

OUR PATH TOWARDS EQUALITY & RIGHTS

Beijing 25+

The Parallel report of The Iraqi Civil Society



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1. Preface:

This report is the result of the collaborative work of a group of organizations, networks, activists and consultants keeping up with women's issues in Iraq. It gathers the outcomes of interviews with individuals, meetings, narratives and data examinations, as well as summaries of several studies and practical data gathered by the team, in their efforts to highlight and support women issues in Iraq.

This report was made possible thanks to the support of Kvinna till Kvinna organization¹.

2. Introduction:

In 2020, the United Nations will celebrate the fourth anniversary of the World Conference on Women, that massive gathering attended by more than 50,000 participants in Beijing 25 years ago. In 1995, 189 governments, including the Government of Iraq, agreed to the Beijing Platform for Action, that historical consensus document calling for action on 12 main areas of concern. This document is the golden standard for policies aiming to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Despite the remarkable progress achieved by the Iraqi government in areas related to women, Iraq is still far from achieving the Beijing +25 agenda, mainly due to the recent developments in the country.

The past five years saw two major turning points for Iraqi women. The first came with the occupation of large areas in Iraq by extremist groups and their taking control of the lives of millions of families in these areas, which led to the displacement of lots of them. This development, with its profound negative effects, has put all biases, values and stereotypes to test in an exceptional context that spanned more than four years. It also spurred important positive cultural and behavioral changes in the society regarding variety of women issues, as it contributed to criticizing several immutable values and ideological principles regarding women in Iraq.

The second turning point was the massive and effective female participation in the youth protests that started in October 2019. The squares of protest witnessed the public involvement of Iraqi women in all societal roles that were till then men-only. It is a newly

¹ **Kvinna till Kvinna** is a Swedish foundation working to promote women's rights in more than 20 countries affected by war and conflict in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and South Caucasus. Kvinna till Kvinna focuses on four main issues: gender-based violence, equal participation of women, economic empowerment and women, Peace and security.

emerged cultural role for girls and women in Iraq that gained a wide support from a large number of families and even some tribes in Iraq.

This parallel report for Beijing +25 was prepared by a number of organizations, networks, and individuals concerned with women's issues. It touches upon the Iraqi civil society's views on achievements, challenges, obstacles, and priorities regarding gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq.

The report is a collaborative work of several Iraqi organizations, networks and female intellectuals and activists working on women's issues in Iraq. This report shows that there is a huge need for concert and robust actions to complement the efforts made by the state and the international and local organizations in regard to gender equality. Despite the government's commitment to support women, the sensitivity of women's issues in the Iraqi society requires the collaboration of multiple parties at various levels to enhance the role of women in society, eradicate the violations they face and give them the momentum they need to ensure a more secure future where their rights are fully met. The multiplicity of views is one of the most important challenges in the ongoing dialogue that revolves around important questions like: What prevents Iraqi women from exercising their full rights? What should be done to improve their situation and to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls?

The report seeks, also, to promote gender equality- work, the implementation of other global commitments, such as those related to the Security Council Resolution n. 1325 and subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security; and the Addis Ababa Action Plan of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development 2015. Our hope is that all these efforts will help the government and the society to overcome the root causes of gender inequality and build a path towards a real and substantive equality. This can only be achieved by uniting efforts and bringing all concerned actors including the young generation of gender equality advocates and those who don't have gender quality in thier agenda to the heart of the efforts of the government and the larger society.

We relied, in this report, on the available data regarding the status of women (despite the difficulty of obtaining such data), as well as research and relevant reports provided by several organizations. However, the most important source of information in our report, was the first-hand testimonies of a number of activists and actors regarding women issues, how they see the actual condition, what factors they think affects the lives of women, what problems and challenges are women facing today, and what should be our priorities.

This parallel report reviews laws, policies, national strategies and institutional mechanisms regarding gender equality as well as the new challenges arising in the recent years in Iraq, with the exception of the Kurdistan Region (KRI) due to its special situation.

The report traces also the changes that occurred in the discriminatory rules and stereotypes regarding the difference between the two sexes. It also conducts an evidence-based assessment of achievements as well as obstacles and challenges in these areas from 2014 onward.

3. Section 1: A Quick Review of Achievements, Challenges, Obstacles and Priorities

This section provides a general analysis of the achievements, major crises that affected women's issues profoundly, their consequences as well as newly emerged priorities. The analysis took into account the diverse viewpoints of Iraqi civil society organizations.

3.1: The Most Tangible Achievements in Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Issues.

We'll point out, here, to the most important advancements achieved by the Iraqi women recently regarding gender equality and their roles. Despite the prevailing social and cultural norms, Iraqi women succeed in challenging their traditional roles and transforming the suffering and shocks they endured to a strong will to depart from the helpless and victim negative situation, to empower themselves and strike an example in an exceptional moment. These successes should yield more contemplation, planning and work towards a more effective role of Iraqi women, a role that transcends all structural and cultural setbacks, they were sued to till now. We can summarize their achievements in the following points:

1. A wide participation of women in relief operations and in the response to emergency situations resulting from ISIS occupation and military operation that lead to the displacement of thousands of families.
2. They participated actively in civil society work, and they found new opportunities through this participation.
3. A significant increase in the number of women participating in the work, projects, and initiatives of civil society organizations.
4. Increased female participation in specialized voluntary groups (as members or team leaders). These groups have brought about a qualitative change in the awareness and social culture at the country level, especially when they responded to the major humanitarian crises the country faced. That change they made encouraged many families to allow their daughters to join these voluntary teams.
5. Iraqi Women actively participated in the protests that several Iraqi cities witnessed, especially Baghdad. Their participation extended even to some highly sacred and conservative cities, such as the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. This active participation had its impact on the Iraqi society as a whole, and spurred a profound debate around women issues, which came in their favor.

6. Women and girls were actively present in blogging and social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, as well as engaging in virtual dialogues. They had a wide impact in all these online activities.

7. Through their leading figures, women's organizations were able to change and influence political decisions in general, and address issues of concern to women, including the rejection of decisions and amendments suggested by some political blocks in the Parliament (Resolution 137, draft Jaafari law)².

3.2: The Most Important Crises and Challenges that have Threatened Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Issues Over the Past Five Years:

1. The occupation of about 30% of the demographically diverse Iraqi territories by ISIS extremist group. They controlled the lives of millions of families and committed the most brutal kinds of violations against women, which had lasting tragic effects. These conditions forced hundreds of thousands of these families to flee away to live in displacement camps, in dire conditions, both economically and environmentally. This occupation led also to the destruction of many productive sectors, markets, factories, infrastructure, and governmental institutions.

2. The political conflict was bad news for equality issues. The escalation of the conflict between the different political actors led to the marginalization of women's roles especially as leaders, with the focus shifting to narrow political gains and interests. This had very negative effects on women's role and participation.

3. The rising militarization of the Iraqi society, led to higher rates of societal and domestic violence and had its effects, also, on tribal attitudes, as tribes started to use all available tools to revenge and deter, including women, either as a punishment or a reconciliation tool.

4. The displacement and migration of hundreds of thousands of families from the areas occupied by extremist groups or areas of ongoing military operations have exhausted much of the national and international efforts. The displacement was a turning point for most of the families impacting their stability and economic conditions. It has also increased unemployment rates and disrupted education and social growth, as well as promoting several types of violations towards families.

5. The economic crisis led to a suspension of most of the private and public sector projects, and imposed limitations on the expenditures, which became restricted to fundamentals as well as security and military needs only. This situation resulted in an increase in poverty and a scarcity in work opportunities, both leading to conditions that exacerbated several crises women are already facing.

6. The protests movement that started in October 2019 in several Iraqi cities, led by youth groups demanding political reform, witnessed two phenomena. The first was the building of a national identity and overcoming of stereotypes, while the second was the active and wide female participation. Women and girls' participation painted an image of Iraqi women, imbued with patriotism and positive involvement. The protests contributed to a cultural change in the Iraqi

² R.M. Organization report

society, which began discussing and adopting the youth ideas. We even saw families supporting their daughters' participation, and tribes backing their women. It's worth noting that we didn't witness any sexual harassment in the protest squares.

7. The corruption of political parties and leaders, both financially and administratively, and their exploitation of public resources for the benefit of a small group, besides the lack of political parties' support for development, construction and national projects all led to the aggravation of the economic crisis and the increase in unemployment rates.

3.3: The Impact of Humanitarian Crises on the implementation of Beijing + 25 Agenda in Iraq:

1. Iraqi Government's interest in women issues decreased significantly due to the urgent situation imposed by ISIS occupation of wide areas of the country;
2. The Ministry of Women was abolished, and replaced with the Department of Iraqi Women's Empowerment in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers. The Government has also reduced financial support provided to the Supreme Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women, the Committee of 1325 Resolution, the National Reconciliation Commission at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and all departments concerned with women's issues in other ministries;
3. The crisis led to a lower participation of women in political parties, and less occupation of leading positions in the government;
4. The Iraqi civil society has been preoccupied with the response to emergency situations emanating from the pressing humanitarian crises;
5. The rising militarization of the society led to a multiplication of problems women are facing.
6. Women living in areas controlled by ISIS were victims of atrocious abuses, including genocide, execution, forced marriage to ISIS's fighters, rape, slavery and trafficking.
7. Women fleeing areas occupied by ISIS or areas becoming battle fields, faced dire conditions during their escape journeys;
8. Increased attempts of some political figures to legalize extremist perceptions of women and curb their freedoms, through legislations they proposed in the House of Representatives or executive and judicial procedure; they instigated;
9. In the battles with ISIS women and their stigmatization (or the fear thereof) were used as a weapon of revenge or deterrence;
10. In the clashes between clans and tribes and their stigmatization (or the fear thereof) was also used weapon of revenge or deterrence;
11. The critical security situation had its impact on women's condition in several areas, especially those with fragile conditions;

12. Isis occupation of several Iraqi areas and the military operations that accompanied it led to the displacement of over a million person.
13. Displaced families lived in refugee camps for years and for various reasons;
14. Women and children related to individuals associated with ISIS were isolated in separate camps, where they suffered difficult humanitarian conditions;
15. Due to the military operations, there was a significant increase in the numbers of widows, orphans, missing persons, displaced persons, mothers of victims as well as the loss of breadwinners for lots of families;
16. Issuing ID cards to the families that lost it as a result of living under ISIS rule, proved very challenging to the administrative departments of the government.
17. Political disaccord between different political factions and the influence of religious ideological elements made it very difficult to amend some laws to cope with the new urgent issues related to women.
18. The Private sector is facing hindering difficulties, and the projects depending on state's funding were put to halt.

3.4: Assessing Priorities to Accelerate the Progress of Women and Girls in Iraq

First, we will assess the priorities set forth so far in order to accelerate the advancement of women in the past five years, and how the civil society saw these priorities. Then we'll have a look at some priorities proposed for the coming period, regarding laws, policies or programs, also through civil society eyes.³

3.4.1: Governmental Priorities

The crises Iraq faced, compelled the government to focus on its response to the humanitarian crisis and the consequences of the security deterioration. The civil society identified the governmental priorities as follows:

1. Equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice. Several problems and controversies arose over a number of laws:

A- The draft of the Jaafari Civil Status Law⁴ was controversial, as it contains several articles that the civil society organizations judged as violating the rights of women and girls.

B - Not passing the Jaafari Status Law made some lawmakers amend⁵ or suspend some of the articles of the Iraqi Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959⁶, which widened the gender equality gap.

³ According to the perspectives of who prepared this report.

