effect that this has on enabling free and fair democratic elections and the democratic process as a whole is devastating. The predominant outcome intended of online violence in all forms is a silencing of diverse and often oppositional voices. Not only are women's rights being threatened, the implications for democracy and national security are also alarming.

6 Forster, K. (2016). Jo Cox death: Call for violent threats towards female MPs to be taken more seriously. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jo-cox-dead-violent-threats-online-abuse-natalie-mcgarry-trolls-a7086436.html [Accessed November 6 2021].

7 Huber, J. and Kammerud, L. (2016). Violence against women in elections: A framework for assessment, monitoring, and response. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. Available at: https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/vawie_framework.pdf [Accessed September 19, 2021].

3. Methodology

There are several reasons for this research paper's specific focus on online violence towards women in Iraq. Social media usage is becoming prolific in Iraq, in particular among young people, and it is replacing more traditional media platforms, such as forums, where information is gathered, shared and discussed. Younger generations in Iraq are becoming more vocal in their opposition to the political system and corrupt leadership. They are increasingly seen as a threat to the 'bad actors' who wish to maintain the status quo and who are also turning to online platforms to silence such voices.[8] In Iraq, as is the case in many fragile states, women are often leading the charge for democratic and socio-cultural change, in particular against the conservative and patriarchal values that are embraced by many of Iraq's state and sub-state actors. Iraqi women are therefore facing a dual-threat to their participation in the public sphere: misogyny and gendered hate speech combined with state-sponsored gendered disinformation. This paper will contribute to the wider literature about online violence against women by providing an empirical country study of the context in Iraq.

The research framework guiding the baseline study is centred on the following research question:

What is the relationship between online gendered violence and women's participation in public and political life?

This study set out to answer this question to develop a set of clear and actionable recommendations for international development and civil society organisations who are working in this space to take forward in their programming. It seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

- What are the different types of online gendered violence that exist in Iraq? Who are the main perpetrators?
- Who are the main targets of online gendered violence? How does gendered online violence differ according to targeted groups?
- What are the different types of actions taken by women who are victims of gendered online violence? How do different targets react?
- How does gendered online violence transition into the physical space? What are the outcomes?
- What are the responses to gendered online violence at an individual level, a community level and a national/political level?
- What recommendations can be made to relevant stakeholder groups?

8 Silva, John (2019) Spotting social media 'bad actors'. Newslit.org. Available at: https://newslit.org/educators/civic-blog/spotting-social-media-bad-actors/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

The study used the following combined methods for data collection:

Desk Research: A thorough analysis and interrogation of existing literature was conducted, including an assessment of available quantitative, qualitative, academic and policy-related research pertaining to the socio-political context of the country, gender-related initiatives, hate speech in Iraq, and relevant studies or needs assessments. The consultant also drew on the data and findings collected from two key global studies which have been published recently on the subject of online violence: 'The Chilling,' a research study published by UNESCO in April 2021, which examined the growing phenomena of online violence towards women journalists around the world; and a quantitative study published by the Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women', which measured the global dominance of online violence against women, with a more specific regional focus on the MENA region.

In-depth structured and semi-structured Interviews: The researcher mapped and identified key informants and stakeholders across the media, policy and civil society landscape in Iraq. Interviews with 19 key informants were conducted remotely (via Skype or WhatsApp). Interviewees were identified and selected based on their experience of online harassment and gendered hate speech. A series of qualitative projective techniques, known as vignettes, were used to better understand how women react to online harassment. The vignettes technique can be useful in exploring complex topics that participants might otherwise find difficult, even traumatic, to discuss. Commenting on a story is often less personal than talking about direct experience and is therefore viewed by participants as being less hostile. Vignettes give participants better control over the interview process by allowing them to decide when they introduce their own experiences to demonstrate their responses to the stories. A focus group discussion (FGD) between 15 women journalists and activists also took place in Baghdad in July 2021, where the issue of online violence against women in the public sphere was discussed. For security purposes, the names of all participants have not been used in this paper.

These methods enabled the project to develop analysis and recommendations to combat online gendered violence in Iraq.

It should be noted here that some of the participants who were identified and approached refused to be interviewed about online violence. This was out of a combination of fear for their safety by speaking out and a sense of shame. Some commented that the subject was a sensitive one with which they did not want to be associated. This was particularly heightened amongst the women who were candidates in the upcoming national elections.

All of the names used in the case studies have been changed to protect the identities of the women who have been subjected to online violence. In some of the case studies, specific details have been altered or removed to prevent identification.

4. Political Context

It is clear from the events of the last 18 years that multiple forms of violence have been the key determinants in the political and social development of post-2003 Iraq. The process of state-building, which has been marked by war and conflict, has allowed a corrupt and abusive political system, one defined by partisanship and intense polarisation, to become widespread in the country. It is important therefore to take into consideration the role that war and violence have played and continue to play in the formation of identity in Iraq. Iraqis have grown up in a context where, albeit to greater and lesser degrees, physical and symbolic violence have characterised both governance and dissent. Paramilitary-led violence in post-2003 Iraq has been exacerbated by the prevailing political and socio-cultural conditions.[9] The rise of these paramilitary groups continues to sustain both state-society tensions and inter-communal cleavages. Filling the governance void left by the state, as the state continually fails to deliver security, stability, and even basic services, officially sanctioned armed groups are aggressive in their targeting and condoning of violence against activists and those working for change.

A widespread protest movement in Iraq, active since 2011, has become more unified and significant since October 2019. While protesters and activists have been subjected to multiple forms of violence and intimidation, they have actively renounced the current corrupt political system, calling for early national elections to be held in Iraq, now due to take place on October 10th, 2021. In-fighting between political parties and blocs in the run-up to the election, while commonplace in previous election periods, has been even more ferocious, with some parties calling for a boycott of the elections and withdrawing their candidates. Both traditional and social media platforms have become battlegrounds where hate speech and disinformation are rife as a means of undermining and discrediting political opponents. Disinformation against activists and the protest movement have revolved mainly around the spreading of false narratives alleging their involvement and funding from US and Gulf countries as well as being against Islamic values.

In previous election periods, gendered hate speech and misogynistic disinformation have resulted in a number of female candidates withdrawing from their campaigns. Accusations around sexual behaviour and even deviancy were common and used as a means of dishonouring women in a society dominated by conservative and religious values.[10] First reported in the 2014 elections, this situation has become more dangerous as armed groups and paramilitary forces continue to act with impunity. Fear amongst women in the public sphere is more heightened as online abuse and violence have become normalised by the political class and wider sub-state system.

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9 Renad Mansour, 'Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state of Iraq', Chatham House, 25 February 2021. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021-02-25-networks-of-power-mansour.pdf (Accessed October 25 2021).

10 Tajali, M. and Farhan, S. (2018). Women's candidacy and violence against women in the politics of Iraq. Jadaliyya. Available at: https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/37780 [Accessed September 19 2021].

5. Conditions for Women and Girls in Iraq

Decades of war and conflict, ruthless dictatorships, brutal sanctions, and failed state-building attempts have all had an impact on the environment in which women and girls in Iraq live and work. Violence and GBV are accelerated in times of conflict and the safety of women and girls became less paramount with the decimation of armies and industries through long-term wars, from the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s to the invasion of Iraq in 2003.[11] Over time, women became less present in the workforce as employment opportunities for them decreased because of war and its subsequent economic impact. Men were given priority over women through better access to education as well as a greater presence in the Iraqi public sphere, leaving women obligated to withdraw into more traditional roles of mothers, homebuilders and nation bearers.[12]

After the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent state-building experiment which ensued, state policies and legislation, drawn up mainly by men (Iraqis and others), neglected to consider the fundamental role that women could play in the development of a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. The Iraqi Women's Movement was active at the time the constitution was drafted and lobbied the drafting committee to include a guarantee of women's rights in the constitution; their efforts were largely ignored.[13] Legislation such as the Iraqi Penal Code, which decriminalises libel and defamation, and the Personal Status Law sees gender equality continually challenged, with allowances for physical violence in marriage in the former and inadequate protections for women in marriage, divorce or inheritance in the latter. Inherent incongruities and ambiguities in the legal framework combine with a prevailing milieu of lawlessness to see women inadequately protected and continually undermined.

Violence against women (VAW) remains a clear issue in Iraqi society and culture, an issue that has been further exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic.[14] The Iraqi government acceded to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (CEDAW) in 1986 but not all gender justice aspects have been recognised and discrimination remain. While there is a domestic violence law that protects women and girls in the Kurdish Region of Iraq, there is no national law and the Penal Code remains the only source of legislation to govern VAW. [15]

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11 Ali, Zahra. 2018. Women and Gender in Iraq: Between Nation-Building and Fragmentation Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

12 Enloe, Cynthia. 2010. Nomo's War, Emma's War: Making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War. University of California Press: California.

13 OCHA Services (2005) Iraqi women hold third sit-in demonstration to demand rights in new Constitution. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraqi-women-hold-third-sit-demonstration-demand-rights-new-constitution [Accessed October 27 2021].

14 OCHA Services (2020) Covid-19 exacerbating gender-based violence in Iraq. OCHA. Available at: https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/covid-19-exacerbating-gender-based-violence-iraq-enarku [Accessed September 19 2021].

15 UNDP (2018) Iraq: Gender Justice and the Law. Available at: https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Iraq%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf [Accessed October 27 2021].

Conservative religious values continue to be prevalent in Iraq. Tribal and religious codes are dominant in many provinces and often inform the status and treatment of women.[16] Women are perceived through honour-based codes, which are in turn underpinned by patriarchal attitudes and social norms.[17] This leaves Iraqi women struggling to navigate themselves in a world where they are constantly deemed to be immoral and un-Islamic.

Women in the public sphere, from television reporters and presenters to members of parliament and government representatives, are endlessly having to consider how their private and personal lives might be conceived by the wider public, as they are treated as commodities or even public property. More recently, women who have been active in the human rights and protest movements have reported being subjected to harassment and abuse with insinuations of involvement with male colleagues and slurs on their and their family's 'honour'. There is no legislation to regulate this abuse—either on or offline. A recent draft of the cybercrimes law drew considerable criticism from media freedom activists and human rights organisations due to its threats to freedom of expression.[18]

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16 UNDP (2018). Iraq: Gender Justice and the Law. United Nations Development Programme. Available at: https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Iraq%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf [Accessed November 8 2021].

17 CEDAW (2019). Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination against Women and Girls in Iraq. CEDAW multiple authors. Available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_CSS_IRQ_40949_E.docx [Accessed November 8 2021].

18 Human Rights Watch (2020) Iraq: Scrap Bill to Restrict Free Speech. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/25/iraq-scrap-bill-restrict-free-speech [Accessed October 27 2021].

6. Online Violence against Women in Iraq

There are two clear frameworks with which to assess the incidence and impact of online violence towards women in Iraq. The first is one, which views VAW, in all of its forms, as underpinned by misogynistic attitudes and discriminatory gender norms. In Iraq, empirical research has shown that both women and men hold different types of aggressive and hostile views of women which impacts the possibilities for gender equality.[19] There is also evidence to suggest that in such patriarchal societies, citizens are more likely to eschew tolerance and embrace more violent and often extremist outlooks.[20]

The second framework is that which encompasses gendered disinformation and state-sponsored attacks on freedom of expression and women's political participation. This second framework recognises that disinformation is rife in the Iraqi media landscape and used as a tactic against both men and women. However, while similar disinformation narratives are used, they become highly gendered when directed at women. The disinformation framework allows for an analysis that acknowledges that online violence in some cases can be used as a political tool by bad actors within the state and its apparatus. The two frameworks are not mutually exclusive. Both are ultimately aimed at exposing the silencing and exclusion of women's voices from the public sphere, threatening the already fragile chances for democracy and peace.

The Economist Intelligence Unit's report on global online violence identified nine prevalent intimidation strategies used to threaten women.[21] In descending order of incidence, these are: misinformation and defamation; cyber harassment; hate speech; impersonation; hacking and stalking; astroturfing[22]; video- and image-based abuse; doxing;[23] and violent threats. The researcher found that these nine strategies were clearly noticeable in Iraq. Doxing was the only strategy that was less likely to be observed in this research study, although an in-depth content analysis or quantitative exercise might reveal otherwise. Other characteristics emerged which are particular to the context of the Iraqi socio-cultural and political landscape. In the case of Iraq, it is evident that a mixture of threat tactics are being used by multiple actors in order to undermine the presence and condition of women in society, a point which will be examined further in this paper.

It is also evident from this research that online violence in its many forms is happening

19 Al-Kaisy, Aida (2020). A gender analysis of the media landscape in Iraq. Internews. Available at: https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/2020-04/Internews_gender-analysis_media_landscape_iraq_2020-04.pdf [Accessed September 19 2021].

20 UNDP and UN Women. 2020. eds. Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia. United Nations.

21 Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. Available at: https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

22 Defined as a 'coordinated effort to concurrently share damaging content across platforms' in the EIU report. Ibid.

23 Defined as 'posting personal real world information such as addresses to perpetuate violence' in the EIU report. Ibid.

at both the personal and the public levels. In many cases, online threats are not only translating into offline dangers, but they are clearly seeing women at all levels retreating from society.

6.1 Who are the main targets and perpetrators of online violence against women?

In a society such as Iraq, where conservative and patriarchal norms are entrenched and dominate interpersonal and professional relations, women continue to face opposition and challenges to their presence outside of the household. Furthermore, there are few modes of redress available to them legally or via the state and its related institutions. This is not cultural essentialism but the product of deep-rooted systems of power, which are maintained to preserve the positions of patriarchal elites. The Iraqi legal system and penal code in particular allows for physical violence against a spouse and children and perpetuates stereotypical roles of men and women in society.[24] The struggle against VAW rests predominantly in the hands of civil society with few official institutions tasked with dealing with social issues.[25] Although a bill to combat domestic violence has been submitted to parliament on a number of occasions, it has not yet been passed, despite some support from particular parliamentary factions in government.[26] In a context where GBV is in many ways permitted by the state and where notions of honour inform social relations and roles and where digital security is low priority, it is unsurprising then that the online safety and security of women is compromised on an everyday basis, and in both the private and public spheres. While a cross-section of women and girls are targeted by online violence, it is those women who are seen to be subverting traditional gender roles in Iraqi society, observed through their online activity and presence on social media, that are the main targets.

6.1.1. Intimate partners

Young women who interact with men online are prime targets for online abuse, in particular cyber harassment, video and image abuse, and hacking. These women are targeted by male family members, friends or partners and as such this type of violence can be considered to be a form of intimate partner violence. Women who share private images with a man who they consider to be trusted are placed at risk through the subsequent non-consensual sharing of those images. Similarly, women who are attempting to carve out independence, or a career, or those at university are subject to online abuse. Again, the perpetrators are male and most often male relatives or friends.

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24 Alkhudary, Taif (2020) Iraqi women are engaged in a struggle for their rights. London School of Economics. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2020/06/15/iraqi-women-are-engaged-in-a-struggle-for-their-rights/ [Accessed September 19 2020].

25 Foltyn, Simone (2021) Iraqi women struggle to escape abuse as domestic violence rises. Al Jazeera. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/12/iraqi-women-struggle-to-escape-abuse-as-domestic-violence-rises [Accessed September 19 2020].

26 OHCHR (2020) Safety at home, an illusion for far too many women in Iraq. OHCHR. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DomesticViolenceIraq.aspx [Accessed October 25 2021].

Interviewees who had experienced online abuse as well as CSO and community actors all noted that, in cases where the male perpetrator was known to the victim, the intention was to intimidate and exert control. The method, where the threat of sharing images mainly to blackmail to extort money or sexual favours, is known as 'sextortion' and is a common phenomenon in Iraq. It has also been described as 'revenge porn' by some with a predominance of ex-partners involved in this type of abuse.[27] Threats of sharing the images with male family members are common.

6.1.2. Social media influencers

The brutal killing of beauty blogger and Instagram celebrity Tara Fares in September 2018 brought the safety and security of women social media influencers to the attention of both the Iraqi and international communities. Fares was vocal about the domestic violence she had suffered at the hands of her husband who was known to have ties to armed groups and tribes in Iraq. When they separated, he published intimate photos of her online as means of shaming her but defiantly she continued to speak out against traditional portrays of women and men in Iraq, and violated all social norms with her appearance in the process. Fares suffered endless online abuse, from hate speech to gendered disinformation to threats, before her fatal shooting by an unknown gunman who has yet to be caught.[28] Although Fares had a very high profile, it is not uncommon for women who are active on social media and who call out social norms, corruption or exploitation to experience online abuse. The main types of abuse in this case tend to be cyber-harassment, hate speech or violent threats. In most cases, sexual harassment and predatory behaviour online are used and references to a woman and her family's honour become weaponised.

Once I posted a video from Palestine that was human-rights related and one of my relatives commented that I needed to study religion, that my father hadn't brought me up properly and that I should wear a hijab.

References to physical appearance are also common and many women noted that men would often initially comment and engage in what might appear to be innocent conversation which would then escalate into sexual syntax. Images are often doctored, with one interviewee telling of how a post with a picture of her wearing 3 rings on her hand was shared across social media with a circle around her hand highlighting what was seen as a controversial choice. The likes start increasing up to 200 if my picture is on the post. This is then followed by comments on the way I look. There is an unnatural thirst for pictures of women. They don't even read what is written, they just look at the picture and comment.

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27 Bajec, Alessandra (2019) Scores of Iraqi women victim to online sexual blackmail. The New Arab. Available at: https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/iraqi-women-victim-online-sexual-blackmail [Accessed September 19 2020].

28 Callaghan, Louise and al- Salhy, Suadad (2019). The death of Tara Fares: the sinister truth about the Iraqi influencer's murder. The Times. Available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tara-fares-iraq-instagram-shot-baghdad-0v2c3r37p [Accessed October 25 2021].

6.1.3. Journalists

The growth of online abuse and violence towards women journalists is recognised as a global issue. A study entitled "The Chilling", published by UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists' (ICFJ), finds that there has not only been an increase in online violence but that these campaigns are coordinated attacks whose intention is to scare journalists and dissuade them from investigating topics which might challenge power and corruption.[29] In Iraq, women journalists are targeted for their reporting as well as their gender. Such disinformation, threats, and hate speech are all misogynistic in nature although their ultimate purpose is politically-motivated intimidation and the threat of harm. Triggers in reporting include references to Iran or the paramilitary groups which are closely associated with Iraq as well as reporting on topics which are construed to be transgressing social norms around such issues as sexuality. The perpetrators are often state or state-sponsored actors, in particular those associated with armed paramilitary groups. Intersectional abuse is also common against women journalists and misogynistic language is intertwined with homophobic abuse and hate speech designed to undermine and discredit. It is likely that women journalists, activists, and political figures are being chosen because of their gender as women are more likely to seek change, as recognised by the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals SDGs.[30]

6.1.4. Activists

In the October 2019 protest movement that escalated across Iraq, women played an active role in calling power to account and for an end to corruption as well as demanding better political and human rights. Many broke major prohibitions in Iraqi society such as remaining overnight in the protest squares alongside male peers, or posting pictures on social media of life and violence from the protest arena. In some cases, women were seen to be leading protests calling for gender equality and women's rights, with videos circulated of women activists from Basra and Baghdad in particular. Unfortunately, this group has been a primary target of online abuse of the most threatening and violent kind.

During the period of the October protests, we all took part and people would find you online, curse you and threaten you.

Women activists are most likely to receive violent threats from fake accounts and unknown sources demanding they remove themselves from both the public and online spheres. Disinformation against the protest movement has been rife in Iraq, focusing on anti-Islamic and pro-Western narratives as a means of discredit and intimidation, in blatant astroturfing attacks. In the case of women protestors, false accounts of women

29 Posetti, J., Shabbir, N. and Maynard, D et al (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. UNESCO. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/the-chilling.pdf [Accessed September 19 2020].

30 UN Women (2021) Facts and figures. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures [Accessed September 19 2021].

activists having extra-marital relationships, or doctored images of them as sex workers or performing sexual acts are all common (examples demonstrated in the case studies further in this study).

6.1.5. Political figures and electoral candidates

With elections planned for October 2021, there is a concern that women candidates will face online abuse and attacks, as was seen in the 2014 and 2018 elections in Iraq. The case of Intithar Al Shimiri, outlined in more detail later in this report, is one of many that went unprosecuted. Deep fake videos of women candidates allegedly performing sexual acts are used a means of defamation and harassment in some cases. In others, tactics include hacking and accessing private pictures which are then shared via social media. Dr Heshu Rebwar Ali, a candidate for the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) in 2018, was subject to harassment when a video of her in a short dress at a private event circulated ahead of the election.[31] Cyber harassment is also rife and used as a means of intimidation in order to dissuade women from standing or ultimately withdrawing their candidacy if they do. Even those who remain undeterred are often asked to step down by their parties who are concerned about reputational damage. In this case, the main perpetrators are political actors, political parties and their allies although the blurred lines between the parties and armed groups mean that these perpetrators remain in the shadows.

The threats are coming from the paramilitary groups, the political class and those in power. This is linked to them not wanting women to get power. They want to keep them working at a civil society level and nothing more.

Women candidates are likely to push for women's rights and gender equality, which are not at the forefront of the agendas of conservative political parties. With a fixed quota for representation of women in the General National Council of 25% (30% in the Kurdish parliament), parties are keen to keep close tabs on the women that are elected as a result of quotas and ensure that they will serve to propagate their often religious and likely corrupt priorities.(32)

6.2. Types of Online Violence

The following section will outline specific forms of online violence in Iraq, using the types identified in the Economist Intelligence Unit report, with examples collected from interviews to illustrate their intrinsic nature.

6.2.1. Misinformation and Disinformation

This form of online violence towards women is rife in Iraq and evolving into a number of dangerous forms. Di Meco defines gendered disinformation as 'the spread of deceptive

31 BBC News (2018) Iraqi women election candidates targeted for abuse gain UN support. BBC. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-43894391 [Accessed September 19 2021].