⁴ The draft Jaafari law contains articles that allow marrying minors and waste many of the rights acquired in previous periods.

⁵ Like the issue of custody.

⁶ In order to include some of the articles of the draft Jaafari law into the current law.

C- The adoption of Anti-Domestic Violence law was hindered by some political parties, for the third time consecutively.

2. Forming women committees in most of the governmental departments, even though in some cases they are just a formality with no active role at all.

3. Despite the anti-domestic violence law was not passed in the parliament, several measures were taken to protect families from domestic violence. These include the establishment of a new directorate⁷ concerned with domestic violence in the Ministry of Interior to deal with physical, sexual, psychological, intellectual or economic abuses that any family member commits or threatens to commit against any other member of the family. This crime could be categorized as a misdemeanor, felony, or contravention according to the law;

4. Issuing instructions to limit harmful tribal practices such as (Al-Faslia⁸, head to head marriage, minor's marriage, and crimes of honor⁹). The Supreme Judicial Council decided to punish any person who commits the practice of tribal Decka¹⁰ with a penalty ranging from life imprisonment to death sentence. The Council also designated two locations in Baghdad to detain those who carry out these practices;

5. The implementation, by the government, of initiatives targeting the eradication of poverty, and increase of agricultural productivity and food security, including:

A- The inclusion of the families of females heads of households in the social security grants.

B- Giving emergency grants to families fleeing war zones.

C- Compensating the mothers of the martyrs and victims of terrorism.

6. Involving women in the peace-building and coexistence processes through forming Women's Office in the Supreme Permanent Committee for Coexistence and Societal Peace in the Council of Ministers;

7. Enhancing access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health, and significant efforts by the government to support healthcare services provided to displaced women.

3.4.2: Civil Society Organizations Indicate a Lack of Interest from the government in the Following Priorities:

1. Establishing mechanisms that seek to eradicate poverty, increase agricultural productivity and food security, while depending only on financial grants;

2. The significant decline in women's political participation and representation, and in the role played in decision making, on both governmental and institutional levels.

⁷ This department became one of the institutions of the Ministry of Interior and currently includes the headquarters of the Directorate and 16 departments, two in Baghdad, Al-Karkh and Al-Rusafa districts and one in every governorate.

⁸ Offering women as compensatory items or gifts to other tribes as a mean of reconciliation between these two tribes.

⁹ Killing women who have affairs outside the marriage circle, so they don't ruin their tribe reputation. This practice is called "Shame Washing" in the literal translation.

¹⁰ Firing live bullets at someone's house to send a message to that person.

3. Failure to allocate specific funds in the state's budget for gender-sensitive plans and programs (the Ministry of Health is the only ministry that has allocated a gender-specific budget for reproductive health only);
4. Weak government protection mechanisms for women in conflicts or victims and survivors of violence;
5. The inaction of the government when some female activists got kidnaped, or were killed, threatened or defamed, just because they took part in the peaceful October protests.
6. Lack of support for feminist movements, volunteer work or any activism in the Iraqi civil society, which signals a need to wider acceptance of women empowerment and gender equality principles. We still have a lot to do to get the state and political parties to respect women rights and their effective roles.
7. The regression of laws that respect women's rights and the issuing of instructions that harm the remaining ones, like what happened with the Personal Status Law¹¹. Moreover, important bills, like the one concerning anti-domestic violence, face lots of obstacles.¹²;
8. Neglect of women's political rights in the legislations that shape the Iraqi political environment, such as the Law of Political Parties, the Law of Provincial Councils, as well as their rights of participation in independent authorities and parties;
9. The weak support provided to widows and families of the martyrs who were victims of terrorism, and women who lost their families' breadwinners (the husband or the son). Among the striking examples we can mention the mothers of the victims of the Spiker massacre. These mothers had to organize sit-ins to raise their demands of an investigation in the crime. This is the case of thousands of families all over Iraq, where women are suffering several kinds of humiliation, poverty and need, in addition to the burdens of losing loved ones and the ensuing psychological trauma;
10. Lack of interest in investigating the cases of women who went missing during the military operations against ISIS;
11. The lack of inclusive laws that address the situation of iraqi women regardless of their religion or groups. One example is the adoption of a law that compensates only Yezidi survivors. However no similar laws were adopted regarding those affiliated with other religions or sects;
12. Weak implementation of legal procedures of solving the problems women and children related to individuals who are affiliated with ISIS.

3.4.3: Civil Society Priorities:

The Iraqi civil society focused on the following priorities:

¹¹ According to the opinion of a number of law activists, Prof. B.A. and Prof. A.A.

¹² It has been introduced since 2008, its legislation is being suspended till this moment by parties with certain ideological orientation.

1. Equality and non-discrimination in the law in order to achieve justice:

A- Lobbying to stop the passing of laws that violate women's rights and refusing the use of religious or sectarian pretexts to pass these laws. The draft of the Jaafari Civil Status Law is an obvious example in this regard. We should also raise awareness of the dangers of dividing the Iraqi society through the adoption of different Personal Status laws;

B – Pressuring the government to pass the bill of anti-domestic violence. The adoption of this important legislation has been regularly hindered for over eight years, i.e. three parliamentary cycles;

C - Pressuring the government to amend the Political Parties Law to ensure an effective political participation of women including one that allows them to shape their participation in a way that reflects their views and interests, not the ones of the dominating political powers, with their masculine version of equality.

D- Pressuring the government to amend the Provincial Councils' Law and institutionalize gender equality and active participation of women to ensure and protect their rights of participating in the institutional structures of the government.

2. Organizing awareness campaigns targeting various groups of the Iraqi community to shed the light on women's issues in Iraq;

3. Organizing awareness campaigns for women about their rights and the legal ways to claim these rights;

4. Implementing advocacy campaigns against early/child and out-of-court marriages;

5. Organizing advocacy campaigns to raise the awareness about some tribal practices in which women are used as tools to settle disputes or pay compensations in cases of killing. In such situations women are deprived of any and every human right and are treated as if they were slaves;

6. Advocating against domestic violence;

7. Leading advocacy campaigns that address the aspects of discrimination against women in Iraq, and try to change stereotypes that affect women, either because of their affiliation, or as a result of using them as weapons in conflicts, especially the war against ISIS;

8. Working to find shelters for abused women;

9. Providing treatments for traumatized women victims of violence, whether it was domestic violence, or their use as a weapon in tribal conflicts or as slaves by extremist groups;

10. Providing psychological support for the survivors of all kinds of violence;

11. Providing training on participation in peace-building, community reconciliation and effective communication between different social components, especially in multicultural areas;

12. Empowering women and girls and encouraging them to participate in volunteer teams, civil society work and events of community-based organizations. Iraqi civil society has taken significant steps in this regard, starting from Baghdad;

13. Campaigning to change negative social norms and gender stereotypes;
14. Support the provision of a safe work environment that attracts and encourages women to work.

3.4.4: Priorities of Women Organizations to Accelerate the Progress of Women and Girls' Rights Over the Next Five Years Through Laws, Policies and/or Programs:

1. Poverty eradication, higher agricultural productivity, and ensuring food security;
2. High quality education, training, and lifelong learning for women of all ages;
3. Eliminating violence against women and girls;
4. Ensuring that gender equality, justice and non-discrimination are all protected under the law.
Pressuring the government to fulfill its commitments about publishing the results of investigations in crimes committed against women;
5. adopting formal measures to protect women rights' defenders;
6. Passing and implementing the anti-domestic violence law;
7. Reconsidering the Yezidi survivors' law and amending it to include all Iraqi survivors of ISIS, regardless of their religion, sect or nationality, so that it becomes a more equitable law;
8. Promote political participation and representation of Iraqi women;
9. Creating a ministry for women, or establishing another institutional entity such as (a higher council for women) similar to (the Supreme Council for Combating Corruption) formed by the Prime Minister in accordance with Order No. 70 of 2019¹³;
10. Amending the election laws to include the following goals;
 - A- The formation of a women parliamentary block.
 - B- Ensuring that women can fill leadership positions, especially as governors or deputies thereof, as well as have a quota in the presidency of provincial councils.
 - C- Increasing the minimum quota set by the constitution for the participation of women, in both parliamentary elections and provincial councils to more than 25% (the current minimum).
11. Amending the Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015, as it does not help in empowering Iraqi women, despite Article 11 that ensures women's representation is taken into account. There is a need to introduce binding amendment that sets a minimum quota (of 25% for example) for women in founding and public boards, as well as to encourage the creation of women-led political parties.¹⁴

¹³ Madam deputy (L. O.)/p. 11

¹⁴ Madam deputy (L. O.)/p. 11

4 Section Two: Progress Made Across the 12 Critical areas of Concern

This section provides an assessment of the Beijing Platform for Action's 12 critical areas of concern, which fall under six broader dimensions¹⁵. Covering these dimensions, we'll focus on the following aspects:

First: Reality on the ground, through research, field statistics and studies, or observations set forth by women's organizations

Second: An overview of the relevant procedures, pursued by either the government or the community-based organizations,

Third: The recommendations and procedures needed to overcome issues related to equality and women's empowerment according to the Beijing agenda in order to accelerate the progress for all women and girls.

This section is not meant to be a comprehensive coverage of all six dimensions, but rather an overview of some prominent issues that deserve more attention due to their importance.

4.1: Comprehensive Development, Shared Well-being and Decent Job

The main issue with 'women having a decent job' resides in some cultural factors in the society. These factors put lots of pressures on women and cause them several problems, whenever they go to work or deal with the society, family, tribe, or social systems. Surveys have indicated that women face discrimination as well as multiple types of challenges and violations in the work place. In this regard we can cite the following examples:

1. Threats addressed to female attorneys working on personal status and women's protection cases. This was faced with weak protection measures, which have led to the murder of some of them.¹⁶;
2. Female journalists were subjected to threats defamation;
3. Female activists were also subjected to numerous abuses and defamation;
4. Female employees faced discriminatory measures, and only weak protection against harassment;
5. Female human rights defenders were victims of harassment¹⁷, threats, and sometimes assassinations¹⁸;

¹⁵ <https://ngocsw.org/beijing25/ngo-guidance/>

¹⁶ The assassination of Lawyer, Souad Al-Lawsi, on 11/8/2015, after she received a number of threats (S.D.), the report of H.T.

¹⁷ The assassination of activist and lawyer Nawal (N.D.) The report of (H.T.).

¹⁸ The killing of human rights activist Souad Al-Ali, 46, in the Abbasiyya area of Basra Governorate, which has witnessed a major protest movement on 9/25/2018. She was the head of the local Al-Wad Organization for Human Rights and took part in the protest movement in Basra.

6. Female activists defending women's issues are exposed to threats¹⁹ and many cases of abuse. There is a need for formal measures to protect female defenders;
7. Women rights' defending organizations or the ones working on establishing shelters for female victims of violence, faced several kinds of threats, including raids²⁰;
8. Women working in the medical and health sector are subjected to different types of harassment;
9. Some women working in fashion or beauty field were killed²¹;
10. Several women candidates to the parliamentary elections have been subjected to defamation campaigns;
11. Female bloggers, fashionistas and makeup artists were bombarded with hateful and offensive speech.

Below are the measures that have been taken by the government to promote gender equality in relation to the role of women in the paid work, employment, and the governmental measures that civil society sees as problematic:

1. The New Labor Law No. 37 of 2015 includes articles that provide protection to the working woman, regulate the relationship between employees and employers, as well as addressing discrimination based on gender, race, opinion, belief, religion, sect, health or economic status. The law prohibits sexual harassment and any other behavior that creates an intimidating work environment. It also guarantees paid vacations, including 21 days annual leave, pregnancy and childbirth leave (98 days) and maternity leave (six months with full salary and six months with half salary);
2. Despite the criminalization of the above mentioned assaults and threats, the measures and policies adopted can't be considered as deterring these abuses for a multitude of reasons;
3. Investigations of crimes and the procedures pertaining to them are not usually transparent and there is no relevant reliable source available to the public. Therefore, people hear only about crimes against women, but nothing about the reactive measures or punishments. This situation encourages committing more crimes;
4. The judicial courts refer many cases of crimes against women to the tribes, so they become just tribal case;²²
5. Transferring of female suspects to the women's prison due to the lack of women's temporary incarceration facilities, where they should be kept till being brought to the investigating judge²³.

¹⁹ A lawyer for a center working on cases of female displaced survivors of violence was subjected to a threat that forced her to leave work, report of H.T. organization.

²⁰ H.T. organization has been subjected to a series of threats since 2014. The most recent one was in 2019.

²¹ The killing of Dr. Rafeef Al-Yasiri, a plastic surgery doctor working in Barbie Beauty Center, and Dr. Rasha Al-Hassan working Viola Beauty Center, In 2018.

²² Lawyer and Activist, A.U, noted several such cases throughout her activities defending the cases of women.

²³ The activist, P. R, through her work in the media and advocacy for violated women cases.

4.1.1 Case (1): The Murder of The Famous Iraqi Model, Tara Fares.

Tara Fares was a blogger and fashion model on social media platforms. She was assassinated on the 27th of September 2018, without any prior threats. Footages recorded by surveillance cameras show the details of her assassination. Fares had about 2.7 million followers on her Instagram account. She used to post her various fashionable clothes, preferred makeup techniques, pictures of her travels and quotes from books she had read, as well as funny events of her daily life.

Once her murder made the news, the social media platforms in Iraq became battlefields. Her death was as controversial as her life. Some hit her with offensive and defamatory words, while others defended her fiercely. One Facebook user wrote: "Maybe she was too liberated a woman, and a negative youth phenomenon, but she was after all, an Iraqi human being."

After more than a week of Fares' death, the former Minister of Interior, Qassim Al-Araji, stated that "Tara Fares was killed by extremist groups that are known to us, and efforts are made to arrest the perpetrators and expose them to the Iraqi people, so they would be punished according to the law". He added that the case will be solved very quickly²⁴. However, no measures were announced and many women's rights defenders believe that the case is forgotten like other similar cases.

4.1.2 Recommendations:

1. Transparency in criminal investigations, in particular cases where women are victims of abuses or assaults.
2. Reinforcement of legal measures that support women, through a more robust application of the law, and allowing relevant organizations to attend the trials and communicate with the judges and the public prosecution, so they become more aware of the problems women face throughout the application of laws and measures related to cases of abuse against women;
3. Protect and promote local products to encourage local entrepreneurship and small projects;
4. Issuing of laws that simplify administrative procedures as well as making efforts to monitor and criminalize extortion and threats;
5. Provide protection for agricultural projects and areas and the equitable distribution of water;
6. Promote land ownership rights for the benefit of rural working women;
7. Ensure the safety of women who want to report any crime, by making police stations a safer and more accessible place so that women feel safe going there to report a crime, without fearing that what they say would leak to unwelcomed parties;

²⁴ https://www.bbc.com/arabic/resources/idt-sh/tara_fares_arabic

8. Establish women's detention centers, so that female suspects could be held there, instead of being transferred to prisons till they are brought to the investigating judge;
9. A true and real commitment on the part of the state to women's issues, so they feel the state is serious about it. Currently lots of women feel that the state is not so serious in dealing with their issues, and that its involvement is merely rhetoric, without real action;
10. Establish mechanisms that ensure women's participation in economic, security and judicial decision-making entities and provide women's organizations with easy access to the relevant procedures , mechanisms and proposed agendas;
11. The state's annual budget should contain specific funds for women's issues, and womens' organizations should be involved in setting it and monitoring its implementation.

4.2: Poverty Eradication, Social Protection and Social Services

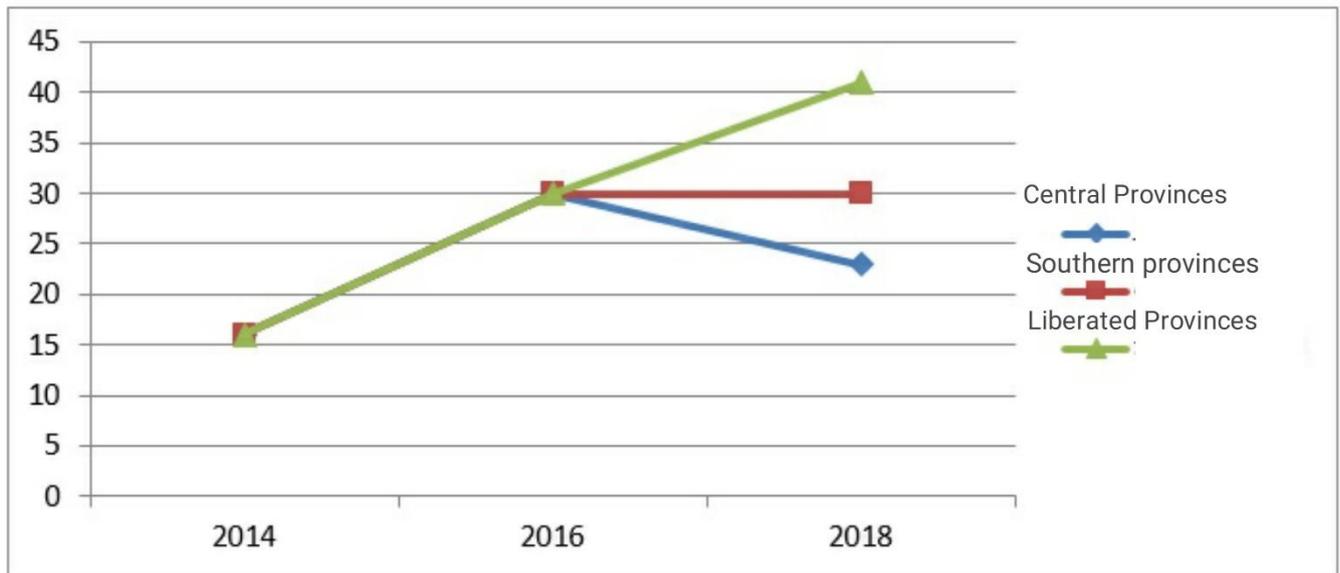
In this dimension, we will address the issues of poverty and education and their impact on women.

4.2.1 Poverty, Difficulty in Obtaining Employment Opportunities and Its Impacts on Women:

Amid a widespread of corruption and an increase of unemployment, the poverty rate in Iraq has risen in an unprecedented way since 2003. The World Bank statistics showed that 50% of Iraqi children in the southern governorates are poor, and that "the poverty rate in Iraq reached 41.2% in the liberated areas, 30% in the southern regions, 23% in the center, and 12.5% in the Kurdistan region.

These statistics also revealed that "48% of Iraqis are under 18 years old, and that 23% of them are poor, which means that one out of each four children is poor. The rate of poverty among children in Kurdistan is 5%, while it reaches 50% in southern provinces, according to the same source.

The figure below shows the continuous rise of poverty indicators in Iraq



The figure above represents the increase in poverty rates in different areas in Iraq except for Kurdistan region.²⁵

According to governmental sources "the number of employees and retirees in the public sector is more than five million persons. Their salaries and pensions consume half of the annual budget, which hinders the provision of funds for comprehensive development. The public debt has risen from 73.1 billion dollars USD in 2013 to 132.6 billion USD in 2018, while the foreign currency reserve decreased from 77.8 billion USD in 2013 to 40.8 billion only in 2018".

The poverty reduction strategy launched in 2018 by the previous government was limited to the following:

- Supporting the poor through strategic projects that provide job opportunities for the unemployed.
- Providing help through the social welfare network.

The implementation of this strategy has faced major problems:

- Corruption and failure to direct resources and services to eligible people;
- Problems related to lending money to small projects through the Central Bank loans. Most of the time, lending is not possible due to lack of collaterals to cover these loans;
- The inefficiency of government agencies particularly in the governorates;
- Some political parties exploit public projects to their benefit, either to finance their activities or secure loyalties.

The key problems facing labor force and employment in Iraq and their impact on job opportunities for women are:

1. Due to the weakness of economy, jobs are hard to find, and when found they are low paid, especially for youth, who can't get more than 150 \$ per month. Moreover, the private sector

²⁵ Central Statistical Institute and Executive Management of the Poverty Reduction Strategy in the Ministry of Planning with the World Bank 2018.

started to favor foreign labor from Southeast Asia as they accept lower wages, around 100 \$ per month²⁶.

2. The preference of hiring males over females in some jobs, due to societal norms.
3. Productive sectors are suffering from the lack of protective measures, high operative costs due to high prices of services and electricity, besides the need of high skilled workers. As a result, only small/home businesses that don't need additional workers are the only ones carrying on.
4. Productive projects suffer from the difficulty of obtaining permits for opening businesses and high costs of formal and informal taxation systems, including from informal security agencies and tribes. All of these make it very difficult to start small businesses and factories.
5. Goods transportation faces security-related problems, as it is subjected to extortion by armed groups linked to corrupted security personnel. This poses high threats to the trade of agricultural and industrial products.
6. Some corrupt entities control the irrigation schedules and systems in some areas, which puts the production in lots of agricultural areas in risk, especially in summer. This causes big losses to many farmers.
7. Some agricultural gardens and farms were destroyed, either as a result of military and security operations, or because they were used as shelters or bases by some armed groups, during such operations.
8. No funds are earmarked for women issues in the state's budget since 2016, besides the abolition of the Ministry of Women.

4.2.2 Poverty Reduction Recommendations:

1. Encourage local products by protection and support mechanisms, in addition to empowering workers and helping them acquire the skills necessary to develop their work;
2. Encourage agriculture and provide protection to agricultural lands and compensation for the damages resulting from military operations, as well as securing water rations and empower and train women on this type of work;
3. Develop food rations program for poor families, especially those headed by widows, so they can have access to food and basic needs;
4. Develop loan programs for small projects and secure and support work spaces in small and integrated industrial cities for example, under the supervision of the Ministry of Industry and economic consultants;
5. Develop programs for cooperative, small and city farms, with the collaboration of the municipal departments and the Ministry of Agriculture;

²⁶ Note that the amount of 150 \$ per month cannot contribute to the maintenance of a person as well as a family of two.

6. Encourage cooperative projects specialized in household food industries and waste recycling as well as marketing, through specialized civil society organizations and seek the help of international experts in this regard;

7. Develop the Ministry of Youth's scientific sponsorship programs targeting creative and unemployed youth and retired academics, in cooperation with women's civil society organizations in order to attract the participation of girls and women. To this end, some governmental facilities could be used as training and production facilities.

8. The cultural centers affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and civil society organizations should join forces to develop programs and courses for unemployed women and girls, to prepare them to work as freelancers in fields like journalism, digital journalism, blogging, translation, network marketing, and programming;

9. Provide advanced training for empowered girls working in specialized governmental institutions, in cooperation with ministries and state agencies and under the supervision of women civil society organizations, in the fields of advanced accounting in the Ministry of Finance, preparing budgets and project management in the Ministries of Housing and Industry, and media training in the major media institutions among others.