32 Gender Concerns (2021) Country in Focus: Iraq. Available at: http://www.genderconcerns.org/countries-in-focus/iraq/ [Accessed October 25 2021].

or inaccurate information and images against women political leaders, journalists and female public figures, following storylines that often draw on misogyny, as well as gender stereotypes around the role of women.'[33]

Smear campaigns are a common tool used to spread false information with the deliberate intention of insulting and humiliating a woman's character based on her gender. In Iraq, as with many conservative and religious societies, smear campaigns which discredit women based on their honour. Suggestions of sexual relations are common and are used to undermine a woman's character as well as her engagement in public and political life. Women interviewed noted that gendered disinformation campaigns and tactics would follow their involvement in civil or political protests, publication of a political piece or announcement of candidacy for election. In all cases, suggestions that these women are trying to subvert traditional and Islamic values are implicit.

The use of disinformation also extends further to include political smears on the basis of what might be considered unsavoury affiliations. For example, suggesting a woman is Baathist or that she has close connections with Western governments and embassies is an oft-used device. This is in line with disinformation that is seen across the board in Iraq, aimed at activists and protestors in the main, women and men, where accusations range from receiving financial support from the United States government to contradicting Islamic values. However, a gendered element is added when women are targeted. The allegation that other women will follow suit should this behaviour be allowed to continue underpins these campaigns. This type of online violence and gendered disinformation, which targets high-profile women in the public and political spheres, employs sensational images and narratives in order to further the spread of its content. This works not only amongst social media users but also relies on the algorithms of social media platforms which rank content according to higher engagement, which ultimately then leads to more comments and shares.[34] This type of abuse therefore is likely to proliferate widely.

Case study: (Intithar Al Shimiri), former MP and academic, Baghdad

In this case study, the real name has been used due to the high-profile nature of this case in Iraq and the ubiquity of available information about it in the media.

I have a liberal point of view and wanted to build a civil country. I decided after 2003 to get involved in politics and stood with a political party. I began to make a name as being a strong independent woman who speaks out against corruption. I was eventually approached by the Dawa party to stand with them and, due to my academic background,

33 Di Meco, Lucina (2020) Online Threats to Women's Political Participation and The Need for a Multi-Stakeholder, Cohesive Approach to Address Them. UN Women. Available at: https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/65/egm/di%20meco_online%20threats_ep8_egmcsw65.pdf?la=en&vs=1511 [Accessed September 19 2021].

34 Meserole, Chris (2018) How misinformation spreads on social media – and what to do about it. Brookings Institute. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/09/how-misinformation-spreads-on-social-media-and-what-to-do-about-it/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

I was chosen as a candidate for the Minister of Higher Education. At one point during the campaign, I did an interview on Al Sharqiya Channel in Amman with someone else from the Sadrist Movement who asked me how I had got involved with the Dawa Party. I ended up talking maybe too much about not having connections with Iran. That was when it started. I returned to Baghdad and received a call on the mobile from a Canadian number via WhatsApp. The man's voice told me to drop out of the election. I asked him who he was and he said if you don't drop out, we will come to your house and kill you and your husband. I laughed and said, 'How do you know I will win' and he said, 'You will win'. I hung up and they called again repeating the same threat. I called the party and told them what had happened and they told me not to worry as I was protected by the mukhabarat (secret service). I then received another call from a man with a strong Iraqi accent saying I would lose my life if I carried on in the election. When I pushed back against him, he told me I would pay the price. A call the following day, this time from an Iraqi number, demanding a payment of 1 million dinar which I refused. Another call came this time demanding 750k dinar. Then the next day I got a call from my friend telling me that there was a video of me on Facebook that was compromising. It was a fake video posted by an account under the name Ahmed al Askari. When we looked into it, we discovered that the account was created in Dubai. I immediately pulled out of the elections at the request of my party. My lawyer eventually found the person who had set up the account. He was based in Ras Al Khaimah (United Arab Emirates) and admitted that he had been paid $5000 by an Iraqi political party to post the video. The video was a deep fake, suggesting that I had relations with one of my students, a Saudi man. They had put my face on the video of another person.

6.2.2. Cyber harassment

Harassment online takes the form of repeated messages, posts or images, which are used to intimidate women who are active in the public sphere for both political and personal purposes. In Iraq, there appears to be a high frequency of male partners using online platforms as a means of intimidation, degradation and control. This can begin with partners monitoring social media behaviour and unfolding to include abuse via social media and the threat and eventual sharing of what might be considered intimate images and video footage. Threats of physical abuse offline are common in this form of harassment. Even more prevalent is the occurrence of extortion and blackmail. Requests for large sums of money to preserve a woman's 'honour' are commonplace, as are demands for sexual favours. The term 'intimate partner violence' is used in this context and refers to a husband or male friend who is abusive online, using strategies associated with emotional bullying offline.[35] In the case of a male friend, a request for sexual favours will often accompany the threat of sharing what might be deemed to be compromising images.

35 WHO (2021) Understanding and addressing violence against women. World Health Organisation. Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/77432/WHO_RHR_12.36_eng.pdf [Accessed September 19 2021].

This practice has become so common in Iraq that a recent drama series was aired on Iraqi television called 'Virus' which followed a number of different forms of cyber harassment and examined their manifestations and implications offline. The series looked at the impact on Iraqi society and family relations, while also challenging the role of patriarchal and religious values in how Iraqi society deals with such cases. Anecdotally, it has been noted that public reaction to the series was mixed although most of the interviewees recognised that the series reflected a very important issue for the country.

Case study: Fatin, housewife

I started receiving threats from one of my husband's closest friends via social media platforms. He began by saying he would share personal photographs and details online unless I became close to him. He then came around to the house one day and tried to touch me in front of my husband. I was shocked when my husband started taking photos of what was going on. My husband then threatened to post the images online, saying he was going to divorce me. He threw me out of the house, and I had to take my children and go stay with my sister. It did go to court as he was asking for money from my family. In the end, he used the excuse of being unstable of mind and was not prosecuted.

Case study: Dina, civil servant, Anbar

It was not long after I got married when pictures of me started appearing on various Facebook accounts of people who I vaguely knew. It didn't take long to realise that it was my new husband and that he was trying to blackmail my parents for money. I left him and he then started making claims on Facebook that I was trying to steal money from him. He then approached my sister on Facebook and threatened to publish more images of me if she did not start a relationship with him. He won't accept a divorce and my parents are putting pressure on me to go back to him because of the children. I work in the public sector and divorce is not acceptable. I went to the community police and they tried to get us to reconcile. I went to court and explained everything to the judge only to be told by him that, although he understood my plight, there was no law to support me. I tried the official way and it didn't work. I even tried via friends to see if they could change his mind and that didn't work.

6.2.3. Hate speech

According to UNESCO, '[h]ate speech online is situated at the intersection of multiple tensions: it is the expression of conflicts between different groups within and across societies; it is a vivid example of how technologies with a transformative potential such as the internet bring with them both opportunities and challenges; and it implies complex balancing between fundamental rights and principles, including freedom of expression and the defence of human dignity.'[36]

36 Gagliardone, I., Danit, G. and Alves, T. (2015). Countering online hate speech. UNESCO. Available at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231 [Accessed September 19 2021].

The targets of online hate speech are more likely to be women and minority groups. It is used as a means of normalising hate towards a particular group or community.

The rise of hate speech online has been recognised in a number of reports and studies on Iraq. Over 50% of the Iraqi population are active on social media, which has become an integral part of the Iraqi public sphere and a key forum for debate and the exchange of views.(37) The relative privacy of the Internet and anonymity that virtual interactions can offer has seen a growth in online dialogue from vulnerable groups. However, the response to this has been the proliferation of hate speech, harassment, and threats in the digital space in order to silence those voices which are seen to challenge entrenched and accepted socio-political narratives. Much of this online abuse has been targeted at activists in the protest movement. Protestors have been accused of political affiliations with Western and American interests with no loyalty to Iraq. Activists are threatened via their social media accounts and YouTube where false information and accusations are deliberately propagated in order to discredit their intentions. Gender often plays a role as women activists are targeted. According to a report by the Tahrir Institute for Middle East policy,

Militia affiliates turned the popular trending hashtag #بناتك_يا_وطن ("the homeland's daughters")—launched in solidarity with the February 13 women's marches—into #عاهراتك_يا_وطن ("the homeland's whores"). Militias also fabricated baseless accusations online, alleging promiscuity at protest sit-ins and tents. Sexual defamation has dangerous consequences, especially for women and girls who are at risk of "honour killings."(38)

The same report also found that online attacks on those who are active in the Iraqi public sphere can result in physical violence. In August 2020, an online smear campaign against the television channel Dijla ended in the burning down of their offices after calls to attack the station were published online.(39) There have been similar instances where protestors have been kidnapped or abused following published abuse and calls for violence.(40)

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37 France 24 (2021). Misinformation thrives in Iraq's virtual battlegrounds. Available at: https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210528-misinformation-thrives-in-iraq-s-virtual-battlegrounds [Accessed October 26 2021].

38 Shea, J. and Al-Hassani, R. (2021) Hate speech, social media and political violence in Iraq: virtual civil society and upheaval. Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy. Available at: https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/hate-speech-social-media-and-political-violence-in-iraq-virtual-civil-society-and-upheaval/ [Accessed September 19 2021].

39 Dijla TV is Amman-based, owned by Jamal al-Karbouli, an Iraqi politician who is head of the National Movement for Development and Reform party (Alhal). It is one of the more popular news channels in Iraq and has experienced a number of attacks on its offices and threats towards its journalists as well as revoking of its license to broadcast by the CMC in September 2020 for broadcasting a concert during Ashura and therefore allegedly offending Iraqi Shias.

40 OHCHR (2021) Human Rights Violations and Abuses in the Context of Demonstrations in Iraq October 2019 to April 2020. UNAMI. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/Demonstrations-Iraq-UNAMI-OHCHR-report.pdf [Accessed October 26 2021].

PeaceTech Lab in Iraq[41] recently produced a ''Lexicon of Hate Speech Terms' from Iraqi social media.[42] Through media monitoring, the glossary referenced a number of terms which can be classified as hate speech, amongst them Eahira (Whore) which is used to undermine women by questioning their and their family's honour and 'Emo' as a homophobic term to belittle those who are considered to be LGBT+. It is also a common tactic to associate or accuse women of being sympathetic to and representative of LGBT+ communities in Iraq in order to undermine them and position them as subverting traditional and Islamic values and, by extension, Iraqi society. Another common form of online hate speech is sectarian in nature, aimed particularly towards those who might be considered to be Sunni. Again, the use of the term Baathist as an insult is a common form of hate speech as it suggests an unsavoury past affiliation with the former regime.

There are no laws that adequately address the prevalence of hate speech in Iraq. A report by Human Rights Watch in 2020 called on the Iraqi government to reform its legal system in relation to freedom of expression, claiming that 'vaguely worded laws...allow prosecutors to bring criminal charges for opinions they object to' rather than minimising the use of hate speech.[43] The report claims that the government's reliance on archaic laws which have remained in place since the Baathist regime continue to be used to silence opposition.

Case Study: Halima, activist, Basra

I was active in the Tishreen protests in 2019 and had posted some pictures of myself on social media. The UN got in touch with me and asked if they could use one of my pictures in a report that they were writing on the protest. I gave them my permission and it was published. The next day, the picture began circulating on social media. Some people commented positively but the majority of the comments were negative. They said I was a Baathist and that my father was a Baathist. They suggested I had 'taken my clothes off' for the UN. Then rumours began to circulate that I had connections and was working with the United States and British embassies. I have no links to either of these embassies and was working for a civil society organisation at the time. It carried on. They posted a photograph of me wearing civilian clothes and without a hijab and said that I want to be an American. Sometimes the videos of my work from television also go on social media. They also posted an old video of me talking about Iranian intervention in Iraq. I then got so many messages, threats, for example 'we will step on your head with our shoes',

41 PeaceTech Lab is an initiative of the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) which according to their website is 'working at the intersection of technology, media, and data to devise effective means of reducing violent conflict around the globe.' More information is available at: https://www.usip.org/programs/peacetech-initiative [Accessed October 26 2021].

42 Peace Tech Lab (2021) Social media and conflict in Iraq. Available at: https://www.peacetechlab.org/iraq-lexicon [Accessed September 19 2021].

43 HRW (2020). We might call you in at any time: free speech under threat in Iraq. Human Rights Watch. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/06/15/we-might-call-you-any-time/free-speech-under-threat-iraq [Accessed November 8 2021].

attacking my honour. The messages were mostly on Facebook but also via Facebook Messenger and also on the telephone. After the last video they came and slashed my car tyres outside my house. This was after a message had arrived with a picture of Sadr but they could have just been doing this to scare me.

6.2.4. Impersonation

Inventing false online profiles in a woman's name with the intent of causing harm and distress is another form of online violence, which is commonly used and is seen in Iraq. While impersonation can be used for a number of reasons, from identity theft for financial gain to discrediting public personalities, in Iraq it appears to be used mainly for political motives and to put the person in question, and their inner circle, at risk.

Case study: Maysoon, journalist, Mosul

It was in 2014 when we were under Daish when I posted a comment regarding the Sunni leadership and their treatment of IDPs. I received a number of comments including one asking why I had not targeted the Shia leadership in my post. I then noticed that a number of personal photographs of me began to appear across the Internet. Further investigation led me to find that the same person who had commented had created two Facebook accounts in my name. On one of the accounts, he started attacking the Hashd Al Shaabi in my name. He had sent friend requests to all my contact groups and, without realising, my friends were liking political posts that they thought were mine. I contacted Facebook to take the account down but they did not reply. I was so scared. I stopped posting for a while and then changed my name on Facebook. I kept trying to close the page and then suddenly someone showed me a way to close the page after about 9 months.

6.2.5. Hacking and stalking

While the incidence of online stalking appears to be low in Iraq, possibly due to the lack of knowledge around geo- and location tracking, the frequency of digital surveillance, of activists and journalists in particular, is unrecorded and therefore unknown. There is some evidence to suggest that the government and related armed groups deploy cybersecurity technology to track protests and activists, although none of the women interviewed for this report recounted such behaviour.[44]

Hacking into electronic accounts is more widespread and this is reflected in the draft of an anti-cybercrimes law. It was eventually rejected by parliament and criticised by freedom of expression and civil society organisations, as it included imprisonment terms of up to 3 years plus a large fine for anyone sentenced for hacking.[45] Again, the hacking of accounts of protestors has been widely reported, as is evinced by case studies below.

44 Freedom House (2021) Freedom on the Net 2021: Iraq. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/iraq/freedom-net/2021 [Accessed October 26 2021].

45 Mena Rights (2021) Iraq's new draft Law on Combating Cybercrimes still contains problematic provisions restricting fundamental freedoms. Available at: https://menarights.org/en/articles/iraqs-new-draft-law-combating-cybercrimes-still-contains-problematic-provisions [Accessed October 26 2021].

Hacking into the accounts of women in Iraq is common, in particular to steal personal or intimate images for the purpose of blackmail and extortion. Facebook and Instagram are the most common applications which are hacked with some suggesting the reason being that they can often be used as a way to develop romantic relationships.

Community Police Case Studies

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior (MOI), community law enforcement officers and police forces are given some jurisdiction to deal with crimes at a local level. Women police officers work with local victims of online abuse, hacking, and blackmail to help find the perpetrators of the online violence and bring them to justice. They do face-to-face work in schools and universities, raise their profile amongst women and girls and provide both legal and moral support where necessary. A report by the London School of Economics (LSE) examining the changing role of community enforcement since ISIS found that there was increased acceptance that the needs of Iraqi women should be better addressed by a more gender representative community police force.[46]

1. We worked on a case with a girl who had just started university when she received messages from a man saying he had taken all of her photos from her social media accounts. He wanted sexual favours in return for not sharing the images. He saw how smart she was and got jealous we think. Her mother knew what was going on but blamed her and threatened to tell her father until we managed to convince the mother not to do so. The girl was nearly going to leave university but luckily a social worker got involved and they kept her place at university for her. She changed her numbers and changed everything about the way she used social media.

2. Not long ago, there was a woman who posted on social media that she was a widow and that her account had been hacked. All of her photos were stolen and they told her they were going to send her photos to family unless she cooperated. She offered money which they then tried to negotiate for a higher amount. Her account wasn't protected properly and this is an issue.

6.2.6. Astroturfing

The term astroturfing is used to describe organised campaigns online where specific messages are disseminated in support of a particular agenda. Politically motivated astroturfing is a growing issue, as seen for example in the 2016 US presidential election campaign, the Brexit referendum in the UK, and the Russian-Ukraine conflict where the use of social bots to flood social media with disinformation and propaganda is employed.[47]

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46 Watkins, J., Bardan, F. and Al-Jarba, A. (2021) Local policing in Iraqi post-ISIL. LSE Middle East Centre. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/111567/2/LocalPolicinginIraqPostISIL.pdf [Accessed September 19 2020].

47 Lorenc, Katarzyna (2021) Political online astroturfing in the 2020 United States presidential election campaign. European Consortium for Political Research. Available at: https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/57652 [Accessed October 27 2021].

In Iraq, the terms 'electronic armies' or 'electronic flies' have been employed to describe the troll farms and bots that have been created by political and armed forces to spread disinformation against those who are seen to be acting against the status quo.[48] Astroturfing against women journalists and activists is common and incorporates other forms of online violence such as gendered disinformation, video and image abuse as well as gendered hate speech.

Case study: Mona, activist

It began after 2018 when I took part in a protest in Basra. I started getting threats via social media and fake accounts flooded social media with a photograph of me at the US consul from 2018. The threats came that I should 'watch myself as we know where you live'. This carried on into 2019 as I was involved in the protests then. Fake accounts on Facebook and Instagram started posting false information about me. They photoshopped a video and put my face on that of a sex worker saying that I was trying to ruin Basra and its women. They posted things attacking both my and my family's honour. In 2019 I was reporting live from the protests and they hacked my Instagram account and started posting unsavoury sexual messages. I closed the account and opened another one but they did it again. I then started getting death threats in the square. An unknown man came up to me in my tent and said to me 'If you aren't scared for yourself then you should worry about your family.' In January 2020, I started getting phone calls with similar threats. In August 2020, there was an assassination attempt on my life. After I was released, some of the pages linked to the armed groups attacked my honour again. They said that I was lying and that it had not been an assassination attempt but that in fact my father had shot me in front of my house because I was having an illicit relationship with a man. I have now left Basra for fear of my life.

6.2.7. Video- and image-based abuse

As noted in the previous examples of online abuse outlined in this report, images and videos are frequently shared online for pernicious reasons and malicious intent. In the main, images are personal, often intimate, and at times sexual. In many cases, the images have been doctored or deep fake videos have been created to implicate a woman in a sexual act. Blackmail is often involved and sexual relations as well as money are often requested in order to prevent the images from being shared online and thus the woman's honour being besmirched.

Case study: Suhair

I became close to a family friend who used to take me to university and who said that he wanted me as his wife. As we got closer, I sent him photographs of me via WhatsApp. One day I was at an engagement party and overheard someone say that he was engaged to

48 Freedom House (2021) Freedom on the Net 2021: Iraq. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/iraq/freedom-net/2021 [Accessed October 26 2021].

be married to someone else. When I asked him what was happening, he told me that his mother did not want him to marry me. He then began the blackmail and when I ignored his requests, the pictures that I had shared with him began to be published.

Case study: Um Yasmin

A man started a relationship with my daughter asking for her hand in marriage. We eventually discovered that he was already married. He had been using a separate telephone to communicate with my daughter and his wife found the phone and some photos that had been shared between them. She began by sending the photographs to my son who wanted to kill his sister. Then she began posting on Facebook and Telegram. She would open an account, post the photos, then close the account and open a new one, posting the images again. It went on for a year. My daughter wanted to commit suicide. I did go to the community police and put an order against her and took her to court but I had to stop fighting because of the financial cost. I am a seamstress and had to sell my machine to get the money to pay for the court. My emotional state was so awful. I couldn't even sleep at night.

6.2.8. Violent Threats

Although violent threats online are the less prevalent form of online violence against women globally, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit's study, they are omnipresent in Iraq.

Case study: Shireen

I use Facebook as a platform and have a large number of followers for my live broadcasts and opinion pieces. About two years ago, I started working, writing and posting about politics, the government, and the militias calling them all to account as well as on topics such as sexuality, non-traditional relationships, and human trafficking of women. Again in 2019, I posted something about the government and the prime minister and the growing power of the militias. Heads of the paramilitary groups (names redacted for security reasons) both posted a video mocking me. I began to get threats via Sabreen news.[49] When I met the Canadian ambassador, pictures were posted even though we were talking about press freedom. They called me bint al safarat, daughter of the embassies, which is an insult. They said my mother was Baathist and that I took money from the embassies. I was eventually kidnapped near the BBC offices and Sabreen News said that I was fabricating the threats and had my own agenda. I was a candidate in the upcoming election but I have withdrawn my candidacy; so many of my colleagues have been killed or at the very least have closed their social media profiles.

49 Sabreen News is a Telegram account which is associated with the paramilitary group Asaib Ahl Al-Haq. According to a recent report published by the Washington Institute, one of its key objectives is to spread disinformation against the Iraqi government and the protest movement.

Case study: Siham

I am a university professor in law at Mosul University. I did stand in the elections in 2014 but then Daesh took over Mosul and I left the university as they said what I was teaching was unreligious. In 2016 I started working on freedom projects in Mosul with IDP camps. Then I returned to university but I carried on working in women's and human rights. I began to get threats, mainly videos via Facebook. They would send me videos of women being killed and beheaded and say this is your fate. I closed my Facebook page. The videos were posted after I stood for the elections even though I didn't win. They were from Daesh for sure.