4.2.3 Improving girls and women education

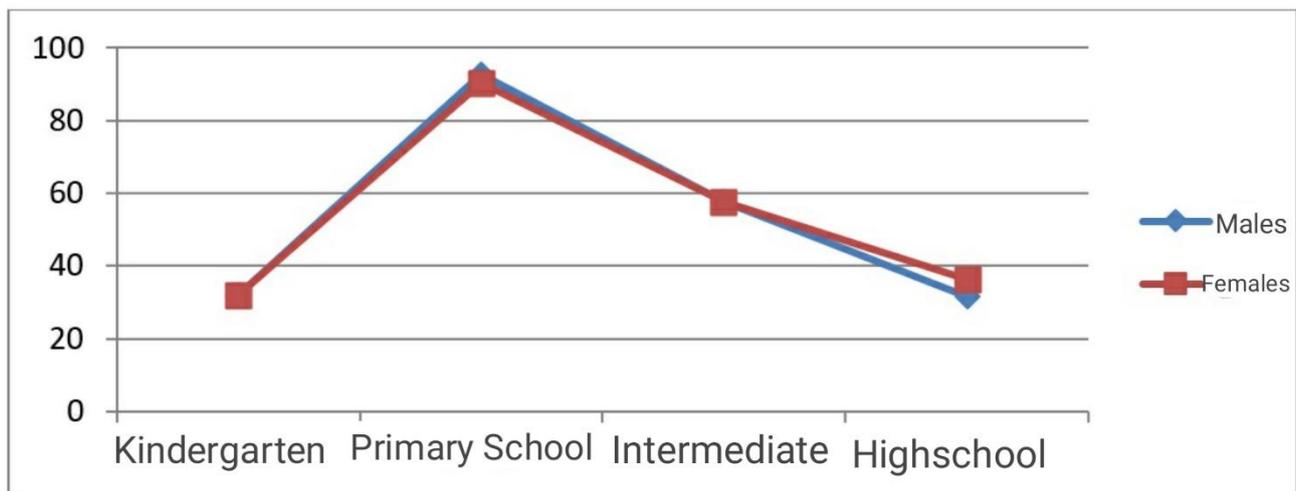
The problems the education sector faces are but a result of social, political and economic consequences Iraq is facing. During the previous period, education witnessed several crises: The increase in dropping out of schools for both, boys and girls due to economic factors; and the disruption of the educational process as a whole for the children of millions of displaced families. Lots of families were also unable to enroll their children in schools for various other reasons.

Statistics reveal a decline in girls' ability to finish schooling in various levels, as detailed in the table below:

Enrollment rate by gender 2018²⁷

Gender	Kindergarten	Primary School	Middle School	High School
Male	32%	92.7%	57.5%	31.7%
Female	32%	90.4%	57.5%	36.5%
Rate	32%	91.6%	57.5%	31.7%

²⁷ The situation of women in Iraq and the sustainable development agenda 2030 / Ministry of Planning, Women Empowerment Team / p.20.



As the data show, 31% of the girls were able to finish high school, while 69% couldn't.

The percentage of girls who finished high school is lower in rural areas and in areas with fragile security. Often times, this has to do with the economic situation and their families need to push them and the boys to work in farms, or to marry their daughters at younger ages, to get rid of their financial burden, which leads to higher rates of child marriage. In other cases, girls simply can't reach schools, especially in winter, due to bad roads in rural areas.

4.2.4 Recommendations to support women's and girls' right to education:

1. Prepare and implement an effective state strategy regarding the assessment of labor market needs and enable young men and women to join it in both, the public and private sectors, especially girls. It is a well established fact that girls work and empowerment can solve lots of their problems.
2. School curricula should include topics that promote equality and encourage equality-sensitive attitudes among students.
3. Provide gender equality and human rights training for teachers, and other education workers, as well as activating the role of the educational counselors.
4. Promote safe, harassment-free and inclusive educational environments for women and girls.
5. Encourage women to get higher education.
6. Encourage retired female teachers and instructors to volunteer in nearby schools, in cooperation with civil society organizations and the Ministry of Education.
7. Encourage women to join civil society organizations and volunteer work, which should be linked to schools, so it can contribute to the development of youth's capabilities.

4.3 Freeing Women from Violence, Stigmatization and Stereotypes:

Despite the gains achieved by women during the past few years at some levels, the violence that the whole society suffered on the hands of some extremists groups created new types of

stereotypes. Moreover, the displacement forced lots of families to live in more open environments in Baghdad or Kurdistan, with new cultures. This exposed lots of girls to new life norms and styles.

4.3.1 Stereotyping Women in Iraq:

- Women who were displaced due to the occupation of their hometowns by extremist groups (ISIS):

Women displaced from the areas occupied by extremist groups (ISIS) were subjected to abuses and accusation of terrorism as well as having their honor questioned by some militants involved with the armed forces, some media channels and social media platforms. The government, with the support of Iraqi civil society, worked to change this negative stereotype and achieve social acceptance in the areas of displacement and create a new culture of communication between different Iraqi identities.

Below are examples of some of gender stereotypes and stigmatization faced by Iraqi women and girls : :

- Widows and families of victims:

The crisis of Spiker Military Base: this crime which was committed by ISIS and targeted hundreds of the fighting forces in Mosul and Salah al-Din has triggered a widespread of anger against the residents and women of these areas, as they were thought to be linked to those murderers. The state made huge efforts, in collaboration with the civil society, to remedy this situation and overcome the crisis. In this regard several campaigns targeting families who lost their fighting sons, were organized, with the aim of helping them to overcome the trauma.

- Women in humanitarian crisis situations:

Iraqi government and civil society worked hand in hand to reduce the effects of displacement stereotype mentioned above on displaced women in IDP camps.

- Women of families stigmatized as being ISIS affiliated families:

This is still a major crisis that lacks appropriate attention. Families and women of ISIS fighters, and of course their children, are negatively stereotyped. They live like prisoners of war in camps. They are not allowed to get out of these camps, where they live in dire conditions, deprived of basic health and environmental services. It is even reported that they are compelled to accept some tradeoffs in return of basic services. These women lost the breadwinner and had to raise their kids alone in these dreadful conditions. Outside these camps the communities don't accept their return, beside they don't have IDs, and they can't enroll their children (being orphan or with unknown father) in any school, for lack of legal documents. They are not treated equally according to valid laws for such situation. This stigma risks promoting hatred and creating an environment that could be very favorable for crime, recruitment in extremists' groups, and different kinds of exploitation.

- Women participating in the protest movement:

The youth participating in the movement faced a number of accusations that are intended to discredit them (males and females). These include accusations of being agents for foreign countries (sons of embassies), being Jokers (in reference to the movie bearing the same name), which means that they are recruited by mafias with the aim of toppling the current regime. These accusations just held a blind eye to the circumstances and tragedies that drove young people to protest. These stereotypes were also associated with the accusation of adopting liberal ideas that broke traditions and social restrictions. Religious political currents sought to defame female protesters and questioned their honor.

- Women participating in volunteer and civil society activities:

Women taking part in volunteer work and contributing in the civil society in Iraq faced many stereotypes and social obstacles. However, the maturity of these women and the roles they played led to an acceptance and respect, as well as them being perceived as civilized or liberal. The families of these girls and women are, often, more open and don't really identify with tribal systems. The civil society organizations in Baghdad and many Iraqi cities played a prominent role in this regard, and had a positive influence, encouraging women to be involved in these fields. Some of them even became effective female leaders. Nevertheless, this group of women still faces challenges imposed by religious communities that fear the idea of women's rights as they see it conflicting with religious ideologies, cultural values and traditions.

- Women in cities:

Women generally face stigma just for being women. A woman is called "Mara" which is a derogatory derivation of the original Arabic word "Emra'a". This term is considered an insult when addressed to a male or female. This stigmatization has deep cultural roots, and consequently it constrains women inside the ideas of honor, decency and fear of harsh critic. At the same time women are increasingly used as tools to attract customers in some businesses like cafes, hotels, companies, or even some community initiatives.

- Women in the countryside

Women in countryside also face the stigma of being a woman (Mara), however a harsher word is used in the countryside (Hurmah, which means the inviolability). This type of stigma belittles women and deprives them of their dignity as human beings. It goes as far as not allowing them, even when really old, to consult a physician when sick, and if they do, the doctors are punished by the tribe, as they see it as a violation of her honor. Many death cases were recorded in that context. However, some areas are witnessing a noticeable change in this attitude, due to the efforts of civil society.

- Displacement problem

The number of displaced families for the period from June 2014 to July 2018 reached 892,311 families, of whom 123,135 women are the breadwinner of the families, in addition

to a group of children attributed to ISIS as a result of the sexual violence that was inflicted on their mothers. They are missing all their civil and human rights.²⁸

4.3.2 Case (2): Women in Anbar:

Studies showed that displaced women are exposed to many forms of violence. According to one study, social norms are the largest source of violence against displaced women, as it represents 23% of the cases studied, followed by domestic violence with 17%, and lastly, violence inflicted by government agencies with 16%²⁹.

The violence experienced by displaced women includes sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, restrictions of freedom, neglect and rape, among others.

Surveys also indicated that the most important methods of supporting violence victims are economic empowerment 42%, psychological support 32%, providing safe houses 11%, providing medical services 3% and finally legal aid 2%.

Surveys also showed that 11% of victims of rape, attempt of rape or sexual violence do not report the incidents that occurred to the police for several reasons. The most important reasons are:

- 1- Fear for family reputation;
- 2- They do not believe the police will do anything;
- 3- Feeling shy or guilty;
- 4- Fear of revenge by the perpetrator;
- 5- They don't want the police to interfere;
- 6- They prefer family or community mediation over the police.

There is a need to connect survivors of violence with civil society and NGOs. 14% of the survivors said that they need this kind of connection.

The studies also revealed a need to address the stigmatization of displaced women. 23% of the surveyed displaced women said that they believe the community sees them as prey easy to hunt, 21% as weak and unable to take responsibility, 11% as prone to sin, 14% as fragile, 12% they just have to live under the family's authority, 6% said people consider them strong and capable, and only 5% think that society empathizes with them and want to support and help them.³⁰

²⁸ Beijing government report / p. 15.

²⁹ M. M. Organization: a study entitled: Baseline of social reintegration project and building resilience flexibility for women returning to Anbar

³⁰ M. M. Organization: a study entitled: Baseline of the social reintegration project and building resilience flexibility for women returning in Anbar.

The displacement phase has led to an increase in the following aspects in displaced and returning communities:

1. An increase in suicide cases and suicidal thoughts;
2. An increase in the percentage of domestic violence as a result of the difficulties faced by families;
3. An increase in the percentage of underage forced marriages, especially orphan girls;
4. An increase in the rates of trafficking of displaced girls and women;
5. Increased cases of runways;
6. Increased rates of cyber violence against women and girls and their exposure to cyber bullying or blackmail.

Some urgent measures that should be taken regarding women's issues in areas of displacement:

1. Addressing the cases of families who lost their breadwinners through legal measures;
2. Legally allow safe abortions for women who became pregnant as a result of being raped, if they chose abortion; ³¹
3. Find legal solutions for children of unknown fathers (according to Iraqi law) without excluding cases stigmatized as being ISIS children, for leaving this issue pending could create feelings of injustice and rejection, hence future problems for this group, which is estimated to be in thousands;
4. Prevention of forced separation imposed on some women whose husbands were involved with ISIS, and allowing them to return home;
5. Addressing the problems of families who live in camps and have some of their members affiliated with ISIS, and rehabilitating the women psychologically and socially to enable them to re-integrate into the society.

4.3.3 Violence Against Women in General:

Violence against women in the Iraqi society is a phenomenon that deserves deeper and more comprehensive studies. It is so deep and influential that it overwhelms all efforts made so far. Being rooted in the cultural heritage leads to a concealment of the phenomenon, avoiding to talk about it, and obscuring the facts related to it. In the following lines we will address a

³¹Abortion is still prohibited in Iraqi law, and the law punishes women who abort and the party that performed abortion, and this is what exposes many women who do not want to keep the child (such as being an illegitimate child, as happened with girls and women who were raped from ISIS) to resort to unsafe abortion That is, outside the hospitals, which leads to the death of many girls, and accordingly we have had requests to amend this article and allow safe abortion in special cases where insecure abortion will cause harm that results in maternal deaths, especially young mothers caused by heavy bleeding, severe inflammation, high blood pressure and Dystocia.

number of common cases and some of the issues that the society used to accept or be silent about, while neglecting and forgetting the victims.

The following table indicates the confirmed rates of violence according to the Ministry of Interior. The shown numbers are just a small fraction of the real percentage.

The number of women who experienced various types of violence and submitted a complaint during 2016 and 2017:

Violence	Physical	Psychological	Verbal	Sexual	Total
2016	5419	0	1703	169	7291
2017	4712	1384	0	187	6283

The directorates of domestic violence in the Ministry of the Interior recorded different types of abuse and their percentages during 2014 and for all departments

- 54% the husbands assaulted their wives;
- 7% the wives assaulted their husbands;
- 5% assaults between brothers and sisters;
- 6% children assaulted their fathers and mothers;
- 12% the fathers and mothers assaulted their children.
- 16% others.

Total 100%

4.3.4 Case (3): An Iraqi Woman's Case Illustrating Violence Due to Social norms and Economic Conditions

A 28-year-old Iraqi woman suffered from familial and social conditions. She lived in a poor neighborhood of Baghdad. Her family has denied her the right to education, made her work in a car repair workshop, which is a job above the physical competence of women. This harsh life pushed her to accept the marriage to a total stranger. Getting to her new life, she, unfortunately, was pulled down into a crueler life. Her husband deformed her personality,

insulted her and deprived her from her rights as a human being. This lady reported that most women in these poor areas live in similar conditions for various reasons. She was fed up with this life, so she decided to flee to her family's house, but everyone there asked her to return to her husband, and she was forced to return. However, this time she was locked in an uninhabited house owned by the husband's family, where they kept her at home and prevented her from leaving it permanently. They also put the children with her to take care of them.

Despite the attempts of the women defenders' network to work on her case and address it legally, she asked them not to do anything and to hide everything that could incriminate the husband. She begged the defending woman not to file a case in courts, for fear of domestic violence as a pay back, if the case becomes a judicial one. The case of this woman summarizes the stories of many women who are victims of domestic violence and shows their fear to claim their rights, and the weakness of domestic abuse laws that protect wives in various cases. This situation reflects the social need to legislate a law against domestic violence that provides minimal protection for the wife and her children.³²

4.3.5 Case (4): Women and tribal Practices; Women Given as a Price of Reconciliation Between Clans:

In a case that was widely criticized for its ugliness, a tribe in Basra Governorate in southern Iraq in 2015 fined another tribe in the city with fifty women as a tribal fine (reparation), following a conflict between the two clans that led to the killing of a number of civilians after using live bullets in the clashes.

According to the tribal rules, these women are forcibly married to the men of the clan that have acquired them, and they are not treated as wives with rights, but just as a price paid for the blood of the slain sons of the clan.

Regarding the injustice that women are suffering as a result of some decisions, civil activist Bushra Al-Ubaidi says, "Handing over women as a price to end clans' conflict is a crime which is punished by Iraqi law according to Article 9 of the Personal Status Law No. 188; but unfortunately there is no real implementation of the law."³³

4.3.6. Case (5): Marwa From Basra, A Child Victim of Tribal Norms

Marwa was an Iraqi girl barely 14 years old, living in Basra. She is from a tribe that had its share of clashes with another tribe, resulting in the killings of lots of people on both sides. The price of reconciliation was a marriage between the two tribes. A marriage which joined little Marawa to a man from the other tribe.

³² The report of the Network (MH) submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

³³ <https://gourl.page.link/K3zb>

Once in her new house, she was abused and tortured, treated inhumanely and beaten by her husband and his family until she got some feet injuries that she even ignored what they are, as she wasn't allowed to see a doctor.

Little Marwa did not realize that she would one day be a victim of tribal conflicts, and used as a price of reconciliation of the two tribes. In 2018 she ended her suffering, and her life. She committed suicide, leaving the tribes with a legacy of remorse.

4.3.7. Case (6): The Negative and Positive Feelings of Women in Anbar

Studies show that women with positive feelings, those who are optimistic and expect a better future, represent only 1%.

As for the negative feelings, lack of self-confidence represents 23%, nervousness and tension, as well as impotence and dependence on others represent 21%, isolation from society 11%, depression and desire to die 12%.³⁴

4.3.8. Case (7): Details of The Fire of The Homeless Women 's House in Baghdad ... Mass Suicide of Female Inmates

In mysterious circumstances, a fire broke out in a house dedicated for the rehabilitation of homeless women in the Adhamiya district in central Baghdad in January 2019. Consequently, a member of the High Commission for Human Rights in Iraq "Ali Al-Bayati" revealed that there were problems between the administration of the house and the inmates. The investigation confirmed that the seven homeless women committed suicide by burning themselves as a result.

The house's management failed to provide real medical, psychological and social rehabilitation programs for the female inmates which had a significant serious impact that led to this accident.

According to news sources, the mistreatment of the girls in the house, not allowing them to leave the house, and imposing some religious restrictions on them, including wearing headscarves and others, were the main causes of this accident³⁵.

The obfuscation and silence are due to the absence of alternative choice for women to report violations, and also because of the culture that permits the killing of women when they violate conservative norms. Hence, the following is needed in this regard:

³⁴ Women and the Future: A study entitled: Baseline of the Social Reintegration Project and Building Resilience Flexibility for Women Returnees in Anbar.

³⁵ <https://v.gd/w5yD0w>

- 1- Increase public awareness and make efforts to change the perceptions and attitudes towards women;
- 2- The introduction of comprehensive sexual education in primary and secondary schools, and the promotion of respect for women;
- 3- Empowering women economically and psychologically;
- 4- Promote programs that are concerned with perpetrators, especially perpetrators of crimes of honor;
- 5- Promote programs related to victims of violence against women in all its forms;
- 6- Promote programs related to prevention and protection.

4.3.9 Violations that Women suffered at The Hands of Extremist Groups, In Particular (ISIS):

The violations that women had faced in areas under the control of extremist groups (ISIS) were not restricted to a specific sect, but involved all sects, religions and ages. While the crimes of genocide committed against the Yazidi component got wide coverage in the media, all the other minorities also, such as Christians, Shabaks, Turkmen and even Arabs and Muslims were not spared of the terrible violations that occurred. These violations included forced marriage, rape, murder, enforced disappearance, trafficking, and the use of women as a weapon in combat. Many families were forced to donate their daughters to ISIS fighters to save the rest of the family. Lots of girls were lost and their whereabouts is unknown till now due to this practice. This same period also witnessed an increase in the trafficking and smuggling of women by various groups.

4.3.10 Case (8): A Yazidi ISIS Victim Girl Abandons Her Children

A Yezidi girl named Jihan Qasim, released years ago by a group of ISIS, chose to abandon her three young kids there and leave without them. She feared the kids would be ostracized by her community for being fathered by a Jihadi fighter.

"Of course, I couldn't take them home. They are the children of an ISIS Jihadi" Jihan said. "How can I take them, and my three brothers are still held captive by ISIS?" she added, referring to the harsh reality that her children will be a constant reminder of the atrocities faced by that closed and coherent Yezidi community.

Dozens of Yazidi women and girls have faced systematic rape, human trafficking and being forced to marry terrorists, after ISIS kidnapped them from their homes in Sinjar in 2014. Jihan was thirteen years old when she was kidnapped and was forced to marry a fifteen-year-old Tunisian ISIS fighter. After a while, she escaped with her children from ISIS. Later she decided to leave her children with the Syrian-Kurdish authorities. "They were very young," she said, "They were attached to me and I was attached to them as well, but they were ISIS children." She added that she does not have any pictures of her children and does not want to remember them.³⁶

³⁶ <https://gourl.page.link/BF3k>

4.3.11 Case (9): Military Training of Turkmen Children:

One of the major problems women face is the militarization of society. In 2017, Turkmen children were recruited and moved to the camp of Tuz Khurmato, close to the afflicted village of Bashier, to become part the so-called Taza Forces. They were trained on shooting and bombing, under the supervision of officials in the district. Over two thousand Turkmen children (many of them less than 15 years old) were recruited.³⁷

4.3.12 Recommendations of Women Organizations³⁸ Concerning The Violations That Women Were Subjected to in The Areas Controlled by Extremist Groups ISIS:

1. Document all cases of enforced disappearance and push to ensure that their tracing is on the the agenda and plans of the central government;
2. Compensate the families of the victims of any form of violence from all national ethnicities, and expediting the process;
3. Establish psychological and educational rehabilitation programs to rebuild the affected communities in these areas;
4. The ratification by the Iraqi government of international laws and treaties related to the right of every person to live in dignity and ensure their protection against all types of violations, especially genocide and enforced disappearance;
5. Expedite the development of an Iraqi law for missing persons, based on the principles and stipulations of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED). Iraq was the 20th country to sign it on the 23rd of October 2010;
6. It is necessary to provide education in the mothers' tongues - especially in areas of displacement due to the high dropout rate of students from schools, especially for linguistic minorities;
7. It is important to develop curricula that promote the acceptance of the other and the peaceful coexistence;
8. Remove the military equipment and military groups from the Iraqi society, especially the civil areas;
9. Consolidate the concept of citizenship among the Iraqi security forces, and design specific programs to increase their awareness about human rights in general;
10. Protect diversity in Iraq by setting laws, and monitoring their implementation;

³⁷ A report by the T. T. organization, entitled "The Situation of The Turkmen in Iraq After 2014".

³⁸ A report by the T. T. organization, entitled "The Situation of the Turkmen in Iraq After 2014".

11. Promote the role of women from all local communities in the Iraqi government's national plan regarding the implementation of the Security Council Resolution n. 1325 concerning the Conflict Zones, which urges the protection, empowerment, and political participation of women;
12. The Iraqi government should adopt a strategy to prevent children recruitment by armed groups and other groups which fight ISIS;³⁹
13. Address the problems of women forced to marry ISIS fighters and the children fathered by non-Iraqis or Iraqi ISIS members, taking into account the Iraqi laws in this regard, especially for non-Muslim women;
14. Find an appropriate solution for missing and kidnapped women, and those victims of enforced disappearance or loss as a result of displacement and wars, work to uncover the fate of those women and adopt safe return mechanisms;
15. Establish procedures to uncover mass graves and genocides and address these cases legally;
16. Implement safe return mechanisms for the displaced, as well as reintegration and social cohesion mechanisms;
17. Fight the stigma "women of ISIS" or "ISIS's children", as these stigmas have a serious impact and may reproduce extremism and find solutions for victims of these stigmas.

4.3.13 Women with disabilities

People with disabilities are of the most neglected groups in Iraq, and the problem becomes more acute for women with disabilities. Out of the total number of people with disabilities (1,357,063) in the governorates covered by the survey, there are 776,721 males (57%), and 580,342 females (43%). In other words, the gender ratio is 134 males for each 100 females. However, this ratio may be due to the fact that some families don't reveal that some of their females are disabled, for fear of stigma.