Case study: Zeina

I had posted a picture of the Yarmouk hospital and how dirty it was, and I said Yarmouk hospital is one of the worst in the capital of Baghdad. It was my opinion on my social media page. I also wrote that most sick people around the world go into hospital with an illness and come out recovered. In our country, a sick person goes into hospital with one illness and comes out with many more illnesses. My page is quite prominent with lots of health officials following me. Someone took a screenshot of the post and they took it to Yarmouk hospital who claimed the picture was from 2007. I then heard that they were going to put a daawa out against me (take legal action) as an activist and they put my name and picture on their website. I checked and verified that the picture I had posted was definitely a recent one. So, I contacted the hospital and asked them to take my name and picture off their website. I work for the electricity ministry which is run by the same party as the health ministry and I didn't want any problems. Then their head of media started attacking me and suddenly various media channels were contacting me asking for interviews. This was a government institution attacking me, a citizen, for posting online.

7. Responses to Online Violence

With little by way of legislation to deal with the escalating threat of online violence against women, the onus has mainly fallen on the individuals who are targets of abuse to deal with the situation. At an individual level, there are a number of key actions common across the different groups, none of which are solution-driven or dealing with the issues at hand. Firstly, women are adapting their online habits. They refrain from using their own images on social media and in some cases reported using cartoons or children's images as an alternative. They often self-censor and consider the types of content they are posting and sharing. Many do not use their given names when posting or publishing pieces that might be considered to be politically controversial.

I have been working in the media for over ten years and I never write anything that puts my life in danger ... I have written on Iran, America, child marriage and divorce. When I write anything that might point towards a certain party or political agenda, I don't use my name because if I did, I would be open to threats and killing. And they don't forget; once it's online it becomes history. Our country is a country of partisan politics and nothing is going to change.

When threats escalate, the majority of women close their accounts on social media for extended periods of time or open new accounts under different names. Journalists and activists who were interviewed who decided to continue posting saw the scale of the threats intensify significantly and eventually move offline. Leaving jobs, with the drastic damages to livelihoods and independence which that brings, were courses of action cited by many. Blocking accounts is also a popular individual action by women.

It is of significant concern that the technology companies who own the main social media platforms, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube, appear to be taking little responsibility for abuse and offensive content shared on their platforms. Despite the fact that globally, the social media giants have developed content moderation policies intended to be applied in the case of online abuse and gendered harassment, the methods by which they are applied and enforced are unclear and leave wide scope for interpretation. A report by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), which examined the scale of online abuse against US congressional candidates during the 2020 presidential election, found that social media platforms lacked transparency with regards to the application of their content moderation policies and processes. It also found that moderation decisions driven by algorithmic content analysis were opaque and at times inaccurate; yet technology companies were overwhelmingly relying on artificial intelligence for financial reasons.[50]

As a result, gendered online abuse was going unnoticed and unchallenged. The ICFJ/UNESCO report 'The Chilling', which deals with online violence towards women, stated

50 Guerin, C. and Maharasingam-Shah, E. (2020). Public figures, public rage. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Available at: https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Public-Figures-Public-Rage-4.pdf [Accessed September 19 2021].

that social media platforms are seen as the biggest enablers for online violence against women journalists but cast as (largely) failed responders to the problem.[51]

There is a concern that the technology companies see the rise in online violence as a reflection of the issue of violence in society and that what is happening online is not fostering offline violence. Evidence to the contrary—from the murder of Brazilian feminist and politician Marielle Franco on March 14th, 2018 to the storming of the White House on January 6th, 2021, both incited by posts on social media—is mounting around the world.[52] In Iraq, women found the tech companies unresponsive to their claims and a clear link between on- and offline violence was discussed by many (see below for more details).

I contacted Facebook to take the (fake) account down but they did not reply.

What is the point of reporting on online harassment as they might close the profile down but he will just make another one.

At a global level, there has been some movement from the technology companies to deal with intimate partner violence online but anything which might be seen to have a political dimension appears to be left unscrutinised according to key stakeholders in this arena. This response is also seen in Iraq at a policing level. The community police force currently operates covertly to maintain privacy and protect the women involved in cases of online harassment. According to one community police officer in Anbar, 'While we share everything, we have with the central security services in Baghdad, when we do find the perpetrator, we tell them we put them in front of the community.' Interviewees who had turned to the community police for help said that their aim was less to prosecute abusers and more to reconcile differences between the two parties. Another interview with a community police officer confirmed this position saying 'We try to give a good picture of women and change social attitudes and the community. We want to raise the role of women.' Unfortunately, this approach, whilst well-intentioned and providing one-off short-term solutions, does little to resolve the overriding issues of misogyny, conservatism, and impunity as perpetrators can expect lenient penalties for their actions. Rather, victims are advised to talk to their abuser and find a solution between them. In the small minority of cases where convictions did take place, there is little transparency around which laws were used and a lack of any definable due process.

Even if I told the community police or whoever, are they really going to fight for my rights?

Even more concerning is the lack of any formal response from security services or state

51 Posetti, J., Shabbir, N. and Maynard, D. et al (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. UNESCO. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/the-chilling.pdf [Accessed September 19 2020].

52 Di Meco, Lucina and Wilfore, Kristina (2021). Gendered disinformation is a national security problem. Brookings Institute. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/gendered-disinformation-is-a-national-security-problem/ [Accessed October 27 2021].

institutions to online violence which is politically motivated, in particular gendered disinformation, astroturfing, and violent threats. Online attacks against journalists, activists, and political figures—such as women electoral candidates—are left unchecked and perpetrators continue to act with complete impunity. Some measures have been recently introduced to provide some protection for women candidates in the 2021 elections, with dedicated hotlines for women to file complaints against abusers and avenues for reporting abuse directly to judicial agents circumventing the highly mistrusted security services. However, there is little evidence to suggest any change in behaviour online or any legitimate process of persecution. Interviewees all commented on the lack of available avenues

Women are not feeling protected by the state and its laws.

I tried the official way and it didn't work so I was forced to try the friend's way and change him but that didn't work either.

I don't tell anyone because there is no one to tell. The people that you would tell are the ones who are the abusers themselves.

The close connections between law enforcement, security services and armed groups in Iraq is highly problematic.[53] In the case of online violence against women, the lines between aggressor and protagonist are extremely blurred. In this case the possibilities for official redress are highly contested.

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53 Renad Mansour, 'Networks of Power: The Popular Mobilization Forces and the state of Iraq', Chatham House, 25 February 2021. Available at: https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021-02-25-networks-of-power-mansour.pdf [Accessed September 19 2021].

8. The Consequences of Online Violence

Internet access and social media platforms can provide women and girls with platforms which allow their voices to be heard and as such support gender equality, as noted in Sustainable Development Goal 5.[54] It is clear, however, that many Iraqi women are censoring or even removing themselves from online platforms because of the harmfulness of online violence and abuse. As noted earlier in this report, women are retreating from the public sphere and public debate. At a grassroots level, this sees patriarchal attitudes become further entrenched. Women and girls are less likely to engage online or otherwise with their male counterparts out of fear for abuse. Fear and intimidation are also seeing them reconsider their presence in schools and universities, which does not bode well for the long-term future of women and girls in Iraq. However, online abuse and harassment will only serve to further cement the gender digital divide and eventually see gendered roles become firmly established as the status quo.

Women journalists and activists are leaving cities such as Baghdad and Basra for the relative safety of cities such as Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdish Autonomous Region. This prevents them from reporting and engaging with events that are happening on the ground in the major conurbations, such as the protest movement and elections. Alternative and women's rights perspectives are thus excluded from the general debate. Pluralism of media is undermined and at risk as women's voices become scarce and disregarded. Women journalists who have been known for their outspoken and defiant nature, as well as their willingness to transgress stereotypical norms and roles, are being condemned by their peers—women and men—such that they are themselves accused of inciting hate speech and online violence, according to some of the key informant interviews. Hate speech towards women and a predominant sentiment that 'they got what they deserved' further perpetuates online violence. This type of victim-blaming is not uncommon in other countries and is often supplemented with the regulation and monitoring of journalists' social media outputs by their employees and media organisations[55]. Public access to information and a broad range of points of view is thus increasingly compromised through the restrictions on what women journalists write or their decision to leave their profession.

There is some evidence to suggest that women in politics are more likely to challenge manipulative, corrupt and violent exploitations of power.[56] If this is the case, then online

54 ITU (2021). ICTS for a sustainable world: Goal 5. Gender. International Telecommunication Union. Available at: https://www.itu.int/en/sustainable-world/Pages/goal5.aspx [Accessed September 19 2020].

55 Posetti, J., Shabbir, N. and Maynard, D. et al (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists. UNESCO. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/the-chilling.pdf [Accessed September 19 2020].

56 Bauhr, M., Charron, N. and Wängnerud, L. (2018) Close the political gender gap to reduce corruption. Chr. Michelsen Institute. Available at: https://www.u4.no/publications/close-the-political-gender-gap-to-reduce-corruption.pdf . [Accessed September 19 2020].

violence towards Iraqi women who have political ambitions or simply wish to participate in political debate can be seen as ultimately posing a threat to all Iraqi society and not just women. As already noted earlier in this report, the online targeting of women in politics is having an impact on their willingness to run for office or engage in political debate. Those who do engage in political processes, by announcing their candidacy for political office and running political campaigns, are under pressure to self-censor to maintain their positions. Not only are women discouraged from entering political careers, but the public perception of women in politics becomes increasingly biased. With the lack of representation of different women's voices in the political sphere, the prospects for a substantive and inclusive democracy are challenged and partisan electoral procedures and practices will continue to plague Iraq. Gendered state-sponsored disinformation and harassment not only serves to silence oppositional voices and critics of those in power, research suggests that it ultimately will negatively impact the policy-making and decision-making processes in Iraq.[57]

The mental health impact of online violence towards women in all of the groups cannot be understated. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women included psychological maltreatment as a form of GBV. All of the women interviewed reported a loss of confidence, feelings of anxiety, sleeplessness, and concern over the welfare of their families. Societal pressures to conform to gender stereotypes produces fear of judgement and exclusion from their communities, which in some extreme cases saw women contemplate suicide.

Of particular concern is evidence of a direct correlation in many cases between on and offline violence in Iraq. Women in all of the groups reported how physical threats followed initial campaigns and threats online. For women experiencing intimate partner violence and blackmail, they all reported that it began electronically and then moved offline with husbands, intimate partners, wives of intimate partners, and friends intercepting them at home or school for example. Journalists and activists also reported a direct relationship between abuse and harassment on social media, which might begin as hate speech and then escalate into violent threats and harm in the physical world. The case studies in this report give evidence from tyre slashing to kidnapping. The tragic endings of Tara Fares and Riham Yaqoub provide brutal examples of the worst that can happen.

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57 Di Meco, Lucina and Wilfore, Kristina (2021) Gendered disinformation is a national security problem. Brookings Institute. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/gendered-disinformation-is-a-national-security-problem/. [Accessed September 19 2020].

9. Conclusion

This report paints a dark picture of the situation of online violence towards women in Iraq. Online violence is taking a number of different forms and targets women across the board with little response from officials or technology companies. Women's rights and gender equality continue to be comprised as a result. Women are retreating from the public domain as well as political life, thus achieving the objective of silencing women's voices. Evidence that this silencing provides challenges to democracy and national security is particularly concerning in the case of Iraq, a country which continues to experience conflict and instability. With contested elections on the horizon and a young population that is demanding change, there has never been a more urgent time to tackle social and political inequalities in Iraq.

Patriarchal and conservative attitudes are dominant in Iraq, informing legislative and political processes, as well as social and communal interactions. Yet women continue to engage in the public sphere and there is a will for change. Accordingly, this report draws the following conclusions:

1. The digital ecosystem is echoing the prevailing patriarchal and conservative views in Iraqi society. Women are being judged and trialled based on their gender, physical appearance and alignment with stereotypical notions of women's roles in society. Gendered misogynistic language and sexualised images are commonly used to undermine women who are active online and in the public sphere. Where community initiatives are being employed to deal with online violence, patriarchal norms and hierarchies are becoming more deep-rooted as male offenders encounter little by way of punishment and the women and girls who are their victims are forced to interact with their tormentors.

2. Online violence is being used as a political tool to deliberately silence women, oppositional voices, and critical journalism. This means that political actors are amongst the main aggressors and perpetrators of online violence. High-profile cases of gendered disinformation and hate speech are left unresolved. As a consequence, microaggressions are becoming more prolific as men feel emboldened to act without any outcome.

3. Online violence is having an impact offline. The impact on women's mental health, their retreat from gainful employment and relocation to avoid physical threats are all definitive dangers to gender equality and women's rights. As women retreat from political life, chances for peace and security also become compromised. Physical attacks subsequently follow online threats and the space for safe and secure communications and freedom of expression is shrinking even further.

4. Current policies and practices to deal with online violence in Iraq are ineffective. Individual actions taken by women who have experienced online violence, which include self-censorship and complete removal from social media, are currently the only recourse that women see available to them. Official institutions are implicated in the practice of online violence, at best by their lack of response and at worse by their relationship with the armed groups who are engaging in violence both on and offline. The technology companies, also unresponsive, lack transparency and efficacy in their approach to online harassment and abuse.

10. Recommendations

The topic of online violence towards women has become a global concern and a more unified approach to tackling the issue is being called for by a number of key actors. With this in mind, this report makes the following recommendations that reiterate efforts which are being seen in other and similar contexts to Iraq.

Civil society, community and religious organisations

- Digital literacy and citizenship programmes in schools and colleges which educate young women and men on how to recognise and approach different forms of online violence should be developed and rolled out across Iraq. Women and men should also be taught ethical online communication practices. Possible partner: Tech 4 Peace, Iraq.
- Telephone hotlines which allow women to report incidents of online violence safely and anonymously and without having to deal directly with security services should be established and promoted. Possible partner: Free Press Unlimited.
- A unified approach to women's rights and gender equality should be established which involved religious and tribal leaders, schools and universities as well as civil society organisations. Possible partner: Al Amal/Public Aid Organisation.
- Ongoing monitoring of attacks and online violence against women is essential to raising awareness of the dangers to both women and men alike. There is a possibility to work with regional and international organisations to develop methods of monitoring and response which suit the particular context of Iraq.

Media organisations

- Digital safety and security workshops are integral to the safety and well-being of women journalists. Training on how to protect online and social media accounts as well as hostile environment training which includes how to combat online harassment should be provided by all media organisations. Possible partner: Internews.
- Reporting mechanisms and networks of solidarity should be established in newsrooms or via journalist organisations such as the National Union of Journalists, Al Naqaba Wataniya, which will encourage women to report any incidents of online abuse. Organisational policies to support women's safety and gender equality are key to the long-term success of independent media and their interventions to support women who experience online abuse is paramount.

Technology and social media companies

- A more human-centred approach to content moderation that does not rely solely on algorithms to recognise hate speech and gendered attacks needs to be considered in the short to medium term. Human moderators need to be given adequate training in order to recognise the very specific types of threats and hate speech that dominate the Iraqi online sphere.
- It is not acceptable to leave women who are experiencing online violence without a response from the platforms. More efficient means and processes for reporting online abuse which are transparent and inclusive need to be developed by the social media companies.

National government

- Extant legislative frameworks are not working to support and defend women in Iraq. Legal reform is required and the development of policies that deal directly with online harassment and violence is integral to ensuring the safety of women and girls online whilst also demonstrating the government's willingness to address all forms of violence.
- The Iraqi government needs to work more closely with civil society organisations to raise public awareness of the dangers of online violence whilst also growing public trust in a joint initiative between the public and private sector.
- IHEC appears to have taken successful measures during the October 2021 national elections to ensure that violence on the day was kept to a minimum. However, they could play a further role in providing support to women candidates, ensuring their safety as a part of its overall responsibility to reduce election violence and ensure that Iraq's diverse population is represented and can participate.
- The community police force needs more support to provide assistance to women in Iraq in all of the Iraqi provinces. Women should also be represented within the community forces at all levels, as they are more likely to be more accessible to women and girls who are facing abuse and violence.

International community and intergovernmental organisations

The international community has a role to play by putting pressure on the Iraqi government and its related state and sub-state institutions to take online violence towards women more seriously and deal with its perpetrators and consequences more effectively. The EU and other donors should consider how it allocates its grants in Iraq and reward the Iraqi government for its measure to protect women and girls online.

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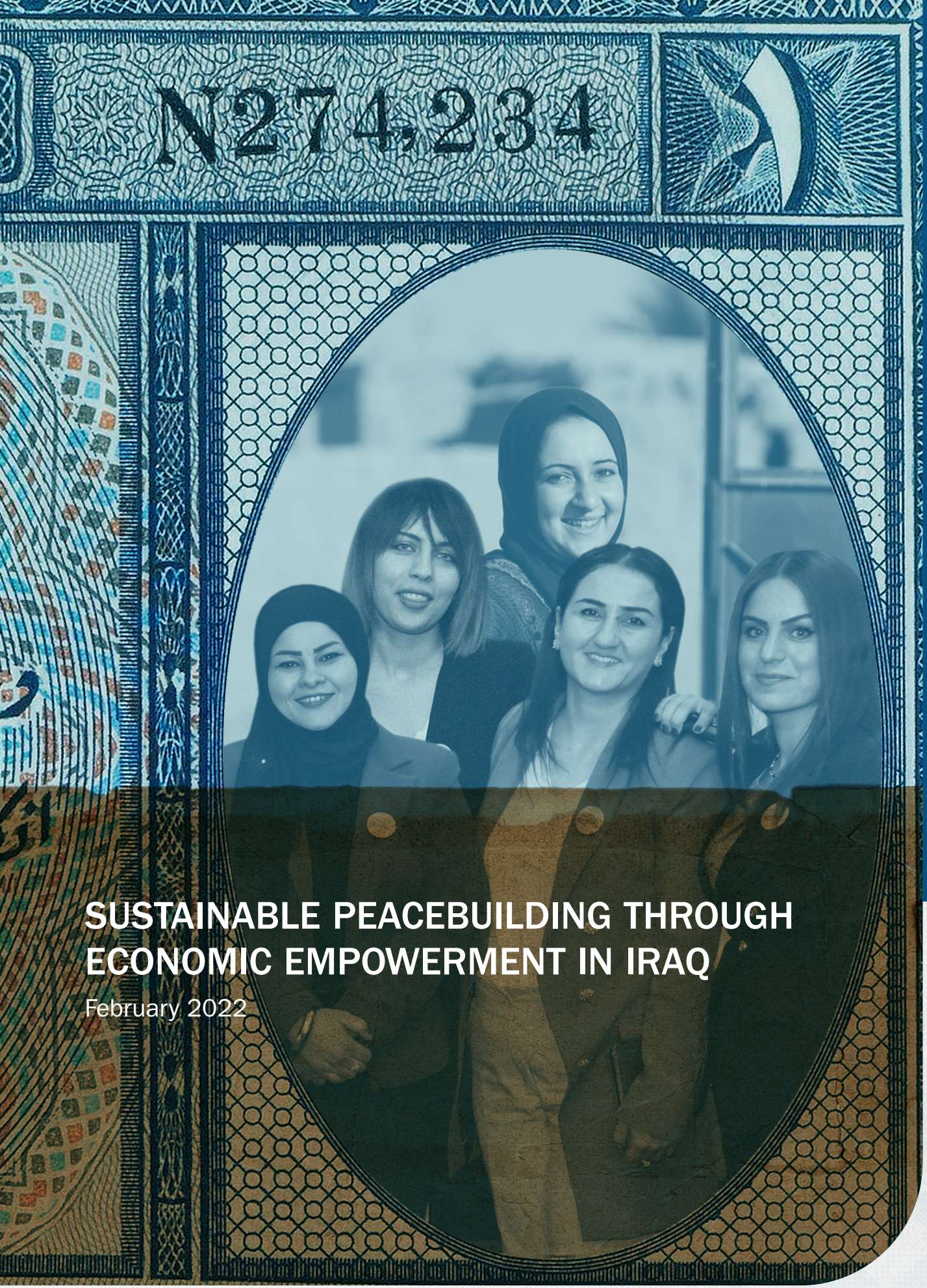

SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING THROUGH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN IRAQ

February 2022

Executive Summary

This study dissects the linkages between women's participation in peacebuilding and their economic empowerment. After ten qualitative interviews with key stakeholders from Mosul and Baghdad as well as a desk review of data within research on 'Women, Peace and Security', the study concludes that greater attention needs to be directed towards economic empowerment as an integral part of peacebuilding programmes. Drawing out challenges and opportunities as well as best practices when it comes to combining economic empowerment and peacebuilding. This study recommends designing livelihood programmes based on a thorough and realistic assessment of Iraq's economy, map women's skills and abilities instead of only their needs, and support women's collective work to ensure the creation of social trust and social cohesion, that will contribute to peacebuilding processes.

1. Introduction

Women's participation in peacebuilding programmes has been proven to enhance and create more sustainable and lasting peace due to their heightened focus on reconciliation and economic development in peace negotiations[1],[2]. This includes women's participation in legislative processes, decision-making processes, and their presence in civil society roles, and leadership roles. In this study, peacebuilding is defined by building social capital, which refers to creating connections amongst individuals for the purpose of creating "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness". Social capital brings about civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance and mutual trust that will consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation.[3]

Traditional peacebuilding programmes often put less emphasis on the economic empowerment of women, addressing securing livelihood as a secondary issue, or pursuing it separately, instead of an integrated mechanism of peacebuilding. However, livelihood programmes that engage with women to reduce poverty and inequality can be invaluable. Women are often the most strongly impacted group by war and displacement and as a result of often being financially dependent on their male counterparts, they face insecurity. In conflict and post-conflict situations, this insecurity due to a lack of means to secure livelihood is heightened. Thus, peacebuilding should imbed livelihood programming as a result of building social capital to reduce insecurity. These opportunities can range from supporting female-led businesses to creating more safe spaces for women to work together in the public sphere.

While there is substantial programming dedicated to women's economic empowerment, this topic remains largely understudied.[4] Existing studies assessing economic empowerment as part of peacebuilding programmes in Iraq are treated as a distinct field of research.[5] When exploring interlinkages between economic empowerment and peacebuilding, this study analyses economic programming activities that aim to contribute to peacebuilding through enhancing social trust and cohesion, as well as women's participation in public life and therefore uses the terminology 'a peacebuilding approach

1 UN Women. "Facts and figures. Women, peace, and security." https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures, accessed 27/01/2021.