Priorities:

- 1- Include measures and provisions in law No. 38 of 2013 that ensure higher incomes, and better access for disabled people (especially in remote and rural areas) to the available social services without any exclusion or discrimination;
- 2- The strategic plans of different governmental administrations should include social services components targeting the persons with disabilities, so they can enjoy better levels of health, educational and social protection services. This should be done in collaboration with this group of people and their organizations.
- 3- Implement Article 17(2) regarding "soft loans according to the law" by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs;

³⁹ A report by the T. T. organization, entitled "The Situation of the Turkmen in Iraq After 2014".

- 4- Implement Article 15 (8) (a) regarding the roles of the Ministry of Construction and Housing: "securing a proper residence for people with disabilities and special needs according to the government's housing plan" according to the international standards;
- 5- Develop a database for people with disability, indicating the age, gender, geographical distribution – especially for the poorest areas - and the extent of their access to social services, especially women with disabilities in remote and rural areas. This is important to achieve equality and non-discrimination;
- 6- Provide equal opportunities for women and men with disabilities in obtaining affordable and professional vocational education.

4.3.14 Recommendations Regarding Women With Disabilities:

- 1- Empower women with disabilities in the areas of health, education, work, habilitation and rehabilitation;
- 2- The national strategies and plans regarding women, whether developed by a governmental, national, semi-governmental or non-governmental organization, should include components related to the rights of women with disabilities. This should be done with the active and effective participation of women with disabilities;
- 3- Expedite the adoption of the law concerning the protection from domestic violence, and the criminalization of female circumcision. This law should include a chapter on women with disabilities;
- 4- Establish an easily-accessed hot-line for women with disabilities, including the ability to communicate through sign language, text messages and other forms of communication, so they can easily report any incidents of violence, exploitation or abuse based on disability;
- 5- Develop capacity building programs for women with disabilities and their organizations in the fields of human rights and international agreements, as well as the best ways to communicate with the relevant authorities to file a complaint, or seek judicial justice in cases of violence, exclusion or discrimination.⁴⁰

4.4 Participation, Accountability, and The Institutions and Systems Sensitive to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

The real participation of Iraqi women necessitates that the drivers of change, whether coming from the top or the base, join forces so they can boost the change and take it to the institutions levels, and ensure its sustainability on the long term.

To this end, we should, first, determine the most important factors in women's empowerment on different levels. Second, we should look into the challenges, whether coming from the

⁴⁰ The National sustainable development report 2030 on the reality of disability in Iraq. Preparing the gathering of the disabled in Iraq.

government, society or culture. Third, we have to look for the key factors that help promote women participation, through learning from others' experiences as well as ours.

It is also necessary to identify the obstacles and challenges that hinder women's participation, whether originating from authorities and political systems, or society, economic or cultural conditions of women.

Obstacles are, surely, imposed by political systems as well as society; and factual analysis shows that they are entwined. We can't, for instance, isolate economic and societal realities from state policies. Cultural restraints, also, even being closed social patterns, are, at the same time, in constant interaction with state policies and social movements.

Identifying the actual gender gaps necessitates an assessment of women's participation rates in different decision-making positions. We need, also, to measure the extent of progress made in some fields after applying positive discrimination mechanisms (quota). This should cover, not only governmental institutions affiliated with any of the three authorities (legislative, executive, or judicial), but also civil society institutions such as unions, associations, organizations and political parties especially in leadership positions.

Moreover, supporting the participation of women at all levels, requires paving the way through legislations that guarantee this participation and also protect their human rights. Issuing these legislations, as well as repealing or amending the ones that impede their participation or violates their rights must also be ensured.⁴¹

4.4.1 Indicators and Facts About Women's Participation in the Legislative, Executive and Judicial Authorities

- The Iraqi constitution does not guarantee a presence of women in the executive authority, as is the case in the legislative one. As a result, their presence in the former is so weak, and depends on what the politicians allow. Most of the time they view women role as a very narrow one. The following table details the situation.⁴²

	N. of Ministries	N. of Women	Percentage
Transitional government 2004	33	6	18%
Transitional government 2005	35	6	17%
Government of 2006-2010	36	1	2.7%
Government of 2010-2014	28	1	3.5%
Government of 2014-2018	27	2	7.4%

⁴¹ Prof. (B.O.) vision presented to the United Nations about the role of women.

⁴² MP (L.W.): Paper presented to the United Nations on 2019, p. 2.

Government of 2018 till now	23	1	4.3%
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- The Judicial Authority: Women were excluded from upper level positions in the Federal Supreme Court and the Supreme Judicial Council, and their presence as judges in Iraqi courts is very limited. According to a judiciary statistic, 5% only of the judges are women.⁴³
- Parliamentary participation: despite the women quota, the political parties impose a specific mode of participation in parliamentary committees on women, where there is a complete absence of women in sovereign committees such as (security, defense, economic wealth, legal and external issues), in some other committees too (ex. national reconciliation, tribal committee), as well as their limited participation in the committees of family, education, and civil society⁴⁴ . Women share in heading committees was also weak. In 2014-2018 they headed 3 out of 27 committees (11%.⁴⁵)

Empowerment requires the application of certain policies and procedures and the strengthening of institutional and legal structures that can ensure overcoming the problem of inequality and guarantee the provision of equal opportunities in the use of community resources and in political participation.⁴⁶ The main problems in this regard can be summarized as follow:

1. Failure of the major political forces to adopt the idea of equality, and the biased use of quotas in favor of certain women inclined to implement the agendas of these parties. In doing so the gender balance doesn't get any better, and the real equality, political and institutional participation of women are not established;
2. The marginalized participation of women in posts that are supposed to work on equality and active participation, hence poor chances for other women to participate effectively;
3. Female activists are subjected to threats and restrictions, especially those working in volunteer teams;⁴⁷
4. Female activists working in the public sphere, especially those who took part in the peaceful protests, have been subjected to kidnapping and threats. This was met by silence on the part of the government with both its executive and legislative wings, despite Iraq's prompt implementation of the UN resolution 1325. A first plan to implement the resolution was in place, and a second one is underway, however no firm position was taken by any senior governmental female figure, and no governmental

⁴³ MP (LW): A paper presented to the United Nations on 2019, the number of women judges is 93 out of a total number of 1585, which corresponds to only 5% for women.

⁴⁴ L.W.): A paper presented to the United Nations in 2019, p. 6

⁴⁵ (L.W.): Paper presented to the United Nations in 2019, p. 7

⁴⁶ Perceptions of a number of activists.

⁴⁷ Activist, Sorour Al-Husseini, in Mosul from the " Removing Corpses" team who was arrested as a result of her volunteer work in the old city on 24/5/2018 after a talk show in which she participated with the former governor of Nineveh, Nawfal Hamad.

position at all was declared regarding the kidnapped women. On the contrary, their kidnapping was used as a weapon to curb women participation in the protests.

5. Although there are laws that prohibit harassment or assault of women, whether in the workplace or at home, the percentage of women who actually report violations is very low compared to those who don't. This is due to a lack of efficient mechanisms and measures of safe reporting and protection for victims.

4.4.2 Case (10): The Arrest and Detention of The Volunteer, Sorour Al-Husseini, For Approximately 5 Months, Just For Doing Volunteer Work:⁴⁸

Activist Sorour Al-Husseini and the governor of Mosul Nawfal Hammadi were both guests in a talk show on the German channel DW, on the 22nd of May 2018. After the show, the governor ordered her arrest for volunteering in removing the cadavers scattered in the city. She had official permissions for this work from governorate office, the municipal departments, and the security authorities.

Despite the great achievement she did, with the help of a team of 30 volunteers (recovering and burying about 1300 cadavers), an arrest warrant was issued for her at the end of 2018. However, she was acquitted by the Mosul Misdemeanor Court in and the charge of removing cadavers from the old city of Mosul was dropped.

The Iraqi Lawyers Syndicate formed a volunteer team to defend her. Attorney Hassan Al-Zuhairi and a number of Nineveh's lawyers attended the trial to defend her in the Nineveh Misdemeanor Court, resulting in the dropping of the charges and her acquittal, as mentioned before, on the 12th of May 2019⁴⁹.

Many activists and volunteers face security issues, even when having official permissions. Moreover, the attempts of the Ministry of Youth to form volunteer teams to work under its direct supervision, raises lots of fears as these types of activities, usually under the guise of security concerns, risk undermining the freedom of expression and real volunteer work that goes parallel to the work of the state.⁵⁰

4.4.3 Case (11): Gender Offices in the Iraqi Ministries are Just a Matter of Formality With No Real Role:

The Human Rights Women Defenders Network, reported - through an activist and female employee in the Ministry of Culture - that the Ministry denied and ignored the demands to set a budget for the gender offices and departments. These offices and departments were the fruit of lots of efforts made by international organizations and missions to persuade the central government to establish them. Nonetheless, the women defending teams noticed, at the time of writing the report, that there are no financial allocations for these offices. Their work is marginal and ineffective, for lack of enabling resources. Therefore, the Defenders Network is calling upon

⁴⁸ Jafar Talk, TV Show played on the DW channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZIGgvQbLrU>

<http://www.basnews.com/index.php/ar/news/iraq/520224> ⁴⁹

⁵⁰ <http://www.basnews.com/index.php/ar/news/iraq/520224>

the central government to allocate funds for these departments, so they can carry out their efforts of reducing the gender gap.⁵¹

4.4.4 Recommendations in This Regard:

The absence of a gender dimension in the government policies when dealing women, the masculinization of the public sphere and attitudes (manifested in the general directions or the subordination of women) and the ineffective presence of women in parties and some decision centers, have all very negative impacts on the real and effective participation of women. This calls for the dissolution of the cultural heritage regarding the participation of women in public spheres and the enhancement of their presence, through drivers of change, whether coming from above (authorities) or from the base (society). The main goal here is to achieve not only a (quantitative) participation but also a (qualitative) one. This necessitates introducing qualitative changes in political participation specifically, and changing women role from (representation) to (empowerment) and then to (influencing) accordingly.

To achieve this, the following is recommended:⁵²

- 1- Building a comprehensive vision and taking specific measures to facilitate women's political participation, taking into consideration all obstacles and challenges related to socioeconomic conditions and cultural restrictions. Despite several measures taken to facilitate women's access to the parliament and the decision-making circles, particularly the women's quota, all these measures are still not sufficient to solve the problem of the huge gender gap;
- 2- A true political will to face the challenges and change the political and institutional systems that reflect patriarchy values, so gender equality could be enhanced;
- 3- A comprehensive review of all legislations that hinder the empowerment of women, their participation and holding decision-making posts. This should be done according to a holistic view regarding the ways of enabling women to occupy such posts.
- 4- Forging Civil Society partnerships to enhance the skills of female leaders in decision-making posts and provide them with consultation and support;
- 5- Empowering women economically and socially. The progress in this area is closely dependent on public policies of education, health, employment as well as legislations. Experiences of lots of countries show that the higher the percentage of women representation is in decision-making institutions and circles the more policies that support gender equality and strengthen women's economical, social and cultural conditions are adopted.
- 6- Making use of global experiences and turning points to gain new points in achieving equality, and political, economic, social and cultural participation;
- 7- Promote building and empowering a feminist movement that works to overcome sectarian considerations and political divisions, in order to unite around the goal of empowering women on political, economic, social and cultural levels. Women should be able to

⁵¹ The report of the Network (MH) submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

⁵² Dr. (B.O.) vision presented to the United Nations on the role of women.

participate actively in national dialogues, peace processes, and economic advancement. This, in turn, will enable them to acquire a great position in the economic, political, social and cultural fields;

- 8- Social restrictions must be addressed in order to empower women in several areas, enhance their social influence and reach out to wider sectors of women, especially in the countryside;
- 9- Develop creative work mechanisms and encourage local initiatives in small projects and cultural creativity of women;
- 10- Identify and empower individual women who possess a vision, so they can run for the coming elections and participate in decision-making circles and other political areas, while avoiding repeating the mistakes of the quota experience in the last elections;
- 11- Female specialists should be no less than 50% of the members of the committee in charge of amending or writing the constitution, to ensure that it is written with a gender vision and dimension on one hand, and to guarantee women's human rights are respected in a way that creates an enabling environment for the participation of women in all areas on the other hand;
- 12- Review the programs and plans of civil society institutions, such as political parties, unions, and NGOs, and work on policies and mechanisms that ensure equitable representation of women and their issues. The marginalization of women within these institutions is detrimental to the principles of democracy and equitable representation;
- 13- The gender perspective should be integrated in the government's institutions, their policies, strategies and programs, in a way that ensures the needs of women and men are met in all state activities. This is considered as one of the necessary tools that can contribute to making a change, as it formalizes and institutionalizes the principle of equality and the policies and recommendations capable of achieving it, so it becomes more effective in making a change and achieving equality.;⁵³
- 14- International support should be obtained, via international organizations, UN agencies and consultative bodies to enhance the active participation of women.

4.5 Peaceful Societies in Which No One is Marginalized

As a result of the crises that ravaged the Iraqi society, as well as the accumulation of past problems, working on peace building and social cohesion were the most important issues that preoccupied many organizations and governmental agencies. However, despite the great efforts made in this regard and the clear state of recovery achieved in many societal spaces, this issue is still one of the most challenging ones and will remain so for a while.

⁵³ All the recommendations are submitted by law and feminist activist Prof. P.O.

4.5.1 Case (12): Anbar and Women's Indicators Regarding Societal Coexistence:

A survey of women's perceptions regarding the societal peace in Anbar has shown that 46% of the women surveyed do not believe that peaceful coexistence is part of their society, and 41% feel that the social cohesion is weak.⁵⁴

Despite the efforts made by committees and governmental groups to develop many national plans to address some of the women's most urgent issues, many women organizations pointed out a need to the following:

1. Adopt national plans regarding women, peace and security in collaboration with the civil society and women organizations on a wide scale. The coordination and monitoring of these plans should be handed to female leaders.
2. Integrate the obligations regarding women, peace and security in the main policies, planning and monitoring frameworks at the national and ministerial levels;
3. Allocate a separate budget for the implementation of the agenda of women, peace and security. The details of this budget should be made public in a transparent manner, to facilitate the assessment of its suitability to the needs of the Iraqi environment;
4. Reallocate funds from military expenditures to social and economic development, including gender equality and women's empowerment;
5. Support comprehensive and gender-sensitive analysis, and early warning and precaution mechanisms.

4.5.2 The Effective and Outstanding Participation of Women:

The growing participation of women in community initiatives, campaigns, and public events are among the most important areas of progress in women's issues. These should be monitored and supported through the following:

1. Women and girls took part in volunteers work, in Baghdad initially, then in all other Iraqi provinces. These voluntary teams contributed to the empowerment of feminist activists and helped in preventing conflicts and solving societal problems;
2. Women organized and led volunteer teams, and launched several initiatives;
3. Women participation in civil society organizations is growing and the number of women's organizations increased between 2014 and 2018;
4. Women are taking part in peace building campaigns, social cohesion and resolving crises, especially those involving diversity of identities in many regions, especially Nineveh governorate;
5. The immense contribution of women in the widespread protests of October 2019 was so obvious, and so was the prominent role they played in maintaining peace, sustaining the momentum and influencing the Iraqi feminist culture.

⁵⁴ (M.M) organization: a study entitled: Baseline Social Reintegration Project and Building a Resilient Adaptation policy for Women in Al Anbar.

4.5.3 Case (13): Umm Qusai, Mother of Iraqis and Her Heroic Role and Sacrifices to Save Iraqi Soldiers:

Umm Qusai is an Iraqi woman who heroically saved more than 58 young men from the "Spiker massacre" in which the Islamic State (ISIS) killed about 1,700 soldiers in June 2014 during their invasion of Salah al-Din Governorate. Umm Qusai managed to hide the 58 soldiers who escaped from ISIS in her house for 15 days, and obtained fake IDs for them from a local university so ISIS militants don't notice them. She then succeeded in sending them back to their families safely. In July 2015, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, awarded her the Medal of the Nation, and granted her a free Hajj pilgrimage trip.

4.5.4 Case (14): Umayya Jabbara, The First Female "Clan Sheikh" Time in The History of Iraqi Tribes

The lawyer, Umayya Jabbara, was a women and human rights' activist . Some of her family members (from the Jabour clan) were killed by ISIS. She documented the crimes of these terrorists and their transgressions against her people.

She also carried arms to defend her city against ISIS. During violent clashes that erupted between the tribes and the police from one side and ISIS militants on the other at the entrance to Al-Alam township, seven ISIS members were killed, and Umayya was one of those who lost hers fighting ISIS. Umayya holds the title of "clan sheikh", which is a men-only title inherited through generations. Moreover, she was given that title by the council of clan leaders "sheikhs".

4.5.5 Women's Participation in The Protest Movement and The October 2019 Uprising:

The general sequence of the protests in the Iraqi streets:

At first, several demonstrations by the unemployed youth erupted sporadically, raising a number demands related to their situation. They manifested in front of some ministries, unions and the ministries cabinet, and at Al Tahrir Square. A university graduate demonstration in front of the cabinet was dispersed by hot water cannons. Despite lots of troops were there, no serious injuries were caused. Then the Municipalities of Baghdad and other provinces prevented hawkers from selling, destroying their vehicles or confiscating their goods without giving them alternative jobs. Their number is estimated to be around tens of thousands. These doings ignited anger among the youth, and they called for general demonstrations on the 1st of October at Al Tahrir square. The government ignored their calls and turned a deaf ear to them.

On the 1st of October, 2019, angry but peaceful demonstrators, mostly youth, took to the streets of Baghdad. The demonstrators were students, hawkers and unemployed graduates. Women barely participated. The demands were specific, and the participation was really large. However, it was faced by extreme violence that claimed the lives of many participants.

Despite the messages sent by several activists and human rights organizations and their efforts to get the government to calm down, violence began to escalate amidst total denial from the government. As a result, the demonstrations stopped for a while, but they resumed on the 25th of October, with millions, this time, taking to the streets of several cities, especially Nasiriya, Basra and Baghdad.

4.5.6 Statistics about Violations in the 2019 Demonstrations in Iraq

Government's statistics⁵⁵ indicate that the number of the casualties exceeded 511 persons, 50 of which are under 20, 7 are girls from Baghdad, and a girl from Basra. Injured persons stand around 21,000. Some of the injuries led to disabilities due to use of gas, live bullets, assassination attempts and beatings. However, civil society organizations affirmed that the number of martyrs of the demonstrations is around 700 so far, including those assassinated, and more than 27 thousand wounded. Many deaths resulting from the manifestations incidents were recorded as occurring for other causes. Several wounded cases, also, refused to go to hospitals, for fear of being pursued and arrested by the authorities. According to the Human Rights Commission's office in Iraq's statements, about 2,700 detainees arrested during the demonstrations in late December 2019 have been released, and more than 123 are still being held. Meanwhile, activists continued to be targeted and intimidated, whether in the locations of the demonstrations or outside them.

4.5.7 The Importance and Impact of Women's Participation at the National Level:

1. Empowering women and making them feel that they are capable of creating an impact through active participation;
2. Societal and cultural change of the stereotype in which women are trapped through.
3. The prominent role they play in providing logistics and volunteering in medical teams that worked to save the injured and provide health support for the protesters;
4. The outstanding role they played in maintaining peace during the demonstrations, as the security forces are usually reluctant to use violence when women are present in demonstrations;
5. Breaking the stereotypes regarding women who live in holy and religious cities such as Karbala and Najaf. They surprised the Iraqi society when they joined the demonstrations in disciplined and respectable way. This move caused a wide controversy and triggered discussions in the conservative communities among religious men and tribe leaders. This led them to think about getting rid of some negative stereotypes and customs related to women, especially regarding preventing them from leaving their houses or expressing their opinions openly.

4.5.8 Problems that the Iraqi Society Fears After the October 2019 Uprising:

The most important concerns pointed out by the civil society and women organizations are:

1. Civil society has faced threats from various government and security agencies and armed actors operating outside the framework of the law;⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Human Rights Commission/ Statistics of the victims of the demonstrations

⁵⁶ Civil society organizations have received lists of organizations accused of supporting or contributing to the protests, and lists were being leaked for the national security and popular crowd militias.

2. Activists have been subjected to various forms of repressive practices, starting with direct threats, arrests and kidnapping as well as exposure to multiple types of torture, and killing and sniping by armed men. The government denied their existence at first, then admitted but denied their affiliation to it;⁵⁷
3. Hackers working for the benefit of some political parties have hacked some social media accounts of activists, monitored their accounts and gathered information about them, then deleted posts and videos about the protests. They also sent threats through social media to many people⁵⁸;
4. Communication departments disrupted the Internet service whenever clashes escalated between the demonstrators and the security forces. Cutting off then restoring the services is done in a systematic manner under the pretext of maintenance. When it is restored social media sites are blocked;
5. Parties having what is called “the cyber armies” have launched social media campaigns to defame activists, target women, discredit them, and promote false news on protesters with the aim of distorting the movement;
6. The government failed to respond to demands of uncovering criminals or agencies that carried out the sniping, killing, kidnapping and assaulting of demonstrators;
7. The government issued deposition orders for some security leaders upon the occurrence of repressive violations proven through video evidence. However there was no trial nor conviction⁵⁹
8. The arrested young demonstrators were forced to sign blank papers and pledges not to demonstrate again.⁶⁰

4.5.9 The Most Important Violations Faced by Women Participating in the Demonstrations:

Despite the wide range of efforts previously made by the government, including the establishment of certain committees, and the development of plans with the involvement of senior figures all in the aim of supporting women, and their participation in the public sphere, as well as the issue of women and peace, the government’s practice during the protests was a major concern due to the violations inflicted upon the demonstrators, such as:

1. Killing: 8 girls were targeted with live bullets and killed in the demonstration squares;
2. Assassination: about 5 female activists were targets of assassination operations, outside the demonstrations places;
3. Kidnapping: 4 female activists were kidnapped from the demonstration squares by unknown security groups. Among them:
 - a. Saba Al-Mahdawi, a third year medical student who served as a paramedic during the demonstrations.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Human Rights Commission Violations Reports, <http://ihchr.iq/index.php?name=Pages&op=page&pid=109>.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Commission Violations Reports, <http://ihchr.iq/index.php?name=Pages&op=page&pid=10>.

⁵⁹ In the committee formed by the Prime Minister on the sniping operations that took place in the demonstrations, many reports were released which many activists deemed unprofessional and lacking transparency about the existence of a third party with the silence of the government and its refusal to acknowledge its responsibility towards protecting the people.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Commission Violations Reports <http://ihchr.iq/index.php?name=Pages&op=page&pid=109>

⁶¹ She was kidnapped on 2/11/2019 after leaving Al Tahrir Square and released after ten days. It is reported that she was tortured and did not return to the scene after that.