2 Lindborg, Nancy. "The Essential Role of Women in Peacebuilding". United States Institute of Peace. 2017. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/11/essential-role-women-peacebuilding>, accessed 27/01/2021.

3 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

4 Reliefweb. "Towards Women's Economic Empowerment in Iraq". 2018 <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/towards-women-s-economic-empowerment-iraq-enar>, accessed on 28/01/2021.

5 UNDP, "Women's Economic Empowerment. Integrating Women into the Iraqi Economy", 2012, https://www.iq.undp.org/content/iraq/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/publication_1.html, accessed 30/01/2021.

to economic empowerment' . This study aims to shed light on the fact that the approach of economic programming itself can contribute to peacebuilding, when conducted in a manner that aims to foster social trust and therefore social capital, while increasing women's participation in the public sphere. To do so, this study first briefly outlines Iraq's economic drivers and women's roles within the Iraqi economic framework. Secondly, it scrutinises peacebuilding programmes in Iraq at present. This is followed by an analysis of the link between women's economic empowerment and lasting peace, emphasising challenges and best practices. Finally, this paper gives policy recommendations to relevant International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) and state institutions.

2. Methodology

The study consisted of a thorough desk review and personal interviews. The desk review covered the most recent information on women's economic empowerment programming in Iraq, as well as previous research done within the framework of women, security and peacebuilding in the region. These insights were used to collect original data through ten semi-structured ninety minute interviews with key figures in the fields of economic empowerment and peacebuilding in Iraq, to gain an accurate and in-depth understanding of women's experiences and their changing socio-economic situation through current peacebuilding and livelihood programmes. Five interviews were conducted with members of women's organisations in Baghdad, while an additional five interviews were conducted with women activists and participants of peacebuilding workshops and economic empowerment programmes in Mosul (see Appendix). Not all the interviewees from Mosul, all of whom suffered during the recent conflict with ISIS, gave consent for all their personal details to be published, therefore most interview participants from Mosul have been anonymised. Prior to the ten personal interviews, two informational interviews were held with a project coordinator of the Baghdad Women's Association (BWA) in Dohuk as well as with a member of the Aman Organization for Women to gather an overview of their projects and goals.

2.1 Limitations

This study is based on a desk review and ten in-depth interviews and is therefore not a complete representation of economic empowerment and peacebuilding programmes within Iraq. Rather, this study reveals the intersections between women's economic empowerment and peacebuilding and through interviews with practitioners and experts in the field, ensures a thorough understanding of the subject. In addition, the limited time available precluded the conduction of further interviews or follow-up interviews, which would have been beneficial to understand the real-time effects of the peacebuilding programmes currently in place.

3. Contextual Analysis

This section focuses on the insights gathered from the interviews conducted as well as the desk review. The insights are separated into three distinct sections: an explanation about women's position in the Iraqi economy, the importance of women's economic empowerment to peacebuilding, and finally the opportunities and challenges to addressing a shift in peacebuilding methodology in the Iraqi landscape.

3.1 Women in the Iraqi Economy

To understand the effects of women's economic empowerment and women's participation in peacebuilding in Iraq, a broad understanding of Iraq's economic drivers is necessary. Wealth produced in Iraq mainly stems from the oil sector, which provides 90 per cent of the government's revenues, while employing only 1 per cent of the Iraqi population.[6] Most of the revenue generated from the country's oil sector is redistributed to Iraqis through employment in the public sector which, according to the United Nations (UN), comprises around 60 per cent of the population.[7] This labour force primarily works within the service sector, including in parts of the government. The second largest employment sector is agriculture, which employs almost 22 per cent of the population.[8] Agriculture belongs to Iraq's private sector due to the dominant public sector not being able to develop its full potential to provide formal job opportunities.[9]

While Iraq's oil resources make it a rich country in general, the people of Iraq do not benefit from this wealth, neither in terms of state services, such as infrastructure, education or health services, nor through job opportunities. According to UNICEF and the World Bank, 20 per cent of the Iraqi population lived under the poverty line in 2017/18. This situation has been further exacerbated by COVID-19, as the multidimensional vulnerability index (MVI) identified 42.1% of the population as being particularly vulnerable to poverty as a result of the pandemic.[10] The MVI looks at a series of measures to determine population vulnerability. Some of these factors include, school attainment, garbage disposal, and drinking water, where more than one-fifth of the Iraqi population has been found as both

6 CIA. The World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy.

7 UN Iraq, Country Profile, http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=941:country-profile&Itemid=472&lang=en, accessed 17/01/2021.

8 Estimations are based on the year 2008, see CIA. The World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy.

9 UN; IAU(Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit). "Iraq Labour Force Analysis 2003-2008". 2009. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/0F8F17DCD9AE2D2B492576160019E73D-Full_Report.pdf, accessed on 27/01/2021.

10 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf, accessed on 09/08/2021.

vulnerable and deprived.[11] [12] Youth populations have been especially harshly impacted by wealth inequality: the World Bank estimates youth unemployment in Iraq to be 36 per cent, compared with the national unemployment rate of 16 per cent.[13] Furthermore, 35.5 per cent of Iraqi youth were found to be neither in employment nor in education or training in 2020.[14] COVID-19 full and partial lockdowns has led to a further decline in economic activity in Iraq.[15] Decades of protest in different parts of Iraq, including Iraqi Kurdistan, Baghdad, and Basra have made it clear that the people of Iraq resent the economic situation of the country.[16] Regional conflicts between different governorates across Iraq have led to increased food pricing, food shortages, and clean water supplies, further aggravated by COVID-19, have led to millions of International Displaced People (IDPs).[17] In 2018, a UN study discovered that the lack of livelihood opportunities is a key contributing factor for violence in areas liberated from ISIS, often populated by IDPs as well as returnees.[18] Trauma, displacement, and unemployment are factors that heighten violent conflict and with Iraq's population facing monumental levels of youth unemployment and internal displacement, there is a strong correlation between these factors.[19] In Mosul alone, 80 per cent of youth between 18-25 were found to be unemployed in 2018.[20] As a result, securing livelihoods remains a priority for Iraq's population.

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11 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf, accessed on 09/08/2021.

12 UNICEF. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. 2020. https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/1181/file/Assessment%20of%20COVID-19%20Impact%20on%20Poverty%20and%20Vulnerability%20in%20Iraq.pdf, accessed on 09/08/2021.

13 Iraq: Engaging Youth to Rebuild the Social Fabric in Baghdad. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/12/02/iraq-engaging-youth-to-rebuild-the-social-fabric-in-baghdad , accessed 09/08/2021.

14 World Bank Data. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Iraq. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IQ , accessed 09/08/2021.

15 World Bank Data. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Iraq. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS?locations=IQ , accessed 09/08/2021.

16 Ali, Zahra, LSE blog, "Protest movements in Iraq in the age of a 'new civil society'", 2019, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/crp/2019/10/03/protest-movements-in-iraq-in-the-age-of-new-civil-society/, accessed on 04/01/2021.

17 Iraq Mission Data. http://iraqdtm.iom.int/ , accessed 08/09/2021.

18 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Humanitarian Needs Overview". 2018, p. 4, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2019_hno_irq_28122018.pdf, accessed 20/12/2020.

19 Iraq: Engaging Youth to Rebuild the Social Fabric in Baghdad. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/12/02/iraq-engaging-youth-to-rebuild-the-social-fabric-in-baghdad , accessed 09/08/2021.

20 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Humanitarian Needs Overview". 2018, p. 4, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/2019_hno_irq_28122018.pdf, accessed 20/12/2020.

When unemployment rates are disaggregated by gender, the situation is even worse. Women are disproportionately affected by Iraq's economic difficulties, with an unemployment rate of 63 per cent, in contrast to 22 per cent of men in 2017.[21] This disparity is further evident in figures regarding the labour workforce in both public and private sectors: in 2017, women's participation in the labour workforce represented only 11.2 per cent, compared to 74.4 per cent for men.[22] Thus, in Iraq's drained economy which does include avenues for economic opportunity, women remain marginalised.

Especially vulnerable and at a higher risk of poverty, abuse, and exploitation are female-headed households. According to a UN study, female-headed households make up one in ten Iraqi households, thus almost 450,000 households.[23]Because statistical data on the labour workforce participation rarely considers domestic labour, often entirely relegated to women. The author therefore recommends that, when encouraging women's participation in the labour market, it is crucial to not overburden women with non-domestic as well as domestic labour, but to advocate a more equitable distribution of domestic and economic responsibilities within Iraqi society.

Despite low participation of women in the workforce, women are highly prevalent within Iraq's agriculture industry. Agriculture is especially important for Iraq, as it offers the possibility for diversification in an economy that is heavily dependent on oil revenues. During the period of international sanctions from 1991 to 2003, Iraq came to rely on food imports, despite its own agricultural production. Even today, most of Iraq's imports consist of food items.[24] Therefore, the development of Iraq's agriculture is a major factor for ensuring food security for Iraqis. In 2017, women made up 43.7 per cent of the agricultural workforce [25] At the same time, it should be noted that the agricultural sector is characterised by high levels of informal work, which is rarely rewarded with direct monetary income and is unprotected by the law. Research has also demonstrated the vulnerable position of women within agriculture work, where women are rarely in control of the resources and the financial transactions in agriculture at any point of the supply chain (i.e. setting the price, going to the market to buy and sell, managing the financial aspects of the business).[26] Thus, while agriculture is an important sector of the Iraqi economy, especially when it comes to providing livelihood opportunities, it is crucial

21 ILO (International Labour Organization). https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/, accessed on 22/12/2020.

22 ILO (International Labour Organization). https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/, accessed on 22/12/2020.

23 IAU (Inter-Agency Information and Analysis Unit), Women in Iraq Fact sheet. 2012. https://nina-iraq.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Women-In-Iraq-Fact-sheet-English.pdf. accessed on 15/12/2020.

24 CIA. World Factbook. https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iraq/#economy.

25 Vilardo, Valeria, and Sarah Bittar. "Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq". 2018. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620602/rr-gender-profile-iraq-131218-en.pdf>, accessed on 21/12/2012.

26 Vilardo, Valeria, and Sarah Bittar. "Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq". 2018. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620602/rr-gender-profile-iraq-131218-en.pdf>, accessed on 21/12/2012.

to pay attention to the specific working conditions of women within this field in order to avoid fostering new forms of gender discrimination or exploitation.

On a legal basis, the Iraq Labour Law of 2015 governs employment relationships in Iraq, including working hours, the rights and duties of workers and employers, leave, and the prohibition of discrimination over age, disability, gender, race, etc. It also sets a minimum wage that is currently USD200.[27] Unfortunately, this law is not widely implemented within the private sector, as pointed out by interviewees in Mosul.

3.2 Women, Peacebuilding and Economic Empowerment

As previously defined, peacebuilding is the process of building social capital which refers to social networks and norms of reciprocity that arise from them.[28] The civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance and mutual trust that consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation thus reinforcing the process of peacebuilding.[29] When it comes to applying the tenets of peacebuilding in Iraq, major reference points are UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Security and Peace, and Iraq's National Action Plan (I-NAP) to implement the resolution. UNSCR 1325 highlights the role of women in peacebuilding, thereby setting an agenda for the universal rights of women. It urges all UN Member States to increase the participation of women in the prevention of conflict, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and all processes involved in implementing sustainable peace.[30]

In the MENA region, Iraq has been a pioneer in implementing UNSCR 1325 by releasing the first ever I-NAP in 2014. Despite this first initial step towards greater inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes, there have been several limitations in implementing the I-NAP. First, there is a lack of knowledge amongst local activists and rural populations pertaining to the I-NAP.[31] Second, while drafting the I-NAP, civil society organisations were included and acknowledged as the 'I-NAP1325 Initiative', a conglomerate of thirty-one Iraqi women's rights civil society organisations hailing from mainly urban areas.[32],[33] The exclusion of diverse civil society organisations has been a critique of previous NAPs globally, as particularly in the field of women, peace and security, civil society plays a

27 Al Sarab Law Office, Lexology, Employment and Labour Law in Iraq. 2018. https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=8fc1dc22-85ab-453a-b833-d4de286f9ff9, accessed on 17/01/2021.

28 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

29 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

30 UN Security Council. "Resolution 1325". 2000. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement. accessed on 27/01/2021.

31 Elbarlement; SwissPeace, "Scoping Study-A Strategy for Women Participation in Peace Processes in Nineveh", 2020.

32 Kaya, Zeynep. "Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq's National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325", Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016.

33 Iraq NAP 1325. http://www.iraqnap1325.org/index.php/about-us , accessed 08/09/2021.

critical role.[34] In addition, certain action points mandated by UNSCR 1325 are missing in the I-NAP, including a clear action plan, timelines for programmes to be run during the I-NAPs mandate, and budget.[35] Finally, the first I-NAP expired in 2018 and the second I-NAP was published in 2020, a gap that was further felt by the COVID-19 crisis. In response, civil society actors emphasised the need for "continuous coordination and collaboration across sectors, in particular, the involvement of all stakeholders including civil society, IDPs and survivors of ISIS taking into account the needs of each governorate."[36] The secondI-NAP was only endorsed by the Iraqi Council of Ministers in April 2021.

Another much less recent international framework relevant to women in Iraq is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, to which Iraq acceded in 1986.[37] Iraq has not ratified the optional protocol in which countries must report on their progress on ending discrimination against women. However, in 2019, the Iraqi Women's Network produced a CEDAW shadow report, which indicated that women are not equally represented within peacebuilding programmes.[38] Indeed, in the Iraqi context, the crucial and fundamental role of women's participation in securing lasting peace, has been extensively researched and affirmed.[39]

There are manifold reasons for the continued lack of women's representation within peacebuilding. One of the main factors is the security situation, whether in Baghdad or in Mosul or elsewhere in the country.[40] It is mainly the security setting that prevents women from taking active roles within public life. Women in Baghdad pointed out how regular public threats by militias create an atmosphere of intimidation which women from different backgrounds protested against in October 2019. According to interviewee Hannah Edwar, "the uprising is a prime example of the increasing empowerment

34 Kaya, Zeynep. "Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq's National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325", Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016.

35 Kaya, Zeynep. "Women, Peace and Security in Iraq: Iraq's National Action Plan to implement Resolution 1325", Middle East Centre, LSE. 2016. p. 19.

36 EuroMed Feminist Initiative, "Consultation session on the development of the 2nd Iraq National Action Plan (NAP II) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, 2018, http://www.efi-ife.org/consultation-session-development-2nd-iraq-national-action-plan-nap-ii-implementation-unscr-1325, accessed on 22/01/2021.

37 UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women". 1979. https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx, accessed on 28/01/2021.

38 Iraqi Women Network, Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee, 2019. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared Documents/IRQ/INT_CEDAW_CSS_IRQ_37264_E.docx. accessed 24/12/2020.

39 Tabbara, Hanan, and Garrett Rubin. "Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution and Negotiation: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen – a discussion paper". 2018, p.2. https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/2018/women%20on%20the%20frontlines-web-rev.pdf?la=en&vs=2003, accessed on 20/01/2021.

40 O'Driscoll, Dylan. "Women's participation in peacebuilding and reconciliation in Iraq". Institute of Development Studies, 2017.

of women in Iraq, but also witnessed a violent reaction of militias[41] that specifically targeted women's presence and social activism in the public sphere. The kidnappings of Saba Mahdawi and Mari Mohammed, who were intimidated into silence,[42] and the killing of Sara Taleb in Basra, fatally shot after returning from a peaceful demonstration,[43] are tragic examples of the lack of safety, specifically women's safety, when it comes to participation in the public sphere".[44]

The peacebuilding programmes led by INGOs mostly engage in awareness-raising and social cohesion-fostering activities.[45] The majority of interviewees pointed to these two approaches of peacebuilding programmes. Concrete activities mentioned by the interviewees from Mosul included workshops between different minority communities, interfaith dialogues, and workshops deconstructing ISIS ideology. The intention of such programming is to develop trust between different communities, thus building a social network and increasing social capital. The majority of women interviewed also stated the importance of awareness-raising workshops on women's rights, including UNSCR 1325. At the same time, one interviewee in particular, suggested that the creation of safe public spaces for women to facilitate gatherings should be an additional priority to peacebuilding programmes to contribute to garnering social capital.

Since the aim of these workshops is mostly to create lasting social connections, trust and cohesion as a method of peacebuilding, their format is important to consider.[46] Participants and the convenors of these workshops pointed out that lasting friendships and networks cannot only be created within short-term workshops. Activist and interviewee Sroor Helal from Mosul explained: "I never benefited from those [short] workshops held in hotels in Erbil. What I really benefited from, until this day, was a two-week peacebuilding workshop that was held in Diwaniye, where members of different communities came together. In the beginning we were hesitant with each other but then

41 Most militias in Iraq are affiliated with political Islamic parties that are usually part of the Iraqi government. Militias that attacked women were for example the militia belonging to Muqtada Al-Sadr, that is Saraya Al-Salam but also militias that belong to the Popular Mobilization Forces (Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi) such as Al-Asa'ib or Hizb'Allah.

42 RUDAW. "121 Iraqi activists kidnapped, murdered since October 1". https://www.rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/290120204, accessed 09/09/2021.

43 Al Jazeera. After threats and chases .. Details of the killing of two prominent activists in Basra. https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2019-10-13---after-threats-and-chases----details-of-the-killing-of-two-prominent-activists-in-basra-.BJ-iWoTetS.html, accessed 09/09/2021.

44 Ali, Zahra, "Women and the Iraqi Revolution", Jadaliyya, 2020, https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40817, accessed 17/01/2021.

45 Malteser International. "Social cohesion in the Nineveh Plains". 2020. https://www.malteser-international.org/en/our-work/middle-east/iraq/being-different-does-not-mean-you-are-enemies.html, accessed on 14/01/2021.

46 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

we became friends throughout our daily discussions. We are friends and connected until today". Therefore, longer-lasting peacebuilding activities that create opportunities for meaningful discussions among activists from different communities, the interviewees emphasised, are much more useful in the peacebuilding process of building social trust, which will accordingly contribute to higher participation of women in public life.

Increasing women's participation in peacebuilding must also consider their freedom at home, specifically regarding gender norms that discriminate against most women. Generally, gender stereotypes demand that women remain at home, take on the domestic work, and raise children, while men are primarily seen as the breadwinners in the family. This creates a massive dependency since women must ask their husbands, fathers, or brothers for money and often for permission to work. While this plays out differently in Iraq according to the socio-economic and educational background of families, these norms remain prevalent throughout Iraq. Iqbal, from the Organization of Women's Freedom, in Iraq identifies the domestic sphere as a sphere of unequal power relations: "Freedom at home is an important step to establish freedom outside and has important effects on society". Therefore, raising not only women's, but also men's, awareness of women's rights, is vital for building a strong foundation for a socially just peace.

3.3 Current Livelihood Programmes

When it comes to economic empowerment of women, most research and data points to the effects of conflicts on livelihoods and economic wellbeing, highlighting the challenges but also the opportunities for change.[47] Structural challenges to women's economic empowerment consist of patriarchal gender norms.[48] These challenges include restrictions on women's mobility, which hinders women's participation in public life, a perceived lack of security, family pressure, household responsibilities, and a lack of some employment skills.[49] However, in their work on displacement and women's economic empowerment, Kaya et al. show that even though conflict has a severe and damaging impact on women's livelihood, it may also offer the possibility for social renewal, including the change of discriminatory gender norms.[50] Kaya et al. ascribe this to the context of conflict in which women, mostly out of necessity, engage with norm-breaking ways to secure their livelihoods.[51] Currently, international funding in the post-conflict context is used by women's rights organisations to cater to women empowerment programmes that focus on securing livelihoods.

47 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. "Displacement and Women's Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq". Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

48 WRC & OXFAM. 2015.

49 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

50 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. "Displacement and Women's Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq". Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

51 Kaya, Zeynep, and Luchtenberg, Kyra. "Displacement and Women's Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq". Center for Women, Peace and Security, LSE. 2018; UN OCHA, p 4.

Securing a livelihood also means preventing women from being subjected to further violence. Different security actors perpetrate violence against women and girls partly, because these women do not have the security of life and income that comes with access to livelihood opportunities and basic services. Whilst women and girls are subjected to violence, including sexualized violence, boys are at risk of being forced into child labour within the armed groups that proliferate in Iraq.[52]

The main critique, which can be levelled at existing livelihood programmes, is that most do not consider that limited opportunities for formal employment in Iraq as a structural issue. Both limited availability of work within the public sector and an underdeveloped private sector have led to insufficient work opportunities. In addition, many programmes have failed to take into consideration the possibility of expanding the skillset of women with different backgrounds and rather offer them the same generic programmes, with limited training for professions such as beautician, hairdresser, seamstress, etc..[53]

Therefore, while research on livelihood programmes indicates that the lack of livelihood opportunities leads to different forms of violence and the erosion of social cohesion, it does not offer insights on linkages between economic empowerment and peacebuilding. The next section will shed light on this topic.

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52 Jarhum, Rasha, and Alice Bonfatti. "We Are Still Here: Mosulite Women 500 Days After the Conclusion of the Coalition Military Operation." 2019. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ENG_We-Are-Still-Here_Mosulite-Women.pdf>, accessed on 12/01/2021.

53 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

4. Economic Empowerment as Integral Part of Peacebuilding in Iraq

In most research, livelihood and economic empowerment of women has mainly been treated as one aspect of peacebuilding or even as an entirely different subject matter. This study finds that economic empowerment must be an integral part of the definition and the process of peacebuilding itself.

This finding is underlined through statistical data within the peacebuilding literature pointing out that in post-conflict situations, "the main recovery need for Iraqi IDPs in 2018 continues to be access to employment and job opportunities."[54] Of those 6.7 million people in need, women makeup almost half at 47 per cent. Especially severe is the situation of female-headed households in debt, generating one out of three indebted households.[55] The importance of economic empowerment to peacebuilding is also confirmed through the experiences and in-depth insight of key stakeholders within both programmes confirming that:

"Peacebuilding will never be established through workshops and awareness raising. It is only through economic empowerment that people step outside, engage with others, and develop a practical responsibility towards their society."

-(Aliya, Volunteer With Us, Mosul)

Consequently, the goals of peacebuilding, that is the establishment of lasting social cohesion and trust, require not only awareness, but must also be actively built through livelihood programmes that keep people engaged not only in earning an income, but also building lasting mutual relations of social trust. Hence, the approach to livelihood programmes has an impact on peacebuilding. The following sections will lay out the challenges, opportunities, and best practices when it comes to combining economic empowerment and peacebuilding.

4.1 Challenges

The main challenge to peacebuilding through economic empowerment is that the economic context within Iraq provides little opportunity for women to access the already very marginal labour market. As previously stated, the Iraqi economy is mostly state-run and depends heavily on oil income with little diversification. While the agricultural sector is a promising sector to be developed with women making up the majority workforce, employment relations within agriculture are mostly informal and do not offer women the control over the income made. Thus, there are structural and institutional obstacles that

54 UN OCHA, p. 51.
55 UN OCHA.

must be addressed not only through the individual economic empowerment of women,[56] but also by the government of Iraq and the Kurdish regional government.

Within this context, when it comes to livelihood programmes, supporting female-led businesses has been one way to practically encourage women to earn an income. One widespread business, mentioned by the majority of interviewees, have been beauty salons established by women. While these projects have been evaluated as successful by BWA, the Tammuz Organization for Social Development critiqued these programmes for their short-term duration and the lack of sustainability, explaining that not all women can set up beauty salons. This situation calls for the diversity of livelihood programs that are adapted to the specific socio-economic groups of women which will be further outlined in the recommendations section.

Another structural challenge is the lack of security and the patriarchal gender order that is indicated above in Section 3 of this report. The patriarchy enforced in Iraq results in restrictions on women's mobility, family pressure, household responsibilities, lack of education and employment skills, and a general lack of autonomy.[57] The absence of independence and opportunity leads to a lack of security, especially in conflicts or post-conflict contexts, where the search for opportunity can lead to terrorist organisations, an one interviewee describes:

"Livelihood opportunities are important, especially for women without husbands and widowed women, so they do not turn to terrorist organizations, militias, or engage in criminal activities to find jobs that might harm them only to gain an income."

-Interviewee (Mosul, 2020)

This resonates with a 2018 UN study which posits that women resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage of girls, taking children out of school.[58] It is crucial to see the linkages between violence and lack of employment, which includes men joining armed groups to make a living. This paper thus argues that for peace to be established, the basic income to provide livelihood, from employment that stems from an economy where peace, not war, prospers.

It is also in the implementation of projects that challenges to creating sustainable peace arise. Thus, projects with a sole focus on awareness raising workshops are seen as ineffective, as interviewee Iqbal Al-Slaan explained: "Awareness raising without any material basis remains knowledge confined to the classroom". Similarly, a BWA project coordinator explained: "The motivation for women with lower or no income to participate in these sessions without any material gains or practical knowledge, such as literacy, is little." Thus,

56 Golla, Anne Marie; Malhotra, Anju; Nanda, Priya; "Understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment." International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). 2011. < https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Understanding-measuring-womens-economic-empowerment.pdf> , accessed on 14/01/2021.

57 Kaya and Luchtenberg.

58 UN OCHA.

while it is crucial to raise women's awareness on topics such as, women's rights within Iraqi law and outside of it, knowledge on women's health, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and transitional justice, its practical application can only be exercised in livelihood practices of everyday life. Therefore, a combination of both peacebuilding seminars as well as training in different skills is crucial. That way, women can understand peace through newly gained awareness and practice peace by gaining an income through livelihood practices, reinforced by social cohesion practices developed in workshops.

4.2 Opportunities and Best Practices for Combining Economic Empowerment and Peacebuilding

Economic empowerment through which social cohesion and women's participation in public life are bolstered leads to more meaningful and lasting women's participation in peacebuilding processes. As interviewee Iqbal articulates it:

"Most women in Iraq must ask their husbands, fathers or other male relatives for money. I was one of them. So, of course, having your own source of income brings greater peace to women than asking their husbands or fathers. This is what we call economic peacebuilding."

-Iqbal (Baghdad, 2020)

It is crucial to understand the situation of Iraqi women from an economic point of view. The concept of economic peacebuilding centralises economic empowerment in social cohesion building activities of the peacebuilding process. Economic empowerment here is a practical way forward to offer perspectives for women to build their lives by themselves, according to their own choices. Consequently, this will affect women's decision-making, starting within the domestic sphere around her mobility and use of income and then moving into the broader public sphere that is concerned with women's rights. While this is a major opportunity for women's economic empowerment, it needs to be considered that even if women earn money, it might end up in their male relatives' hands. Liza Hido further explained this idea and offers practical ways forward:

"I had a participant in our livelihoods programme whom I asked what she does with her new earned income. She said that it was with her husband now since this how religious custom in Islam demand it. I sat down with her and explained that there are no such customs. This is only one example of why it is important to hold awareness workshops and inform women about their rights".

-Liza Hido (Baghdad, 2020)

While economic empowerment is a practical way forward to offer perspectives and opportunities for both men and women to build their lives by themselves, it needs to be accompanied by awareness-raising workshops on women's rights. Thereby, knowledge gained in peacebuilding activities can be directly put into practice through livelihood income, creating a fruitful connection between both aspects. Another risk is that the money earned by women or any loans obtained might be taken by male relatives. Some interviewees stated that loans from the state are given usually to state employees only,

and even if these are women state employees, the loans end up in the hands of their male counterparts. This means that along with raising awareness of women's rights, policy changes to break down institutional barriers. A possible solution is offering both state loans or loans from INGOs to groups of women for developing a female led-business. Thus, the mutual accountability of women towards their project makes it harder to give out money to their personal male relatives based on cultural norms and pressure.

A crucial aspect of access to livelihood opportunities are women who are empowered to build strong networks that will foster sustainable peace. While livelihood opportunities are difficult to create, an initial option might be to create safe public spaces for women that enable women to be more present and participate in public life. There have been examples of the creation of safe spaces for women,[59] such as centres that are dedicated to providing women with physical and emotional safety while also offering counselling and training in skills for employment. While this is extremely useful, it is important not to practice gender segregation as this has been used by political Islamic parties as a way to isolate women further from the rest of society. Rather, male presence should be encouraged in these spaces under certain conditions that have to be discussed locally by the women organising these spaces. This can lead to heightened gender awareness and more opportunity for women in the public sphere, a cornerstone for economic peacebuilding.

Another solution is to invest in the creation of public safe spaces. Nadia, an interviewee, is a Muslawi woman who has suffered at the hands of ISIS and today offers psychosocial support within different local and international NGOs explains the importance of safe spaces:

"One very basic consequence of the lack of livelihood opportunities for women means to stay at home. This not only leads to aggravating psychosocial and mental health issues of women, it also prevents them from creating social relations. Even a public park or other spaces for women to safely meet and engage with each other is important."

-Nadia (Mosul, 2020)

Therefore, a step forward can be investing in safe public spaces outside the home, as a way to enable women to build trusting relationships with others from different communities. This reinforces peacebuilding through gaining social capital while simultaneously alleviating some of the psychosocial effects of remaining confined and isolated within the house. Concretely, safe public spaces in the form of, for instance, large gardens with a house to which entrance is initially allowed for women and their children only and at a later stage men can be included/hosted under certain conditions could be very useful. The exact implementation of such a public space however depends on the specific area and needs to be discussed with local civil society activists. Thus, women will also be more visible and mobile in a mostly man-dominated public sphere. Over time, this may lead

59 LWF (The Lutheran World Federation), "A safe space for women and girls in Iraq". 2020. https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/safe-space-women-and-girls-iraq, accessed 22/01/2021.

to the normalisation of women's presence in the public sphere. Ultimately, and for this process to be sustainable, access to livelihoods is also needed, so that leaving the domestic sphere becomes part of daily routine and necessity for increasing numbers of women.

Sewing workshops as a method for connecting both economic empowerment and peacebuilding was raised by interviewees from the Tammuz Organization for Social Development and the Iraqi Women's Network, as it is one of the prime examples of women's livelihood programmes. There has been little effort by international donors to combine sewing workshops with peacebuilding activities such as, raising awareness on women's rights and SGBV. Importantly, the awareness raising sessions were seen as necessary, and therefore conducted by local Iraqi NGOs themselves, rather than as part of the official programme of donors. While sewing courses are one viable option for women with little education to gain skills, it is not always sustainable for women to take their sewing machine's home after the course and start working alone where they are again relegated to the domestic sphere of the house.

A more viable practice, conceptualised by the Tammuz Organization for Social Development, has been to set up rooms, or to support women to set up a hall for themselves, where women work together as co-workers within a sewing company, similar to start-ups. The benefit of collective work outside of the home is that the goals of peacebuilding programmes, namely social trust, cohesion, and participation in public life are not only taught in workshops, but enacted on a daily basis through common work goals. The civic virtues of tolerance, acceptance, and mutual trust that contribute to building trust and confidence, or as Putnam called it the social capital, will consequently facilitate interpersonal cooperation.[60] In the case of Tammuz Organization for Social Development, women had been able to mutually support each other, to socially normalise spending time outside the domestic sphere, as well as developing their own business through practice. Working outside of the home and accessing public life also helped the women involved gain relevant business knowledge within the sewing sector. Another way to build social capital through economic peacebuilding is to form groups of women, train them in sewing and support them to set up and manage their own sewing factory. In this way, they learn to manage projects by themselves and also organise themselves socially. Until now, however, this kind of practical combination of peacebuilding through economic empowerment has only been implemented on a small scale. The following testimony from one such sewing factory exemplifies how economic peacebuilding provided support and enabled women in making autonomous decisions about their lives by strengthening the participation of women in civil life and groupings:

60 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

"One of the women working in the factory has been facing severe domestic violence. After she did a sewing course with us, she worked within a sewing company. After earning her own income and learning about her rights as a woman, including divorce law, at one point she went to court to get divorced. So, she had to become independent financially to take care of herself, deciding to refuse to be subjected to violence. Gaining her own income enabled her to make an autonomous decision about her life and that of her daughters. Thereby, she started to become a decisionmaker."

-Amal Kabashi Faraj (Iraqi Women's Network, 2020)

Apart from sewing courses, Liza Hido from the BWA explained the importance of not only supporting livelihood programmes in fields that are typically ascribed to women, such as sewing or aesthetics, but also offering women programmes to gain IT skills and English-language skills. However, she also cautioned that it is important to be aware of the wishes of the participants themselves who mostly opt to work in sectors traditionally ascribed to women.

Indeed, the challenge and opportunity with either English or IT courses is that they need to be adapted to the women they are teaching. For example, courses geared towards rural women with little IT or English education might already have different kinds of agricultural skills that can instead be supported. Generally, livelihood programmes should be diversified and include women from different backgrounds and regions.

At last it should be pointed out that when designing livelihood programmes, it is important to consider that it is not only about gaining financial resources, but also about gaining hands-on and social skills that can be used to support and engage in peacebuilding. Also, professional skilled women need to be considered further in livelihood programming.

Enhancing professional development for professional women, as nurses, teachers, social workers, although very impactful to peacebuilding, is often left aside and needs to be further studied and addressed.

5. Recommendations

- **To INGOs: When designing economic peacebuilding programs, seek out potentially growing economic sectors.**

A thorough understanding of the Iraqi economy in terms of the labour market is necessary to build livelihood programmes that are sustainable and that are becoming an integral part of the economy. While most programs focus on classes in sewing, English and IT skills, and supporting beauty salons, a thorough analysis of the potential within the Iraqi labour market can offer more sustainable forms of livelihood to women. For example, the potential of agriculture is mostly neglected within livelihood projects. While certain INGOs and donor agencies focus on developing Iraq's private sector, the potential of these sectors for developing livelihood programmes for women who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds is yet to be developed.

- **To INGOs and Iraqi Government: Within livelihood programs, offer special support to groups of women rather than individual women.**

Whether women are given loans or specific livelihood opportunities, it is crucial to support a group of three or more women to lower the risk of male relatives receiving the income. Individual women are more prone to the social pressure of giving any income she makes to a male relative in her household. However, when it is a group of women, mutual accountability makes it more difficult to give money to male relatives. At the same time, women can share each other's problems, support, and empower each other. In terms of peacebuilding, this supports networking, building trust and confidence in the work environment.

- **To NGOs and INGOs: Understand the different skills of women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.**

While it is important to map the diverse needs of women, particularly those affected by war and violence, it is also important to understand women's skills as this will offer hints for economic empowerment. This will also account for the fact that women remain extremely resilient, exercising agency over their lives rather than being reduced to mere victims without any skills. Therefore, employing a wider definition of livelihood skills to facilitate their access to the relevant labour markets.

For example, most of the rural women have experience in agriculture. Consequently, courses in ecologically friendly agriculture, in marketing, presentation skills to showcase local produce for tourists ensure that women can continue working in a growing industry with diversified skills. Of course, it needs to be remembered that a collective character of work is equally important for women here so that her work does not only remain part of household chores or informal work that lacks pay structure. Being aware of the discriminative gender dynamics within traditional agriculture where men receive most of the material income is important. Therefore, workshops and educational awareness programmes that focus on women's rights, women's health, international and national law in Iraq, and further political processes should also be included in the structure of these skills-based courses.

Young women who have graduated from universities require further employability workshops and livelihood opportunities in their fields of choice (ie. IT, medical and social services, English etc.). This relates to the fact that the degrees women might obtain upon graduating are theoretical and not suited to the labour market. Hands-on skills and professional development workshops that train women on using their knowledge to practically enter the job market, and through their participation within their communities, also develop the private sector are therefore needed.

Professional and/or skilled women should receive adequate support and be equipped with relevant skills in order to be able to offer hands-on skills workshops to other women, and multiply their knowledge within their communities.

- **To the Iraqi Government: Create safe and comfortable spaces for women outside the domestic sphere.**

It is important for women not to spend their days only confined at home with little contact to larger society as this creates depression and heightens possibilities for conflict. Even if there are little employment opportunities, creating a safe environment for women within public places enhances their visibility within Iraqi society, thus normalizing their presence within public life. These public spaces may be public women's centers and gardens with possibilities to engage in sport or physical exercises that are widely accessible but also offer security and have a women-first policy. Therefore, it is important to be mindful not to engage in gender segregation as a solution, thus also allowing men to go to these spaces under certain conditions. These conditions might be discussed in each specific case and might be prohibiting picture-taking or explicitly condemning harassment. Supporting the presence of women in public space directly influences peacebuilding and economic empowerment by normalising women's presence outside the household, enhancing social trust, and creating networks between women.

6. Conclusion

This study has pointed out the ways in which economic empowerment of women is an integral aspect of women's participation in peacebuilding. It has outlined the structure of the Iraqi economy that allows little women's participation in the labour market, wherein women suffer more than twice then men from unemployment. Hence, it is important to consider both the realistic potential within the Iraqi labour market as well as women's specific skills. Within this context, drawing on interviews with key stakeholders, this research has highlighted the limitations of addressing economic empowerment as simply one aspect of peacebuilding or even within a different framework. All interviewees confirmed that a sustainable form of peace is not only implemented through enhancing women's participation in peacebuilding but also by offering women access to livelihoods as the basis for making their own decisions. Implementing peacebuilding via economic empowerment, or rather economic peacebuilding, is best practiced through offering women both awareness pertaining to women's rights as well as the opportunity to work collectively, outside the domestic sphere. In this way, Putnam's conceptualisation of peacebuilding through the creation of social capital is fed by economic empowerment opportunities that contribute to giving women agency in the public sphere.[61]

To gain a deeper understanding of the kind of livelihood programs needed, further research is required that provides more information on how women who have participated in livelihood programs have also participated in peacebuilding. This calls for a broader study that is representative and able to identify as well as interrogate a large number of women who have participated in livelihood projects. Results from such a study would offer more details and practical advice on what to consider when implementing livelihood projects as part of peacebuilding programs.

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61 Putnam, Robert D. Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2020.

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Appendix

Table 1: Interview Participants from Mosul

Name	Organisation	Age Range	Profession
Sara	Participant in peacebuilding workshops and activist	20-30	Employee of an IT company
Nadia	Employed within different NGOs, for example 'Un Ponte Per'	20-30	Trainer for psychosocial support
Sroor Helal	Employee in several organizations; created her own community group, Fariq Sroor (Sroor's Team)	20-30	Nurse
Aliya	Volunteer in 'Volunteer With Us'	20-30	Project coordinator
Wurud	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	20-30	Project coordinator

Table 2: Interview Participants from Baghdad

Name	Organization	Age Range	Implementation of Economic Empowerment	Implementation of Peacebuilding
Iqbal Al Aslan	Organization for the Freedom of Women (OWFI)	40-50	Yes	Yes
Hannah Edwar	Al-Amal Association	70+	Yes	Yes
Vian Al Sheikh Ali	Tammuz Organization for Social Development	30-40	Yes	Yes
Liza Hido	Baghdad Women Association (BWA)	40-50	Yes	Yes
Amal Kabashi Faraj	Iraqi Women's Network	50-60	Works, observes, and networks with women's organisations who do the implementation process	Works, observes, and networks with women's organisations who do the implementation process

Dr. Janan Al-Jabiri

INVOLVING WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING IN IRAQ:

BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNED

February 2022

Executive Summary

In this research paper, we seek to investigate and reveal the "best practices" that feminist organisations have undertaken to build peace. We have used a number of criteria set by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, on the basis of which these best practices were characterised.

Feminist organisations have used a number of strategies and methods, including negotiation, pressure, mobilisation, and networking with various stakeholders, in order to design national action plans and implement the contents of Resolution 1325. These organisations have achieved great successes at the level of the four key points addressed by Resolution 1325. However, this research found shortcomings in their work in terms of involving women in feminist work at the grassroots level, in addition to their inability to provide radical solutions to the challenges facing women's security and peace.

Note

Keywords: Feminsist Organisations in Iraq - New Civil Society Organisations in Iraq - Peacebuilding - Best Practices - Resolution 1325 - the Iraqi National Plan for Resolution 1325.

1. Introduction

The "liberation of Iraqi women from oppression" was one of the most important pretexts used to launch the war on Iraq in 2003

(Halls-French 2017). Women have suffered from poverty and the revival of some tribal traditions and practices that perpetuate violence against them (Aljabiri and Payton 2015), such as forcing women to marry the rapist, or killing them on the grounds of honor, depriving them of civil liberties such as traveling without the consent of the guardian and facing economic challenges, such as excluding them from working on a wide scale, especially after 2003. However, nearly two decades after the end of the war, women in Iraq still suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and violence. The conditions of war, economic siege, occupation, internal sectarian conflicts and conflict of identities contributed to the weakening of state institutions and their failure to impose the rule of law (Pratt, 2011), which led to the deterioration of the situation of Iraqi women. Despite its efforts to improve the situation of women and mainstream gender into national strategies, Iraq remains one of the six worst countries in the world in terms of the Women, Peace and Security Index 2019-2020 (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2019). Iraq ranks 162 out of 167 according to the Benchmark Index for Women, Peace and Security issued by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, which contains eleven indicators that cover three basic dimensions connected to the well-being of women, ensuring their participation in political, social and economic life, as well as the extend of achieving justice for them through the existence of equitable national laws, and indicators that deal with the issue of providing social security, whether in the family or in society in general (ibid.).

There are many forms of discrimination and violence against women in Iraq. According to the Global Gender Gap Index issued by the World Economic Forum 2020, Iraq ranks 152 out of 153 (World Economic Forum 2020). 50 percent of violence cases against women in Iraq are perpetrated by the males in the family - father, brother, or partner/husband. (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2019). In addition, Iraq is one of those countries where the percentage of job opportunities for women is low. It is one of the eight worst countries in employing women, as the percentage of working women is only 20 percent of the total number of Iraqi women. This is considered the lowest percentage in the Middle East region (International Labor Organisation 2020). This comes in addition to the poverty conditions that women suffer from, and their exposure to various forms of marginalisation, discriminatory treatment and violence (Alkhudary 2020). As for the political representation of women, despite the presence of women in parliament, which allocates at least 25 percent of its seats to them, women parliamentarians have not been able to form a lobbying force in favor of women's rights. Some women candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections were also subjected to vicious attacks on social media with the aim of excluding them from political participation (Chirillo and Roddey 2019). In terms of women assuming judicial positions, women only make up 3.9 percent of judges and 18 percent of public prosecutors (Alkhudary 2020).

After the war and the fall of the previous regime in 2003, many women's NGOs were formed, as the new situation gave the opportunity for civil society to intervene in the formulation of state programs and policies. Women have played a major role in preserving social order, maintaining stability, and activating their role in maintaining laws that preserve women's rights, social harmony and the preservation of citizenship identity (Iraq. National Action Plan 2014-2018). Some of these organisations carried out many activities and campaigns for Iraq to adopt UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security which aims at promoting women's political participation, protecting women from violence (Pratt 2011) and their economic and social empowerment.

Although there are studies and research that dealt with the activities and programs of feminist organisations in peacebuilding, the "best practices" in integrating women in peacebuilding have not been diagnosed to see what can be generalised in other places. Therefore, this research paper seeks to know the "best practices" carried out by feminist organisations with regard to working to activate and implement the three key points of UN Resolution 1325. The research examined a number of criteria to evaluate the practices under study by analysing the suitability of the practices to the social, political and economic context in the country, in addition to their suitability to the needs of the women concerned, compatibility with other projects being implemented, the impact and effectiveness of these works, and finally, sustainability and the possibility of generalisation in different regions in Iraq.

This research shows that feminist organisations have played multiple roles in peacebuilding. The organisation has proposed new laws and supported the Iraqi government to develop local plans to implement international resolutions. Moreover, they have protected and empowered women economically. These efforts are classified as peacebuilding efforts. This paper consists of three sections, apart from the research methodology. In the beginning, it will address the theoretical and conceptual framework, followed by a review and analysis of the most important practices as demonstrated by the field research. Then it will address the lessons learned. After this it will demonstrate conclusions and recommendations for relevant stakeholders including the Iraqi government, local organisations and international organisations.