- b. Mary Muhammad, a protester who volunteered to provide logistics for the demonstrators.⁶²
 - c. Tiba Saad Abdul Karim, a protester.⁶³
4. Threats: Hundreds of cases were recorded , but there are a lot more of unrecorded cases;⁶⁴
 5. Defamation: The use of stereotype vocabulary to defame female activists. It is known to be one of the most dangerous deterring tools for female demonstrators;
 6. Detention: According to information provided by the government, there was not official detentions whatsoever
 7. Intimidation: Spreading fears of torture, arrest, rape and mutilation by groups targeting women in various ways, through direct meetings in places of protest or when women are alone. Also leaking pictures and names of female activists to the intelligence of unlawful armed groups to target them later;
 8. Raiding female activists' houses and summoning them by armed forces at midnight.⁶⁵

4.5.10 Case (15): The Kidnapping of Activist Saba Al Mahdawi:

Saba Al-Mahdawi was a volunteer paramedic helping the protestors at Al Tahrir Square. She was the first to be kidnapped, following several threats targeting female activists and volunteers. On the 2nd of November 2019, while leaving the square, she was kidnapped by unknown elements. After lots of pressures she was released on the 12th of November 2019.

No information at all regarding the circumstances of the kidnapping were released by the security and official agencies, and no official responsible even mentioned it. This triggered the concern of women's organizations about the disregard of the dangers women are subjected to while volunteering to humanitarian work.

On the other hand, her clan supported her family, and declared its denunciation to this event, and even decided to boycott any Sheikh of the clan who doesn't declare his denunciation and support to girl's family. This was really a qualitative change in the awareness and attitudes towards women, a new social support and empowerment.

What the government was expected to do was to condemn the incident, and at least open an investigation, through its agencies concerned with women issues, in the circumstances of the kidnapping and unveil whoever was behind this crime.

Instead, the public position of the government came as a disappointment to the expectations of the Iraqi society. No condemnation, legal action, trial, or even a public supportive action

⁶² She contributed to the transportation and distribution of foodstuffs to the protesters' tents. She was kidnapped and released after two weeks.

⁶³ She was kidnapped after she left the Square at 3 O'clock, on 4/1/2020 and was released six hours later after being tortured.

⁶⁴ Organization reports (HT): The medic (A.K.) was threatened through phone call by two well-known operatives just for being present in Al-Haboubi square.

⁶⁵ (H.T.) Reports: The protester (YA), her songs were promoted on satellite channels and social media, which led a militia to attack her house on the 3rd of February 30, 2019. Her family had to move homes after her brothers were threatened; On December 1, 2019, an armed force came to her house at nine o'clock in the evening, asking to summon her.

for the female victims. All they did was denying that the incidents happened, saying that they didn't know about it, or blaming a third, foreign party for it.

Despite the forms of violations women faced during the protests, Iraqi civil society points out that the cases of sexual harassment or attacks in the demonstration squares were rare.⁶⁶ This is one of the most positive aspects of the protests, as it proves the importance of women's participation in the movement. It is also an indication of the cultural change brought up by women's participation and the respect they gained, especially from the youth, contrary to many expectations.

4.5.11 Case (16): The Kidnapping of Journalist Afrah Shawqi By Unknown Gunmen:

The activist and journalist Afrah Shawqi was kidnapped on the 24th of December, 2016 from her home in Baghdad, by 16 armed men in civilian clothes, and using three vehicles. After being held for 9 days, they released her, after being interrogated about contributing to an article published at the Saudi Newspaper "Al-Sharq Al-Awsat".

In Afrah's case the government was swift to respond and the office of the Prime Minister at the time (Dr. Haider al-Abadi) issued a statement denouncing the kidnapping. Activists and civil society also played an important role in pressuring for her release.⁶⁷

4.5.12 Attacking the honor and accusing of Conspiracy:

Nour Qassem, a 27 years old female activist, was horrified when she received, from a friend of hers, her own (Nour's) picture published on Facebook in a way that questions her honor, and accuses her of being an operative for foreign embassies and organizations. She never expected that the pictures she posted on her Facebook page to show her participation in the protests demanding political and economical reforms, and fighting corruption, would be used to discredit her and incite her murder and kicking out of the protests, as she said.

She added: "I was, and still am, proud of myself as I lead women in the protests. I founded a large women group to support the demonstrations."

Almost two months after the demonstrations, a campaign of defamation and incitement was launched on social media targeting feminist leaders in the protest movement. Facebook has become the most used tool to suppress activists by fabricating false accusations and publishing doctored photos, according to Nour.

She accused the "corrupt parties" as she described them, of launching their cyber armies to discredit her and other activists, by using their photos during protests that were organized years ago, in cooperation with government agencies and volunteer teams, and that were funded by international organizations, to accuse them of being operatives for foreign agencies..⁶⁸

⁶⁶ The R.M. organization report, the B.C. report and the H.I.T's, and through many interviews with the feminists participants.

⁶⁷ <https://www.alhurra.com/a/iraq-afrah/342097.html>

⁶⁸ <https://v.gd/JufGBV>

4.5.13 Female Activists at Risk and Iraqi women For Change Initiative:

Female activists - especially supporters of the demonstrations- faced an unprecedented campaign of violence that began with kidnapping, killing, threatening, and ended with defaming them on Facebook pages. Women participation in the protests was so wide since their eruption in the 1st of October. They played a major role in promoting the protests, a role that contributed to the breaking of deep-rooted stereotypes about women.

A group of them launched a campaign under the umbrella of " Iraqi women for Change" initiative, to defend and advocate female demonstrators, after the waves of violence that targeted them, according to Feryal Al Kaabi, a member of the initiative.

This was their first advocacy campaign, after the media statement they issued calling on the authorities to protect the female activists and civilians, and hold the criminals to account.

Feryal also called on human rights organizations to support and protect female activists in the squares of demonstrations, and educate them about self-safety procedures and digital security.⁶⁹

4.6 Summary of The Survey⁷⁰ On Women's Participation in the Recent Protests:

A group of female activists and organizations launched a survey that included various age groups; 70% of the participants were females. The study's goal was to assess women participation in the protests and the perceptions of the community regarding this participation.

The results showed that 94% of the surveyed support women participation in demonstrations, with 79% of men for this participation too. This indicates that an important change may be going on, as women and men support women's participation more. This might be an important chance for the civil society, as it can build upon this change when developing women programs in the society.

The survey also revealed that people value women participation and its importance in sustaining the protests. 63% said that their contribution was good, while 29% felt that it was average.

The results also showed that 48% of the participants were between 25 to 35 years old, while 34% were between 15 and 25.

The highest form of violence inflicted on women and impacting their participation, according to the survey results, was the threatening, then kidnaping came in the second place, then defamation, killing, and the last place was for arrests.

⁶⁹ <https://v.gd/JufGBV>

⁷⁰ A group of feminist organizations and activists launched the questionnaire in mid-January 2020 for a week via social media, and the publication of the poll was funded to include the largest number of those targeted. This survey study is done in cooperative with "Carmine Gorgees from Darakko Consultancy"

Regarding the impact of violence on the continuation of participation 45% of the surveyed persons confirmed that it had a negative impact on the participation of women, while 35% believed it won't deter women from participating.

40% indicated that violence against women caused their intermittent participation in protests, while 33% confirmed that they continued to participate, and 20% said that women, had to change the pattern of participation due to violence, and 5% felt it halted their participation.

As for the cultural change in the stereotypes about women after their active participation in the protests, 80% confirmed that there is a positive change in the image of women in society, compared to 13% confirming that these stereotypes didn't change.

The study revealed the formation of new perceptions about the role of women and their influence and participation in the public sphere. The main conclusions can be summarized in the following points:

1. Women have a great desire for change and there is now a level of awareness that allows this change to happen;
2. Growing self confidence on the women's part, and the community is trusting them more and more, and looking forward to see them playing a greater role.
3. The increasing support for women's participation and the respect thereof, despite the attempts of some groups to belittle them through defamation, knowing they are so sensitive towards their reputation.
4. The study showed the importance of enabling women to participate culturally, socially and politically in order to change the societal narratives towards Iraqi women.

5 General Conclusion:

Hovering over complex issues, diverse visions of Iraqi women, statistics, horrible violations that shook the society and impacted women in Iraq, this report tried to provide a coherent presentation of all these issues and topics through the lens of the Beijing 25 reporting guidelines. We hope that we could've highlighted some forgotten or neglected issues, despite we are totally aware that we couldn't cover all forgotten issues.

5.1 Access to Information is One of the Most Important Things We Need for Effective Change:

One of the most important challenges we faced during the preparation of this report was related to the information and data that describe the problems and social phenomena, especially those related to women issues. Through this report, we would like to note that we faced difficulties in obtaining the following information:

1. Information related to laws, amendments and legal instructions: This information need to be explained widely, so as to raise the awareness of rights and duties and other legal matters.

2. Information about statistics: Although the ministry of planning does lots of statistics, there still is a need for statistics focusing on certain issues, especially women's issues, as was revealed by this report;
3. Information related to court cases, whether criminal or related to women and family issues: these need a robust database.
4. Information related to security issues and criminal investigations: It's almost impossible to obtain any data in this regard. As a result, lots of grave crimes got forgotten, and doubts are raised regarding the investigation and arrest of perpetrators in these cases;
5. Information about the procedures of protecting women or their participation: The absence of these information results in the neglect of abuses and the exclusion of women. Also being unclear or unpublished renders lots of these procedures ineffective;
6. The absence of published guidelines related to the protection or of women deprives many women of benefiting from these processes, which are sometimes provided by civil society organizations and international organizations, in addition to the multiple governmental agencies;
7. Universities, academia and civil society organizations all make researches related to women issues. The dispersion of recourses among all these entities makes them less fruitful.
8. Strategies and programs: many of these strategies or reports are not available, especially those of the government. The availability of these data can create a large participatory work base, hence more influence and action, perhaps correction and criticism too.

Obtaining Information remains the base of a systematic and effective change. It is the way in which the ups and downs of many social phenomena can be monitored. Information, research and guidelines also make the containment of problems and the prevention of violations possible, and their constructive accumulation contributes to the reduction of wasting resources and intensifying efficiency.

5.2 The continuation of multiple dialogues to reach participatory results:

The lack of dialogue between the various influential parties contributes greatly in the diversion of views and increase of fears towards some entities. To this lack, we can add also the prevalence of negative criticism which intends to distort the ideas of others or disregard their work programs. We've pointed out to all of these points in the report.

It is necessary to increase these dialogues that shed light on women issues with many stakeholders and activists. The state and its institutions, the political parties, the tribes, the religious leaders, and influential societal and intellectual persons, they are all concerned with this dialogue and the isolation of one of them would distort the perception of the other, hence lose his support, or at least risk turning him into an obstacle to the process of empowering or protecting women.

This report came as a step towards building an Iraqi dialogue about women issues, with multiple parties concerned and responsible for the women issues in Iraq, in order to experience working with them, in an environment of constructive criticism. The same is true also regarding those who

are part of these problems to learn their human values, and try to reform the causes of the problems. A dialogue, also with culture that some fear reforming it under the pretext of conserving values and beliefs, with women, the main focus of this report, and their will to change. A dialogue with activists and women organizations, to explore their skills in describing, thinking and proposing solutions.

WOMEN RULE THE WORLD
YES! WOMEN CAN.
THE REVOLUTION IS FEMALE
GIRLS POWER