2. Research Methodology

This paper seeks to fill a gap in our knowledge of "best practices" and the most important lessons in engaging women in peacebuilding in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Iraq. Our aim is to answer the following questions: What are the best practices that have been implemented so far in the field of engaging women in peacebuilding at the local level, whether formal or informal, that can be scaled up and repurposed elsewhere? What are the best lessons learned from these initiatives and interventions? What are the organisations behind these initiatives? Are there any successful practices or initiatives that could be re-adopted elsewhere or developed throughout Iraq? What are the internal reasons for success, including the implementing entity's structures and strategies? What are the external reasons, including the surrounding external factors supporting the executing entity?

The research adopts a qualitative research methodology in collecting information, which relies on the following sources:

1. Reviewing the literature related to peacebuilding, the gender concept of peacebuilding, and the experiences and work of official and unofficial feminist organisations on global and local levels, as well as reviewing international agreements and resolutions such as Resolution 1325. Previous literature was reviewed and international documents, treaties and local laws were considered. Among the documents are the first and second Iraq National Action Plan, in addition to a number of reports published on the Internet and articles on women, peace and security.

2. Semi-structured interviews with officials of eight feminist organisations in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region were conducted (see Annex 1). Besides, two interviews conducted in the context of another research paper were analysed as well. The organisations were selected based on their activities and prominence in many peacebuilding activities. This does not mean that they are the only organisations working in this field, but due to limited time, a prominent group has been selected among these organisations. Although the selected organisations all operate throughout Iraq, their headquarters are based in five Iraqi cities: Baghdad, Erbil, Dohuk, Basra, and Mosul.

Interviews were conducted with two types of civil society organisations in Iraq: official NGOs, which are registered organisations and operate under Law No. 12 of 2010, and feminist organisations active in building peace, which can be classified under the "new civil society organisations". This will be clarified in the second section of this research paper. The roles of these non-governmental organisations in working to implement the four key points of Resolution 1325 were analysed. The two key points "protection from violence" and "its prevention" were combined in one.

The researcher faced many obstacles due to the unstable security conditions in Iraq, and due to some people's fear of conducting interviews. Another challenge was the Corona pandemic and the health crisis that Iraq is facing, as is the rest of the world. For security reasons, it was not possible to meet with one organisation that had a role in building peace

and providing protection from violence for women. The interviews were conducted on the electronic platform (Zoom) instead of face-to-face interviews in line with the policy of social distancing and avoiding meet-ups due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Fundamentalist obligations were followed in the research, in terms of clarifying the researcher's obligations to the interviewees to preserve information and not share it with any parties outside the scope of this research.

The researcher faced limitations related to the scarcity of research that addressed this topic, especially in the context of Iraq. There are only a few researches that dealt with this issue in Iraq. Among the researches are the study conducted by Kaya (2016) which deals with women, peace and security in Iraq and the Iraqi National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325, and the study of O'Driscoll (2017) entitled "Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and Reconciliation in Iraq" (O'Driscoll 2017). However, they did not evaluate what the "best practices" were. They rather classified what those organisations did as "best practices".

In general, there is no written information or research to the researcher's knowledge evaluating the interventions carried out by feminist organisations and their impact on the concerned group in order to enhance their participation in peacebuilding. Since interviews with the concerned group, and consequently insights into the impact of the interventions on their peacebuilding ability, were not possible due to the limited time, the paper benefited from a review of reports and research issued by international organisations that dealt with the impact of the work of these organisations on women in peacebuilding.

This research can be used by feminist activists, feminist organisation, whether officially or informally registered, international donor organisations, international organisations and institutions interested in peace and gender issues, as well as academic institutions. Consequently, the research adds scientific value, as the researcher frames several criteria that can be used in other research and evaluation of other projects that seek to empower Iraqi women according to the key points of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. At the end of the paper, the researcher formulates several recommendations that can be used in practice by stakeholders concerned with policies and activities related to women, peace and security, such as the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

3. Involving Women in Peacebuilding: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

3.1 Peacebuilding

The development of the concept of peacebuilding can be traced back to the middle of the second decade of the last century, when US President Woodrow Wilson delivered his speech before the US Congress in 1918 to announce his fourteen principles, known as the Wilson Principles, stressing the need to resolve conflicts between states by peaceful means and establish international relations based on general peace pacts (Hussain 2017). However, it can be said that the concept of peacebuilding was crystallised institutionally with the report of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Ghali in 1992 (Riyad 2019).

He presented his report to the forty-seventh session entitled "The Peace Agenda," in which he explained to the international community his vision of four stages of conflict resolution before, during and after their occurrence. The four stages are: Using diplomacy to stave off conflict, taking the necessary measures to stop war in the event that it breaks out, i.e. making peace, keeping peace after ending conflicts, and finally building peace (United Nations 2010). He defines peacebuilding as "post-conflict activity that includes diagnosing and supporting frameworks that strengthen peace in a manner that avoids a return to war situations" (Tschirgi n.d.).

Peacebuilding requires addressing the causes of conflict in terms of economic, social injustice or political oppression (Security Council 1992), and addressing socio-economic and political challenges.

In addition, it calls for the establishment of effective procedures and policies that respond to the needs of development and security at the same time (Tschirgi n.d.), and not only to provide temporary and short-term solutions. On the other hand, it also requires rebuilding institutions and infrastructure, strengthening national capacities at all levels, developing comprehensive strategies related to the specific needs for the development of peacebuilding in the concerned country, and carefully formulating priorities in order to achieve the purposes for which the peace agenda was set, as explained in the report of Boutros-Ghali (Security Council 1992). Therefore, we can end up defining peacebuilding as "a social change that contributes to creating just peace beyond the narrow definition of the post-conflict phase" (Paffenholz 2014).

John Paul Lederach turned to the importance of local actors in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Accordingly, he defines peace building "as a concept that includes the processes carried out by local actors that are all the forces of society, individually and as a group, as well as the authority and actors from international institutions, non-international institutions and countries that aim to revive civil society, rebuild infrastructure and restore institutions destroyed by war or conflict" (Riad 2019).

Lederach divided internal peace actors into three categories: the highest category, at the highest official levels in government or decision-makers and negotiators, the middle category, which includes leaders of some organisations and institutions, and the local grassroots, which is the third level represented by community leaders (Paffenholz 2014). Lederach compares external and internal efforts to build peace. While he explained that external efforts were sometimes unsuccessful in resolving conflicts in some countries, he emphasises that the internal efforts of local communities, from both men and women, play an important role.

3.2 Gender Concept in Peacebuilding

The concept of including women in peacebuilding emerged and developed with the research of sociologist Elise Boulding, whose writings emphasised the importance of gender mainstreaming in theory, policy and practice of involving women in peacebuilding. In her pioneering work, Boulding was able to mainstream this gender perspective in policies, programs and discourse on peacebuilding (Woodhouse and Santiago 2012), to incorporate this concept into United Nations policies. Gender can be defined as "attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex" (Bouvier 2016). The distribution of roles based on gender reflects the disparity in the existing economic, social and political rights related to the gender of persons. Women's rights, activities, access to resources, opportunities, and ability to contribute to decision-making differ based on gender (Munro 2000).

The importance of the issuance of United Nations Resolution 1325 in mainstreaming the gender perspective in policies and programs related to peacebuilding lies in the emergence of an international recognition of discrimination against women on the basis of their gender, especially in areas that witnessed conflict. In addition, the resolution aims to support women as victims of violence in areas of conflict, even after the end of the conflict, and stressed the importance of their role in building security and peace. Thus, it reflects a kind of international commitment to developing a new vision for empowering women to contribute to conflict resolution and to counter the disproportionate impacts on women (ESCWA 2016). Despite the conduction of many studies that demonstrate the positive and sustainable impact of involving women in peacebuilding, the role of women in peacebuilding is still marginal (Domingo et al. 2013).

3.3 UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Security and Peace

The United Nations conferences on women's rights, equality, and the involvement of women in development and political decision-making paved the way for the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, which was passed on 31 October 2000 (Bouvier 2016). The Security Council Resolution 1325 is based on four key points: Political participation and political representation, prevention of violence and conflict, protection from violence and relief and economic empowerment of women. The resolution is not limited to reviewing the violence and injustice inflicted on women as a result of armed conflicts compared to the rest of the population, but rather emphasises their role as an agent of

change in peacebuilding efforts (ibid.). The first key point stresses the importance of the equal participation of women, the promotion of gender equality on the path to peace and political decision-making in security issues. This concerns the local, national and global levels, and whatever responsibilities women are entrusted as negotiators, mediators, or even in issues as maintaining peace and order and humanitarian efforts, as well as supporting feminist efforts at the local level and for peace initiatives (United Nations 2010). The second and third key point also emphasises the provision of protection and prevention of various forms of violence against women and girls in conflict or post-conflict situations (Security Council 2000). This includes the enactment of laws criminalising the perpetration of violence and sexual violence in areas of conflict, the identification of institutions that track the perpetrators of violations and sexual violence and addressing all acts and behaviors that discriminate against women on the basis of gender (ibid.). As for the last key point, it focuses on relief and economic empowerment, i.e. providing aid to women and girls affected by violence, such as food, shelters, and housing. Besides, it includes empowering them economically and increasing their capabilities where they are, whether in the cities or the camps to which they have sought refuge for security and peace (Strickland and Duvvury 2003). The same key point emphasises empowering them and increasing their capacities to provide relief and assistance as agents and actors for change.

After the issuance of Resolution 1325, many countries adopted the resolution and developed national plans to adapt it to the local political contexts of their countries, including Iraq. Iraq was the first in the Middle East and North Africa, as it developed its national plan for the period 2014-2018 (Kaya 2016). Feminist non-governmental organisations played the main and essential role in Iraq's development of its plan to implement this resolution, through building alliances and putting pressure on decision-makers. The new civil society organisations also played a role. In the following, the difference between each of the NGOs and the new civil society organisations will be explained.

3.4 New NGOs and CSOs

A non-governmental organisation is defined by the United Nations as an "organisation that is independent of the state, has structures similar to organisational structures, has a system of incorporation and legal form, is established by individuals or organisations, and whose decision-making bodies are independent of the authorities of the government. Its aims are non-lucrative and of public interest, which usually go beyond the interests of its own members." (Mandat International n.d.). These organisations emerged in the Middle East in the end of the 1990s, when governments exercised high control over economic and political life (Bosch 1997). They appeared in Iraq widely after 2003 [1]. NGOs work on issues related to development, security and services. Their activities focus on "advocacy, support and capacity building". The organisational structure of NGOs consist of hierarchical structures managed by administrative committees and implemented by paid personnel and a number of volunteers. Their funding depends on state resources, or international donors. Local organisations that receive funding from international donors are subject to local organised laws, which differ from one country to another.

As far as Iraq is concerned, these organisations have played a major role in defining and working to implement Resolution 1325. Although the new CSOs are not entirely modern (they combine the practices of social movements and develop the structures and practices of CSOs), their role has increased with the events of the Arab Spring and the protests of Southern Europe. They promote new forms in which civil society contributes to and interacts with social, economic and political situations (Gready and Robins 2017). CSOs focus on economic, social and political demands, and their activities are based on protests (Ali 2019). The new civil society organisations arose in response to certain needs that emerged during a changing reality in light of the October demonstrations. Since they are not located within the state bureaucracy, they are able to respond more flexibly and easily than traditional organisations. Therefore, CSOs are doing work that registered NGOs may not be able to do. She sees these organisations as "elitist" and does not involve women in their work for women's rights. Also, the new civil society organisations refuse to provide services and demand the state to fulfil this role (Mitri 2015).

In addition, the work of the new civil society organisations is based on voluntary work (interview with Joan Mirza - Aman Organisation for Women), and its funding depends mainly on its members and supporters, whether inside or outside Iraq [2]. CSOs are not registered at the NGO Department in Iraq. Often their activities stem from the priorities set by its members. The new civil society organisations in Iraq have worked to strengthen the political participation and political representation of women in line with the goals of Resolution 1325.

Finally, it is necessary to highlight the core point of this research, which is the knowledge of "best practices". What is meant by this concept, and what are the criteria that were adopted to evaluate the practices presented in the research? This is what will be reviewed in the following sections.

4. Best Practices

Best practice can be understood as the activity that delivers better results than any other activity (EU-CIVCAP 2018). The activity has to be creative and it should be possible to re-apply it in different places (UNHCR 2008). Best practices can be viewed as "the best solutions to existing problems in light of the sources and work environment within a specific framework" (ibid.). The significance of their study is that it helps strategists formulate their programs based on an assessment of reality, in order to analyse what is "best" among the best practices (USAID Office 2011).

The research used four criteria developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to evaluate humanitarian assistance in complex environments (NGO Coordination Resource Centre 2006), which are summarised as: relevance, consistency of practice, impact, and sustainability of those practices. On the one hand, appropriateness in this context means the appropriateness of the intervention and the practice within the political and social context of the society. On the other hand, it means the suitability of the intervention to the needs and priorities of the concerned groups whose needs the intervention ought to respond to. Another point is whether those practices are adequately presented. As for the consistency of the practice, it means the extent to which the practice and intervention are consistent with professional standards, policies, and accepted practices, and whether it underestimates or repeats other practices. Impact is the knowledge of whether the practice has a positive and tangible role in terms of individuals, the community, the wider community, and formal or informal laws and practices. The final criterion is whether the practice and its impact are sustainable. In particular, knowing whether the interventions contributed to addressing the root causes of the problem, or if they only addressed its symptoms. The aim is to show what is new and unique in these practices (United Nations Resources on Gender no date).

After clarifying the theoretical and conceptual framework, and the analytical framework for best practices, the third section presents best practices in the key points addressed by Resolution 1325. This section will begin by firstly addressing political participation and representation, secondly, protection and prevention of violence and thirdly, relief and economic empowerment.

4.1 Political Participation and Representation

Resolution 1325 was issued in 2000 to stress the importance of giving women an equal role in building peace, and achieving security and peace for women. It also emphasised that the participation of women in various formal and informal peacebuilding negotiations, their involvement in official and governmental committees and national reconciliation, and their representation in various elected bodies on an equal basis, are among the essential steps to achieving gender equality. Given the Iraqi context, it is clear that there are a number of social, economic and political factors that have negatively affected the participation of Iraqi women in political life as well as their political representation,

especially in official state bodies (Hassan 2016). Despite the progress made regarding the status of women in the first period of the Baath Party rule in Iraq from 1970 till the end of the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), in terms of providing job opportunities, education and eliminating female illiteracy, women remained deprived of The right to express or self-organise outside the scope of the private governmental union affiliated with the Baath Party until 2003. The previous political system, that of Saddam Hussein, did not allow civil society organisations the freedom to operate independently of the state (Seymour 2015). The matter was relatively different in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially after 1991, when the Kurdistan government emerged from the direct control of the central authority over the region, and many feminist organisations were formed. However, Kurdistan's exit from the central government's control did not provide safety for women in Kurdistan. Women in the region have been exposed to spreading honor killings, so that in the 90s, the number of victims nearly reached 4000 (Wadi 2005). In this regard, local and international civil society organisations played a role in uncovering these crimes. Many of the organisations were formed after 1991.

After 2003, women were subject to various forms of violence in the rest of Iraq, including political violence. Party leaders and political blocs that came to power with the help of the United States of America exercised wide domination over women, and sought to politically exclude them and permanently question their abilities and capabilities. In addition, they did not provide the requirements for the development and qualification of women or support them (Al-Zubaidi n.d.). For this reason, feminist organisations have held many debates about women's participation in the new Iraqi leaderships since 2004 (Hassan n.d.). The situation worsened when Iraqi women began to work in the public sphere, especially in the field of political participation and political representation.

This led to defamation campaigns and assassinations at times. Female candidates in the last parliamentary elections of 2018 were subjected to fierce defamation campaigns that drove some of them out of the electoral race, as happened to the candidate Intizar Ahmed Jassem. She belongs to the electoral bloc "The Victory Alliance" led by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. Her name was removed from the list of candidates (Tajali and Farhan 2018). In the demonstrations in Basra in 2018 and the uprising in October 2019, women suffered from attempts to be excluded with defamation and violence. Suad al-Ali was assassinated in Basra in September 2018, Sarah Talib was assassinated on 2 October 2019, and other activists such as Saba al-Mahdawi and Mary Muhammad were kidnapped (Ali 2020). Reham Yaqoub was assassinated in Basra in June 2020 and other women have been murdered in recent years (MacDonald 2020).

Therefore, feminist organisations worked to defend women's political participation and political representation in various forms. Hence, women's NGOs have received international efforts by mainstreaming Security Council Resolution 1325 and calling on governments to adopt it so that it can be "a powerful tool to challenge discriminatory attitudes and cultures regarding the role of women in society" (Halls-French 2017).

The research paper identifies the two best practices carried out by feminist organisations to activate the "political participation and political representation" key point of Security Council Resolution 1325. The first relates to the efforts of feminist organisations for the legislation of the National Plan in Iraq to implement this resolution. The second relates to involving women in political activity at a grassroots level.

4.1.1 First Best Practice: Working on Iraq's Adoption of a National Plan for Resolution 1325

Women's NGOs in Iraq used Resolution 1325 as an umbrella to change policies, laws, and programs related to gender equality. The implementation of this resolution provides an opportunity to make the voices of women heard and strengthens their participation in order to take on various roles in peace and stability building. It also works on ending discrimination against them and treating them on an equal regarding their representation in all official government bodies and committees. Moreover, it focuses on the protection of women from violence, and on empowering them socially and economically.

Feminist organisations in Iraq found that the resolution is consistent with the rest of the feminist demands that they had raised years ago, and that it was not far from what they were looking forward to (Gienger 2020). The Women Empowerment Organisation is one of the organisations active in this field, with a history of feminist work to provide programs to empower women. The organisation has carried out many activities in order for Iraq to adopt this resolution, such as mobilisation, marshalling and building alliances with similar organisations and groups.

It has initiated the formation of a feminist network consisting of ten feminist organisations, such as the Iraqi Women's League, which has been active in feminist activism since the 50s, in addition to the Baghdad Women Association and the Assyrian Women's Union. Among the women participating in this work were activists who returned to Iraq from exile after 2003, seeking to improve the conditions of women and contribute to encouraging them to mobilise their political forces (Al-Ali 2007).

The Women Empowerment Organisation secured the required financial resources, as it was able to obtain international financial support (Rayman et al. n.d.). This helped the organisation and its allies to begin establishing and consolidating links between feminist NGOs and state institutions (ibid.). It has also held many meetings and conferences with various stakeholders, both inside and outside Iraq, and organised training workshops as well as providing trainings to coalition members.

The organisation demonstrated negotiating capabilities by opening dialogues, discussions and negotiations with three bodies in the state (judicial, executive, and legislative). It has succeeded in engaging and persuading representatives of the state and its institutions to sit around one table that brings them together with representatives of civil society organisations. Efforts by the Women Empowerment Organisation to bring together representatives from the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, despite their political differences, also succeeded in having them sit at one negotiating table to discuss the implementation of Resolution 1325 (Kaya 2016).

Suzan Aref, head of the Women Empowerment Organisation took over the formation of the first network of Iraqi feminist organisations to adopt the national plan for Resolution 1325. She explained:

The aim of this feminist initiative was to reflect the content of Resolution 1325 on the ground and how women benefit from it. When we started working, we realised that to implement such a strategy, the activities and work of civil society organisations will not suffice. A comprehensive governmental plan must be formulated to support the implementation of the agenda of this resolution. The urgent question at that time was how to create political will among the decision-makers in the three authorities (legislative, executive, and judicial). To solve this dilemma, we have already formed a national team called the "National Multi-Sectoral Team" and divided the relevant tasks and roles among the members of the formed network. We also gathered representatives from the central government and the regional government, from the legislative, judicial and governmental authorities, to sit at one table with representatives of civil society organisations. The ten organisations that make up the women's network were the main partners with the state in setting a vision and formulating the strategy of the National Action Plan. The team then formed several committees with the aim of developing a vision, strategy and National Action Plan for the Security Council Resolution. In April 2013, this plan was launched, so that Iraq would be the first country in the Arab world to develop a national plan to adopt this resolution, and for both governments in Baghdad and Kurdistan [3].|

The initiative to launch the National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 had an impact on a general national level. It enhanced the dialogue between all concerned parties and stakeholders, which contributed positively to creating channels of communication between the various stakeholders, and coordinating efforts to improve the conditions of Iraqi women between the governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region and organisations of civil society. Civil society representatives have contributed as pioneers and peace builders in mediating between conflicting parties, finding solutions and developing strategies to improve the conditions of women throughout Iraq. The presence of these meetings and discussions is an opportunity to create friendly relations between representatives of the two governments. It also creates the appropriate atmosphere for sustaining relations between representatives of feminist organisations to work on other projects in order to improve the conditions of Iraqi women on the one hand, and between them and representatives of the governments of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region on the other hand.

This is evident in the meeting of representatives of the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government with representatives of women's civil society organisations after the legislation of Resolution 1325 through the National Plan in Iraq on February 6, 2014, which for the period from 2014 to 2018 (Kaya 2016). A new coalition was formed, consisting of representatives from the Kurdistan and the Iraqi government, as well as representatives of women's organisations. The coalition was called the "Iraqi Initiative for the Implementation of Resolution 1325".

The negotiations revolved around placing women, security and peace issues on the national agenda. Suzan Aref confirms the impact of the release of the National Plan in an interview with Viola Gienger in October 2020:

During the period between 2012 and 2018, many things changed in a positive way. First of all, women, peace, and security became a topic at high-level discussions in government. Everyone is aware what women, peace, and security means, what 1325 means. Inside each ministry, there is a 1325 team that works on reforms required in the plans (Gienger 2020).

Based on the report assessing the implementation of the first National Plan, co-written by Suzan Aref and Qassem Al-Zamili, the added value of the first Iraqi National Plan lies within the fact that it is a "cooperative and consultative process that ensured the expansion of its ownership". 23 ministries and institutions from the Federal Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government participated in formulating plans and working to follow up on their implementation.

This collaboration has resulted in the development and enhancement of the knowledge, capabilities and skills of all stakeholders regarding women's rights and the agenda on women, peace and security (Cross Sector Task Force 2018). However, after all the efforts that were made, there were some challenges and obstacles during the implementation of the National Plan of Resolution 1325 between 2014 and 2018, as the Iraqi government, represented by its Prime Minister, refused to specify a special budget for its implementation. With the occupation of a third of Iraq's lands in the western regions by ISIS, the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, the government did not pay attention to the implementation of this urgent plan (Kaya 2016). As for the second plan, which was supposed to be issued in 2018, for the years 2018-2022, it was issued at the end of 2020 (United Nations – Iraq 2014):

Despite the state's reluctance to implement the first plan, and the delay in the legislation of the second plan, feminist organisations continue to strive for the sustainability of these efforts in order for Iraq to put these plans into practice, especially since it has formed alliances with them and created the ground for building feminist alliances in the future. All this aimed at sustaining the active efforts and pressure on Iraqi governments to implement their commitments. In order for Iraq to adopt this plan, feminist organisations such as the Iraqi Women's Network, a network of 85 feminist organisations, rushed to submit their agendas and reports to the United Nations, in so-called "shadow reports". They used the universal periodic review mechanism to pressure the Iraqi government to comply and implement its pledges, whether for what was stated In Resolution 1325 or even what was mentioned in the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, known as CEDAW [4].

In other words, these organisations put Resolution 1325 on the agenda of the Iraqi government. Therefore, it is necessary to perpetuate and strengthen these efforts and to learn lessons from past experiences.

With all the efforts that have been made, it can be noted that the feminist masses, who have the main interest in peacebuilding, were not mentioned or included at the grassroots level. Basically, these organisations settled for working with the government and international organisations only. This can be considered as causing "influence from above". Therefore, in order for these organisations not to be accused of elitism, it is necessary to engage the feminist masses to lobby for the implementation of the resolution, and to push the government to allocate financial resources to implement these plans. The existence of the political will to achieve the objectives of this plan is an essential factor in its implementation.

4.1.2 Second Best Practice: Involving Women in Political Activism at a Grassroots Level Through the Use of Social Media

While defending women's right of political participation and political representation, Resolution 1325 was not the core starting point of the new civil society organisations. However, all of their political activities are consistent with the mentioned resolution. The new civil society organisations have used social media and benefited from the technological development in the last decade. They found new forms of political participation and created different forms of pressure on public policy makers in order to push them to make or reject certain decisions.

The widespread use of social media in the Middle East, including Iraq, was of great importance (Abdulrazzaq 2013). The exact number of internet users in Iraq is not known, but some sources indicate that the number has reached 30 million, i.e. 75 percent of the country's citizens in 2020 (Ayn Al Iraq News 2020). The number of social media users in the country is 21 million out of a total population of 40 million citizens (ibid.). However, the use of the Internet by women is still much lower than that of men, and there is still a gap in the use of social media platforms (such as Facebook) by women. The percentage of women who use Facebook is approximately 63 percent less than men (GSMA 2018). However, the Internet has been widely used by feminist organisations. The widespread use of the Internet is due to two reasons: "First, the Internet is the largest information resource in the world. Second, it provides people with access to an interactive mechanism to directly communicate with each other" (Al-Hammadany and Heshmati 2011).

Social media has been used by feminist organisations, as they provide a platform for the most marginalised groups, including women, through which they can express their opinions and make their voices heard (Eltahawy 2010). They can communicate with the feminist audience and the wider world, and cooperate and network with each other without waiting for approvals from the authorities (Odine 2013). This medium has been used to reach and influence the authority or the public on issues related to gender equality. It also gave women alternative spaces with fewer restrictions and consequences than male-dominated public spaces, enabled them to talk about their experiences of violence including sexual violence and on how they supported each other by sharing each other's stories. In other words, the Internet has enabled women to spread news about the violations they are subjected to (ibid.).

These spaces were also used to organise virtual events such as writing campaign tags, using photos, raising banners and collecting signatures. New methods of expression, pressure, and methods of organising and mobilising were added in addition to the traditional methods used before the Internet (Abdel-Fattah 2017).

The researcher tried to explore beyond the internet screens, and two interviews were conducted with Inana Tishreen and Aman Organisation for Women, which are classified as new civil society organisations. Social media has been widely used by both organisations with the aim of involving women in political action, but both organisations have taken a different approach. The Inana Tishreen Feminist Group used this medium to invite women to participate in feminist demonstrations and marches, while Aman Organisation carried out continuous awareness and educational work to enhance the awareness on the importance of women's equality, ensure their political participation, mobilise public opinion for a law criminalising domestic violence, and to defend the rights of unemployed women to find job opportunities.

The Inana Group used social media to contact the female audience in order to reach and influence it, mobilise female advocates, supporters, and solidarity activists and make them engage in and expand participation in demonstrations. Inas Karim, one of the founding members of the Inana Tishreen Feminist Group, which was formed in the middle of the October uprising, says:

In the October uprising, we were inviting women and young women to join the protests through social media. We also mobilised to join the Pink March in protest against the call for gender separation in the squares, to emphasise that the uprising brings together male and female demonstrators, that their demands are united and that there is no way to separate them. We planned this demonstration on February 8, 2020, and within five days we were able to mobilise thousands of women, so that on February 13, in most cities of Iraq, a large number of women joined the demonstrations, in response to our call that we launched on social media [5].

As for Aman Organisation for Women, it focused on attracting and encouraging women to talk and debate on various issues. It used social media as an informational and educational tool to increase women's awareness of their rights, in order to unite their voices on political and social issues of common interest. In other words, social media enabled the organisation to communicate, cooperate with women and establish a network. It was used as a platform for holding seminars on various topics related to protecting women from violence and harassment, and ensuring political participation, by inviting feminist activists from different organisations and from different countries, like Lebanon and Tunisia, to exchange knowledge and experiences and share the suffering that unites the women of the Arab world [6].

Aman Organisation also launched a signature campaign to pressure the government to pass a law criminalising domestic violence. In this context, many reports and videos have been published on issues related to empowering women's voices and making them heard by political authorities (ibid.).

The use of the Internet and social media has become very vital and important. It is a sustainable and scalable activity that can strengthen women's participation in activism and political representation. The use of the Internet has become daily and continuous. There are no restrictions to its access or the delivery of voices emanating from it. Participation in raised issues from the most remote places in the world has become possible (Odine 2016). This is used as means of political publicity and mobilisation on women's issues inter alia. Therefore, governments seek to cut it off to weaken communications between male and female activists, and prevent information and image sharing around political issues and certain economic demands and protests (Al-Mousily 2019), which indicates the extent of its power and influence. Joan Mirza, one of the founding members of Aman Organisation says:

We see that the use of social media has become very influential. Some women told us that they were hopeless, as they felt that they were unable to change anything, but by attending seminars and writing thoughts and articles and engaging in discussions, they began to find common grounds with the other participants, and they shared with each other their common suffering, worries and anxieties. This had a positive impact on them, as they were freed from the state of isolation and dispersion that prevailed among women and adolescent girls in the period prior to the October uprising. We, who work in Aman Organisation for Women, find that these spaces and interactions are of special importance, as we notice that the participating women have gained more confidence in themselves. This has positively affected their responses and interactions with others, both men and women. We believe that self-confidence is a prerequisite for women's political participation and representation.

Playing these roles demonstrates the importance of giving hope and opening new horizons to hard-to-reach individuals, especially girls and women who suffer from limited mobility, freedom of movement and few possibilities of meeting others. It is a first and essential step for women to gain confidence in the possibility of change and in their ability to play a role in political participation and representation, in order to achieve change in line with Resolution 1325. However, all these positive effects do not mean that Internet users are not subjected to violations, threats and virtual extortion. This medium has its own challenges as well. With the limited awareness of organisations and their employees about cyber security aspects and procedures, the Internet can be a source of dangers to activists, both male and female.

It can be concluded in this section, that feminist organisations had a role in building peace. What the organisations have done for Iraq to adopt Resolution 1325, through its cooperation with state institutions and international organisations "top down", is pioneering work, and it can be sustained. However, these organisations must include women and adopt a participatory approach by inviting and engaging women and local organisations in discussions about the terms of the National Action Plan, how to implement it, and in monitoring their work and activities. The participation of women in political work through social media was also proven effective as women joined activities announced through these channels. Therefore, it is important to develop and improve the use of social media by organising workshops and conferences (Odine 2013).

There is a need to deal with the danger that cyberspace may pose to the feminist efforts in Iraq, and these working organisations need training workshops on cyber security and on the use of social media in advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns.

4.2 Protection from and Prevention of Violence

The second and third key point of Resolution 1325 emphasised the importance of providing protection for women from violence in areas of conflict, where abuse and sexual violence, including rape, against women are widely used as a weapon by the conflicting parties. Women in Iraqi cities suffer from various forms of violence and sexual violence, such as kidnapping and rape. They are even subjected to captivity, perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), in addition to forced marriage of minors, as well as human trafficking (Kaya 2016). In particular, girls and women with disabilities, whose number exceeded three million in Iraq, are exposed to various forms of violence, including sexual violence (Iraqi Women and Partners Network 2014). In addition, displaced women and girls suffer from male dominance in camp management. Their freedom of movement is severely restricted and they are maltreated, due to their association with the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS). Some of them come from families whose members belong to ISIS (ibid.).

Feminist organisations took the initiative to protect women from violence, whether through legal intervention, as they sought to work for a law criminalising domestic violence, or with the help of unofficial local, spiritual and religious in order to save women from the death penalty. This section will examine these two practices, explaining why these two interventions are among the best in protecting women and preventing violence.

4.2.1 First Best Practice: Efforts to Legislate a Law Criminalising Domestic Violence

Since 1986, Iraq has ratified a number of international conventions related to women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, known as CEDAW (United Nations 2011). It has also adopted the National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 in 2014. However, the rates of violence and sexual violence are on the rise (Kaya 2016), in the absence of institutions that protect women from violence, in addition to the existence of several laws that provide for the legitimacy of violence against women. Paragraph 1 of Article 41 of Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 recognises that the perpetration of violence by the husband if he "disciplines the wife" is not considered a crime (Iraqi Legislative Base n.d.). Therefore, the involvement of feminist organisations in this practice is necessary and appropriate to the Iraqi context.

Efforts to pass a law criminalising domestic violence may be considered fruitless due to the absence of a law in this regard, but the pursuit of a law is a best practice. It is a new work field in Iraq, and it puts the issue of criminalising "violence against women" on the agenda of state institutions for the first time. The efforts and advocacy for the issuance of this law were pioneering actions, especially since the enactment of the law firstly

requires the abolition of other legal articles that legalise violence against women from the same law, such as Paragraph 1 of Article 41 of the Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969, and Article 398, which exempts a rapist from the crime of rape if he marries the victim. Several feminist NGOs and new civil society organisations advocated for the issuance of a law criminalising violence against women, and many activities were implemented in order to highlight the seriousness of the issue of violence against women (Al-Quds Al-Arabi 2020). Some of these organisations were able to obtain support from international donor organisations, which supported with expertise, knowledge and training necessary for campaigns claiming the issuance of this law.

A number of feminist organisations such as the Iraqi Women's Network, the Women's Empowerment Organisation, the Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq, and the Al-Amal Association among others, carried out many activities and put international pressure through organising demonstrations and gatherings, and using the media to pressure decision-makers. These organisations demanded the enactment of this law in order to provide services to battered women, find safe shelters for women, and punish perpetrators of violent crimes [7].

These organisations set out to establish many links, some of which could be called "vertical" and others "horizontal". Vertical links aimed to influence decision-makers in the parliament and government on the local level, and to obtain political endorsement and financial support from international organisations for the issuance of this law. As for the horizontal links, they focused on establishing broad links, alliances and networks with feminist non-governmental organisations on local or international levels [8]. Feminist organisations took the initiative to work on the first draft of the law since 2011, and sought the support of the official authorities, especially a number of male and female representatives of the parliament. They also held many meetings, workshops and conferences, which were attended by representatives of ministries and parliament in Iraqi Kurdistan and the central government [9]. The organisations also sought to benefit from the experiences of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which led to enacting a law criminalising domestic violence since 2011. These organisations did not neglect the roles of moderate actors, as John Paul Lederach describes them. He emphasised the ability of these actors to bring about transformations in society, due to their ability to influence those at the top, as well as giving them the ability to influence at a grassroots level (Paffenholz 2014). Therefore, the organisations sought the approval of the Shiite religious leaders, which has political and social influence on decision-making in Iraq [10]. In addition, they aimed to mobilise financial resources in order to cover its activities inside and outside Iraq for this purpose. Lisa Hido, president of the Baghdad Women Association, says:

We have worked a lot on enacting a law against domestic violence and started a campaign for this purpose. The campaign is well-known and many human rights activists, academics and media professionals joined it, while we, the Baghdad Women Association, head it. The purpose of the campaign is to "make family protection a law". We are trying to pressure the parliament to pass the law. We believe that as long as there is violence, women will not have peace, and therefore, society as a whole will not have peace [11].

The submission of this draft of the law led to polarisation within the state and society between those who agreed and those who disagreed (Younes, 2020). The opposition to this law from some political parties with religious and clan backgrounds, is due to their refusal of battered women leaving the house and turning to safe places for women. From their point of view this is a practice that violates social and religious norms and values (Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative 2020). It is believed that "women's shelters encourage them to disobey their husbands, and daughters to disobey their parents [...], and that the shelter is a place for a group of impolite women present without a male guardian, and is likely to be a place of prostitution" (Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq and its associates 2015). Some feminist organisations call on the state to establish such shelters under the protection and control of the state (Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative 2020). Other organisations, such as the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq, took the initiative to organise women's shelters and considered this legitimate, as it provided safety for hundreds of women.

However, despite the objections of some parties in parliament, feminist organisations continue, in a persistent and sustainable manner, to advocate for the issuance of the law over an entire decade. The draft of the law was submitted more than once for discussion in parliamentary sessions in the past years without being voted on. Nevertheless, the impact of this practice can be seen on raising collective awareness of domestic violence issues and the importance of the state's intervention in enacting a law criminalising violence, punishing the abusers and protecting the abused woman. Talking about the need to pass a law criminalising domestic violence has become an issue of public opinion, and many voices calling for the enactment of this law have risen, especially after the increase in violence against women rates due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic (Ramadan 2020). The percentage of violent crimes against women reached 75 percent of all acts of violence committed. 95 percent of them were directed against women. 61 percent of the crimes were committed by spouses, and 39 percent by male members of the family (GBV Cluster – Iraq 2020). The efforts to pass this law also contributed to creating alliances and networks among feminist organisations. This created an appropriate ground for perpetuating feminist work by continuing to pressure the government to enact a law criminalising domestic violence, or through other actions to achieve its goal of gender equality. Moreover, the continuous work and pressure of NGOs has increased confidence in these organisations, so that they have become known and trusted for their work and for their defense of women's issues as representatives of civil society [12]. This practice is considered one of the best practices. However, it is necessary to involve the female mass base in the activities carried out by NGOs, and not be satisfied with coordinating and working with governmental organisations or international institutions, which will result in women's protection and violence prevention. The importance of employing a participatory approach to include the voices of women stems from the fact that they have a direct or indirect role in decision-making. They are the concerned group and those who have a direct interest in approving this law, regardless of their religious and national descent and their economic status.

4.2.2 Second Best Practice: Engaging Local Moderate Actors to Protect Women From Violence

Protecting women and girls who have been kidnapped from murder by their relatives, in conflict or post-conflict areas, is the second best practice. Feminist organisations in conflict areas have worked to provide them with protection. This role comes in the Iraqi context, in which the social tradition of killing women if they were kidnapped prevails to a large extent, because families fear that their women were raped. This means for them bringing shame to the family and that the family's honour was affected (Puttick 2015). With the Iraqi Penal Code leniency towards perpetrators of so-called honor crimes by imposing lenient sentences on them (Human Rights Watch 2011), women and girls from the Yazidi community in western Iraq were subjected to kidnapping, rape, and forced marriage following the occupation by the so- called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) of Sinjar and Mosul in August 2014 (Human Rights Watch 2016). However, some of them managed to escape. Although they wanted to return home, they feared death if they reached out to their families.

Feminist organisations in the western regions used the influence of local actors to provide protection for women from violence and murder, as these people have great influence within the community. Jinda Organisation, one of the organisations operating in Dohuk governorate, took the initiative to use the strategy of using religious figures to influence the local community. This is due to the organisation's awareness of the local and religious culture of the Yazidi community. It reached out to the spiritual leader known as Baba Sheikh to ensure his intervention to protect these victims and prevent their killing. Jinda Organisation sought to persuade the religious leader to issue a statement to protect the survivors from murder by their families. The organisation held a meeting with him in this regard to gain his support. Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda, says:

One of the young Yazidi women, who volunteers with the organisation, stated the necessity of obtaining a statement from Baba Sheikh urging others not to harm the surviving girls who wish to return to their homes. Obtaining the statement of the spiritual leader would be considered an "official order", and no one would harm the returning girls. We met Baba Sheikh and spoke to him, and then he issued a statement saying that if anyone harms any returning girl, he will stand up to him. The intervention of the Yazidi religious leader not only contributed to the protection of the returning young women, but also encouraged others to return to their families. 40-100 girls and women per month returned to their homes in 2018 [13].|

Jinda may not be the only organisation that called for the spiritual leader's intervention, but those demands were successful, as the spiritual leader issued a "historic decree calling on the community to take in sexual assault survivors" (Azzaman 2019). He initiated changes in beliefs and modified the religious rituals practiced by the Yazidis, in order to reintegrate the returning women into the Yazidi community (Wainscott 2019). This provided protection for many of them and encouraged others to return to their families. This practice demonstrates the ability of feminist organisations and their employees to adapt existing methods and invent new ones to suit the local context in order to achieve

the goals stipulated in Resolution 1325. Understanding and dealing with local contexts has proven successful in this practice. When Jinda Organisation reached out to influential religious leaders, perseverance in work and practice proved itself useful and led to achieving a tangible impact in protecting women from violence in that region. Cheman Rashid, head of the organisation, says that the intervention of religious leaders on behalf of women makes it easier for them as feminist activists, so they can do their work to provide protection for young women. Some of these survivors of ISIS captivity became known stars on a global and regional level [14], such as Nadia Murad, the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate [15]. From this perspective, Jinda's practice can be described as a best practice consistent with Resolution 1325 in providing protection for women in conflict areas. This can be adopted in other conflict settings such as central and southern Iraq, where kidnapped women are still subjected to killings by some families. The murders happen on the pretext of getting rid of the stigma, especially in areas where clan customs prevail to a large extent.

It can be concluded from the above analysis of best practices in protecting women from violence that peace building for women is a long path. The way to implement the roadmap for peace may differ from one place to another, even within Iraq itself. The women have started a diligent and ongoing work on many levels and have sought to develop their own advocacy methods to consider contexts and power dynamics within local communities. They also worked to pass a law criminalising domestic violence and tried to seek the assistance of all influential parties in order to save women from acts of violence.

There is an urgent need to pass a law criminalising domestic violence and to specify sources, institutions and financial possibilities to protect women, as stated in the draft of the law. The adoption of this law guarantees the provision of legal protection for women, enabling feminist organisations and women to track violent crimes and hold the perpetrators accountable. Cooperation between responsible government authorities and civil society organisations is extremely important, as the latter cannot function without adequate support from the state and its institutions. The enactment of a law criminalising domestic violence will contribute to providing the space and opportunity for organisations in the field of protection and prevention of violence to work on changing some of the religious and clan traditions that entrench the idea of beating a woman and killing her if she is raped. These norms are a heavy weight on the Iraqi collective consciousness. Changing them is not an easy task. Therefore, the adoption of the law and the strengthening of efforts to achieve this requirement will certainly represent a positive step in the way of promoting the rights of Iraqi women in accordance with Resolution 1325. By enacting this law, women of all confessions and from various religious and national backgrounds will be protected from violence and its consequences, including honour killings.

After addressing the key points of political participation, political representation, and the protection of women from violence, as two of the main key points of Resolution 1325, the role of feminist organisations in empowering women economically and socially will be addressed in the next section. This is also one of the main key points of the resolution.

4.3 Aid and Women's Economic Empowerment

One of the provisions of Resolution 1325 focused on providing aid and economic empowerment for female victims in conflict or post-conflict areas. Economic empowerment can be defined as "the process by which women's access to economic resources increases, and their economic conditions and representation improve [...]. It leads to primarily improving their situation [...], so that they develop knowledge, skills, self-confidence and the ability to control their personal lives [...]. In addition, they develop the ability to influence and participate in economic decision-making, whether within the family, the local community, or the state as a whole" (Abdul-Majid 2017).

With the support of international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme inter alia, non-governmental organisations carried out actions aiming to empower women economically in accordance with Resolution 1325. The actions specifically targeted women who have been directly affected by the conflict situations in the western regions of Iraq. With the spread of religious violence and the occupation of the western regions by ISIS, the number of displaced women and female-headed families increased. This group is considered the most affected by violence and the deteriorating economic conditions (UNDP 2013). The percentage of women who head families in Iraq is 10 percent. They suffer from many economic and social hardships as a result of the displacement from their former places of residence and of living in camps or in host cities. In the past, displaced women depended financially on empowered family members such as the father, brother or husband (Hassin and Al-Juboori 2016). They face particular difficulty in entering and competing in the already limited labor market (Iraqi Women Network and its partners, 2014). The difficulty in obtaining job opportunities stems from "the distance of workplaces from their camps of residency, the high cost of transportation, the presence of security risks that threatens their personal safety, and family pressure that restricts women to domestic work" (Kaya 2016). As for displaced women with disabilities, they face more complex difficulties in the places they moved to (ibid.).

Many feminist organisations have worked to provide various forms of economic empowerment such as providing relief and direct humanitarian aid. For instance, they distributed food and items (UNDP 2013), and provided financial support through financing small income-generating projects (National Democratic Institute 2018). Furthermore, they organised courses to develop women's awareness and capabilities and to increase their chances to find jobs (UNDP 2013). In addition, they provided trainings to practice some crafts such as hairdressing and sewing (UNDP Iraq 2012). They also helped displaced women to gain legal statuses that allow them to move in the places they moved to [16]. Besides, they supported women to find work in places where there are job opportunities [17].

However, the new civil society organisations have planned for themselves another way to empower women economically and socially, by educating women about the importance of claiming their economic and social rights, primarily from the state, as a way to achieve economic security [18]. Aman Organisation for Women has held several seminars

about unemployed female graduates. It urged them to organise protests to demand job opportunities, gain social security, or stress the importance of the care work that women do in their homes. The protests aimed also at women's economic independence as a way to live with dignity and independently from men in the family (ibid.). This section will cover two of the best practices carried out by feminist organisations, which are: Helping displaced women and survivors of violence to obtain a civil identification card, and organising income-generating projects for needy women.

4.3.1 First Best Practice: Working Towards Obtaining a Civil Identification Card for Refugee Women

Obtaining personal documents and a civil identification card is one of the best practices carried out by feminist organisations, as the loss of these documents deprives women and their children of many rights. The Women's Freedom Organisation in Iraq indicated in its fifth report on violations of women's rights in the Republic of Iraq submitted to the United Nations in 2015, that without the availability of a civil identification card or other supporting documents, women are not able to find work, nor are they able to exercise their rights to freedom of movement and registration. They cannot access public services and food aid, such as obtaining food rations, health care, education, housing, or even engaging in trainings and educational programs aimed at empowering women, e.g. computer lessons (Women's Freedom Organisation in Iraq and its associates 2015). The difficulty in obtaining official documents for women lies in considering them related to the man in the family. With the loss of a father or a man in the family, it becomes difficult for women to obtain replacements for these documents and thus verify their personal identity. Approximately 44 percent of displaced Iraqi families suffer from the loss of identification documents of at least one of their members, including females (ibid.). The magnitude of these numbers can be estimated by stating the number of refugees and displaced persons, including women. It reached approximately 5.9 million after ISIS occupied the western regions (Sydney 2018). Sydney stresses in her 2018 report that obtaining personal identification cards is perhaps the most pressuring challenge for refugees, as access to services such as education, health, and food rations are linked to the availability of these personal documents (ibid.). Ahmed Hassin and Mays Al-Juboori explained in their study entitled "Humanitarian Challenges in Iraq's Displacement Crisis" and issued in April 2018, that the bureaucratic procedures for requesting the re-issuance of identity documents are very complex and fraught with corruption, which makes access to centers for issuing these documents a difficult task, especially for displaced women. Therefore, women find the problem of obtaining this card an "insurmountable" problem (Hassin and Al-Juboori 2017).

Some feminist organisations, including Jinda, took the initiative to meet some of the needs of displaced women, especially those related to proving their personal identity. The organisation has worked since 2015 to provide its services to displaced women from the city of Mosul by obtaining civil identification cards and sometimes passports. It followed the official procedures by contacting the relevant local authorities, taking advantage of

the good relations it has with governmental institutions in the Kurdistan Region in order to issue these documents. Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda, says:

Our main concern has been to provide protection and relief to survivors of ISIS captivity. Survivors were the priority, as they are the most affected by the war. Our priority was to protect them. Therefore, we had to obtain identification documents for them (civil identification card). Sometimes we also had to issue passports for those in need of medical treatment, knowing that it was expensive [19].

This intervention plays a major role in enabling displaced women to be identified by governmental and non-governmental authorities and in shelter camps, and enables them to obtain a series of benefits and services provided to holders of civil identification cards. On the other hand, sustainability is embodied in this intervention, as obtaining an identification card will provide women with the opportunity to be self-reliant and independent from the support of foreign and local NGOs, provided by financial or in-kind subsidies. This practice can be re-applied and developed in other places in Iraq, as the displaced women are not only present in the western regions. A number of them have moved to many other cities in Iraq. For example, they moved to Najaf, Basra and Baghdad, where international organisations can play a role in this regard. International organisations, such as the United Nations Refugee Organisation, have supported government institutions in order for the displaced to obtain the benefits and services they need. However, it is also necessary to support non-governmental organisations, especially feminist organisations. This can happen by providing this type of assistance to women in order to strengthen and empower the displaced economically, especially since the organisations that work in this field, such as the Jinda Organisation, have expressed their willingness to transfer their expertise to organisations in other places in the country, as the possibility to do so has become available.

4.3.2 Second Best Practice: Establishing Economic Empowerment Projects for Women

Feminist organisations have attached importance to providing sources of income for women and their families. The representatives of the organisations who were interviewed for this research paper, such as the Women Empowerment Organisation, the Iraqi Women Network, the Baghdad Women Association, and Al-Taqwa Association for Women and Child Rights, have done a number of practices to support women in need of economic empowerment. These organisations have sought three goals through their economic interventions. The first is to provide means and sources of income for needy women. The second is empowering women to have the opportunity to interact with the outside world and not withdraw into their homes. The third is that they turn into capable women who are able to make decisions for themselves in various issues that concern the family and society, which is what Resolution 1325 seeks. Suzan Aref, president of the Women Empowerment Organisation, states:

We do trainings for women who want to have small businesses. We teach them how to do a feasibility study for small businesses, and we seek to connect them to the sources through which they can obtain small loans. Sometimes we give small grants to anyone

who wants to start a business. We also encourage them to study their projects themselves, and to study the environment in which they work. That is how they can determine the best profession for them, in a way that brings them income [20].

Feminist organisations were also keen to choose the type and nature of economic projects that provide women with the opportunity to go out and socialise. The importance of economic empowerment is most evident in facing social, cultural and family barriers that hinder women from economic participation, regardless whether these barriers were imposed on them by the family or community. Amal Kabashi, head of the Iraqi Women Network, says about the work the network has done:

With regard to relief and empowerment, our programs were based on providing real opportunities for women through diversifying sources of income or providing income-generating projects, especially in conflict areas. But the organisation was keen to provide job opportunities that help women to go out, interact with the society, communicate and build social relationships. Therefore, we were moving away from the traditional projects, such as providing women with a sewing machine, or opening a shop to sell Kibbeh (local Iraqi food). This type of work may increase the isolation of women in their homes, and deprive them of the ability to go out and interact with society [21].

Economic empowerment aims, in one of its main focuses, to empower women to engage in peacebuilding efforts at the local and national levels. Women who lack income and the financial means to cover their simplest expenses "will not be able to participate seriously in building peace, including attendance at meetings and covering transportation costs, not to mention their lack of self-confidence if they feel unable to cover their personal or family expenses" (ibid.). So, feminist organisations track the woman who is considered as a victim until she "turns into an actor and agent of change, and changes her life for the better, to be a success story." [22]. Suzan Aref, president of the Women Empowerment Organisation, states:

I see that women's economic empowerment has a major impact on their participation and role in building peace. This is because a woman moves from a situation where she is abused to a woman who is independent, and has her own voice. She can change the family and change her community. Many women said their lives changed 180 degrees when we came here. One of them told us: "Even my children didn't show me respect before, but now that I'm working, it's different. I have a personality and a voice" [...]. This is what the women in the camps told us, too. In order for a woman to be a leader, she must first start from her home. She has to be a decision-maker in her home, so that she will be able to go out and face society [23].

It can be concluded that the economic empowerment projects carried out by feminist NGOs with women and their families have a multi-level impact. They enhance the role and position of women in decision-making within their homes, and enables them to increase their participation in decision-making outside their homes as well. (National Democratic Institute 2018). It contributes to changing their view of themselves, as self-esteem and a sense of personal worth come with economic independence (UNDP 2013).

In addition, economic empowerment will increase women's psychological comfort, so that they will have the possibility to form new social relationships, in addition to the opportunities to develop their talents, abilities and qualifications for future work (ibid.). Besides, these projects contribute to giving hope to women, as women have looked forward to having job opportunities, economic projects, or even training opportunities in the hope of getting a job. They also aim to change the stereotypical and traditional mindset of the families benefiting from the projects (ibid.). In other words, the impact of these projects is not only on women, but on their families as well. Not to mention that the economic empowerment of women and the participation of women in public work contribute to their ability to play an active role and be an agent of change so that they can participate in peacebuilding (Chughtai 2015).

Regardless of these multi-level effects, it is necessary to secure sources of funding for these organisations and their economic interventions in order to sustain them. Without the funding they would not be able to help and empower women economically. From here, it is necessary to work on two main challenges. The dependence of these organisations in financing economic empowerment projects on grants provided by international organisations. The question that arises is, to what extent can the implementation of these projects be sustained, in situations where international donors may change their priorities or have their field of work shifted to countries with new conflicts that require intervention? Moreover, what is the extent of the contribution of the private sector in Iraq, which is still in a primitive and limited stage to be able to finance economic empowerment projects? In order to sustain these projects and practices, a detailed study must be carried out and the impact of the programs offered by feminist organisations on the concerned groups on the short, medium or long term must be analysed. Therefore, it is necessary to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the projects. However, such work requires the presence of the financial means allocated for this purpose, as poor funding and lack of experience in this field may prevent feminist organisations from conducting a permanent evaluation of economic interventions and their impact on the target groups (UNDP 2013).

5. Conclusion

This research paper aimed at finding out the best practices in integrating women in peacebuilding in Iraq. To answer this question, the practices of civil society NGOs were analysed according to several criteria to see what were "best" practices for peacebuilding. This research showed that feminist activists in Iraq used the work mechanisms of civil society organisations, whether these organisations were officially registered or informal feminist gatherings, which are called new civil society organisations. The aim was to bring about social change towards achieving gender equality. These regulatory frameworks are the most common, appropriate and adapted in the Iraqi political and social context, as after 2003 there were available opportunities for formal and public action by civil society. In the following, the criteria for best practices that have been used to work towards implementing the key points of Resolution 1325 will be outlined.

5.1 First Key Point: Political Participation and Representation

Feminist organisations focused on ways to empower women in their political participation and representation. They adopted the most appropriate method, which is to work with relevant parties to legislate new laws. Non-governmental organisations have sought appropriate methods for the requirements of political work in terms of negotiating, organising various forms of meetings, coordinating and campaigning to pressure the government and decision-makers to bring about changes. They also mobilised international efforts to help them advance their agenda. The organisations have realised the importance and status of local players, and worked to create networks and alliances in order to gather the largest possible forces and advocates to achieve their goals. This included supportive bodies such as religious authorities in building peace. These methods have proven their impact in terms of the government's adoption of decisions and new policies. These organisations succeeded in creating new policies and laws in the country, in line with the key points of UN Resolution 1325. Regardless of the reluctance to implement the plan of Resolution 1325, the efforts remain sustainable, and are still on the agenda of the state and civil society organisations concerned. Feminist organisations are still negotiating with government institutions to implement the terms of this plan. They are taking advantage of the influence of international organisations, and mobilising partner organisations in this regard.

Also, the new civil society organisations have established new practices in terms of reaching and influencing women in their homes. These practices are consistent with the social conditions that women live under. In this context, the organisations have involved women in their work at a grassroots level. They emphasised the importance of talking to women and increasing their self-confidence, as a prerequisite for political participation and political and social empowerment of women. These methods have an impact in terms of strengthening women and increasing their self-confidence. They are methods that can be sustained, adopted and re-practiced due to the presence of means of communication through the Internet.

5.2 Second Key Point: Preventing Violence and Protecting Women from It

The interventions carried out by feminist organisations were evident on two levels. On the one hand, they were evident in enacting laws on a national level aimed at protecting women from violence and criminalising domestic violence. On the other hand, they were evident in the approach of mobilising local actors to provide protection for women. The actions were appropriate to women's needs for protection from violence. These demands are in line with what international conventions aspire to, especially Resolution 1325, to provide protection for women. The push for issuing a law criminalising domestic violence in Iraq is a new initiative with impact. For the first time in the history of Iraq, it has put the state's responsibility to provide protection means on the agenda of government authorities. The initiative contributed to creating alliances and networks among women, which helped establishing a suitable ground for perpetuating feminist work. The efforts built confidence in the organisations and their abilities to lead actions to formulate new social policies, such as the attempt to legislate a law criminalising domestic violence. Furthermore, the impact of this practice can be seen on raising collective awareness of domestic violence.

This practice is sustainable. The law criminalising domestic violence has not seen the light of day yet, but the fact that it has not been enacted until this moment does not mean losing hope in its legislation. Even if it is approved, its implementation will require follow-up and monitoring, so that it does not remain words without action. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the efforts to repeal laws whose articles are inconsistent with protecting women from violence. Besides, mobilising the local efforts of religious leaders and clan elders to commit to providing protection for women has a real impact. Mobilising local actors in conflict and post-conflict areas and protecting women from killing, violence or stigma is a valuable and important experience for the protection of women, especially in areas where clan norms are prevailing. This effort can be sustainable, re-adopted and replicated in conflict areas across the country.

5.3 Third Key Point: Women's Economic and Social Empowerment

The interventions carried out by feminist organisations for economic empowerment were characterised by their adaptation to the needs of women due to the increase in poverty and lack of job opportunities. This especially concerned women affected by violence in conflict situations. The most evident practices carried out by the organisations range from providing personal identification documents for displaced women to working to help women in conflict or post-conflict areas by organising economic projects or preparing training courses. They suit the administrative arrangements of NGOs, their connection and coordination with government institutions. Providing women with personal papers is extremely important in terms of impact and sustainability, as it facilitates protection, mobility, means of income and, thus, autonomy. These practices can be re-applied in other places in the country where there are displaced women who have lost their identification papers and suffer from the inability to move and work due to the loss of these documents.

The provision of financial support or training courses is also a consistent and responsive practice to women's needs. Starting local projects to directly empower and support women has multiple impacts, as presented in this paper. It enables them to be self-reliant in finding resources and opportunities to secure a living or even go out and interact with the outside world. These are basic and preliminary conditions for women to participate in peacebuilding. Women who don't have the most basic necessities of life will not be able to participate in politics, which requires movement and perhaps travel. Sustainable economic empowerment projects that can be undertaken by the state, the private sector, international or local governmental organisations, provide various forms of support to empower women. They are applicable in other cities in Iraq, where there are needy and displaced women, such as Najaf, Basra and Baghdad.

The question remains: To what extent have the best practices provided radical solutions to the issues that have been addressed? Have these practices developed temporary solutions to the challenges faced in providing security and peace for women? The path of peacebuilding is long and difficult in the presence of numerous social, economic and ideological conflicts. It must be noted that despite the organisations' success in carrying out their work and projects on many levels, in accordance with the content of Resolution 1325 as summarised in the previous sections, the interventions of civil society did not step up to create a systematic reform or tackle the roots of the problems. This can be attributed to the fragility of the state and the spread of corruption (Abdulwahab et al. 2019). In addition, there is a lack of cooperation with community organisations regarding women's issues, as cooperation is considered non-obligatory.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations to Government Authorities in the Centralised State

- Strengthen the political will in order to adhere to the implementation of the terms and provisions of the National Plan for Resolution 1325 as stated in the periodic plans. In addition, strive to develop plans on time and find financial and human resources for their implementation.

- Exert efforts to expedite the adoption of a law criminalising domestic violence and identifying sources, institutions and financial capabilities to protect women.

- Find appropriate mechanisms to involve civil society organisations on a large scale in drawing up, developing and implementing the National Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325, with the aim of strengthening the top-down approach of government institutions that ensures the participation of civil voices in the formulation and implementation of plans related to peacebuilding.

- Encourage the contribution of the private sector in financing projects that enhance building security and peace for women by legislating tax deductions or exemptions.

- Facilitate procedures of local authorities and coordinating with non-governmental feminist organisations to benefit from their good connections to refugee women, in order to reissue civil identity documents, especially for displaced women.

6.2 Recommendations to International Organisations

- Follow-up and evaluate projects funded by donor organisations, and support research and studies to analyse the effects of these interventions and learn lessons. This will insure the development, effectivity and sustainability of the projects.

- Support and coordinate with women's NGOs, and cooperate with governmental organisations, in order for the displaced people to obtain the benefits and services they need, and to receive financial or in-kind aid.

6.3 Recommendations to Feminist NGOs

- Emphasise the use of a participatory approach to ensure the participation of women in decision-making, and that women's participation are not limited to feminist organisations or feminist elites. Thus, real communication with female masses can take place to bring about change and implement Resolution 1325.

- Strengthen the cooperation and coordination with local actors in conflict areas and benefit from successful experiences to re-apply them in other conflict settings. This will enhance the protection of women from violence.

- Find new sources in order to ensure the financing of economic empowerment projects for displaced women, and avoid relying only on grants provided by international organisations. There is a possibility that the funding stops or shifts to other contexts.

- Seek the contribution of the private sector in Iraq in financing economic empowerment programs for women in order to sustain local support for the projects.

- Increase the organisations' capabilities to know the effects of their programs on the concerned women in the short, medium or long term. This concerns implementing the key points of Resolution 1325, and finding financial and knowledge resources to achieve this goal.

6.4 Recommendations to CSOs

- Build alliances with civil society organisations and find forms of joint action in order to take advantage of the resources, opportunities, capabilities and connections that these organisations possess. The connections help strengthen a broad feminist movement that is capable of defending women's economic rights and achieving security and safety for them.

- Develop the capacities of organisations by employing the tools of media and social media in mobilising and advocating for women, peace and security issues. It is necessary to seek the expertise and capabilities of local and international organisations to increase the capacity to mobilise the community. In this context, the latent capabilities of cyberspace can be used by obtaining training courses.

- Organise tailored trainings to suit the needs of feminist activists, guarantee electronic security and protect women from the patriarchal discourse circulating on the cyberspace. This can be reached by seeking the experiences of others from local and international organisations.

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Annexes

Annex 1: List of with the Names of Interviewed People and Their Organisations

Interview	Representative	Name of the Organisation	Type of the Organisation
No. 1	Cheman Rashid	Jinda Organisation	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 2	Suzan Aref	Women Empowerment Organisation	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 3	Liza Nissan Hido	Baghdad Women Association	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 4	Amal Kabashi	Iraqi Women Network	A network of 85 feminist organisations in Iraq
No. 5	Soha Odeh	Women's Voice for Peace	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 6	Inas Karim	Inana Tishreen	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 7	Juan Mirza	Aman Organisation for Women	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 8	Dr. Awatef Mustafa	Al-Taqwa Organisation for Women and Child Rights	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 9	Hanaa Edwar	The Iraqi Al-Amal Association – Previous interview	A non-governmental civil society organisation - registered
No. 10	Dr. Bushra Al-Obaidi	Legal expert	University of Baghdad. Faculty of Law

Annex 2: Interview Questions for Research on Best Practices in Involving Women in Peacebuilding in Iraq

What actions have you taken to achieve the goals of building security and peace for women in accordance with Resolution 1325? (Representation and political participation, protection, prevention, relief, economic empowerment) or others?

What methods did you follow to achieve your goals? Have you made alliances? Did you take the initiative personally? Did you organise demonstrations?

- Did you participate or organise demonstrations to emphasise your demands?

- Have you formed networks or joined women's networks? Have you made alliances with feminist organisations for these efforts? Yes, or no? How did you find the alliances?

- Have you been involved in organisational frameworks formed by other parties to advance the goals of your work to build peace?

- Have you followed other work patterns that are not on this list?

Were these actions on a local level or at the level of the country as a whole?

What is the best work you have done in your opinion? Why is it considered "best"? Why is it successful?

If you have had unsuccessful actions in involving women in the peacebuilding process, why do you think they were not successful? What should be avoided in any other coming efforts?

In your opinion, what are the most important lessons that you have learned in building peace that we can apply elsewhere in Iraq?

Do you see that there are:

- Distinguished organisations in this field?

- Distinguished initiatives in this field?

- Feminist figures who have emerged in the field of peace building, who can be referred to as a role models?

What do organisations working on peacebuilding in Iraq need for support from other organisations and entities, such as the parliament?

[1] Few international organisations were able to work in Iraq before 2003. As for Iraqi Kurdistan, the work of NGOs began after 1991, with the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from Kurdistan in 1992-1993.

[2] Interview No. 7 with Joanne Mirza, a founding member of Aman Organisation for Women.

[3] Interview No. 2 with Suzan Aref, President of the Women Empowerment Organisation.

[4] Interview No. 4 with Amal Kabashi, president of the Iraqi Women Network.

[5] Interview No. 6 with Inas Karim, founder of Inana Tishreen Group.

[6] Interview No. 7 with Joanne Mirza, a founding member of Aman Organisation for Women.

[7] Interview No. 4 with Amal Kabashi, president of the Iraqi Women Network.

[8] Interview No. 4 with Amal Kabashi, president of the Iraqi Women Network. Interview No. 1 with Suzan Aref, president of the Women Empowerment Organisation.

[9] Interview with Liza Hido, president of the Baghdad Women Association.

[10] Previous interview with Hanaa Edwar, president of the Iraqi Al-Amal Association.

[11] Interview No. 3 with Liza Hido, president of the Baghdad Women Association.

[12] Interview with Suzan Aref, president of the Women Empowerment Organisation.

[13] Interview with Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda Organisation.

[14] Nadia Murad is one of the female survivors of ISIS, who later contributed to exposing its atrocities on a global level, and she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018.

[15] Interview with Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda Organisation.

[16] Interview No. 1 with Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda Organization.

[17] Interview No. 4 with Amal Kabashi, president of the Iraqi Women Network.

[18] Interview No. 7 with Joan Mirza. Founding member of Aman Organisation for Women.

[19] Interview No. 1 with Cheman Rashid, president of Jinda Organisation.

[20] Interview No. 2 with Suzan Aref, president of the Women Empowerment Organisation.

[21] Interview with Amal Kabashi.

[22] Interview with Liza Hido.

[23] Interview with Suzan Aref.

[JA1] Some of the interviews were conducted on WhatsApp, and others on Skype.

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For more info, please contact:

elbarlament e.V.
Reuchlinstraße 10
10553 Berlin
Tel.: +49 (0)30 398 204 190
E-Mail: info@elbarlament.org

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