



# IRAQ

- Population: 50.6% male to 49.4% female<sup>1</sup>
- Population by Age: <5yrs 14%; 5-19yrs 36%; women 15-49yrs 25%; >65yrs 5%<sup>1</sup>
- Average household size: 6 (5 in KRI)<sup>2</sup>
- Female headed households: 10%<sup>3</sup>
- Polygamous households: 12.3% women with co-wife<sup>4</sup>
- Literacy Rates 15-24 yrs: male 84.1%; female 80.5%<sup>5</sup>
- Infant Mortality rates: 28 per 1000 live births<sup>5</sup>



## Gender in Brief

The roles and responsibilities of women, men, boys and girls in Iraq are fluid, changing with the political and security situation. At independence, Iraq's 1959 *Personal Status Law* established one of the most progressive platforms for women's rights in the region. During the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq's highly educated women took on traditionally male-dominated roles in engineering and the military. By the 1990s, the Ba'ath Party, in alliance with conservative groups, changed approach to promote women's place in the home<sup>6</sup>. Since 2005, women comprise more than 25% of the Iraqi Parliament and women's organisations have emerged but the continuing threat of insecurity has severely limited women's ability to exercise their rights and freedom of movement<sup>7</sup>. The impact of the current humanitarian crisis on the lives of women, men, boys and girls is only slowly becoming visible.

**Gender Roles and Responsibilities:** Within the home, Iraqi men and women generally have gender specific roles. More than 40% of Iraqi men report that they do no household chores at all<sup>8</sup>. Men are primarily responsible for providing for and protecting their families<sup>9</sup> although high youth unemployment rates make this challenging for younger men. Just under half of Iraqi girls report feeling that they are treated equally to their brothers<sup>10</sup>. Although the overall Iraqi population comprises more males than females, there are significantly more older women than older men. An estimated 9 percent of the country's women (900,000) are widows<sup>11</sup>. Older women have specific vulnerabilities especially if they are also female headed households<sup>11</sup>. Social norms prevent women from living without men, leaving female headed households particularly at risk of violence<sup>12</sup>. Polygamous households are relatively common (12.3%); more common amongst older age groups and in rural areas<sup>12</sup>. In previous times of insecurity, "*Gender Role Swaps*" have been documented when men were unable to leave the home resulting in women and boys going out to provide for the family<sup>13</sup>.

**Economics and Education:** Participation in the labour market is very different for men and women: 73% of men work or are looking for work compared to only 14% of women<sup>14</sup>. Unemployment affects young people more than older people: 28% of men aged 15-29 are unemployed compared to the average of 18% unemployment<sup>13</sup>. Overall low levels of women's participation in the workforce are part of the "*MENA Paradox*" whereby women in the region are increasingly more educated and healthier but not increasing their economic and political participation<sup>15</sup>. Child Labour is more common in rural areas where 10% of children reported working compared to 5% in urban areas; boys are more likely to work than girls<sup>16</sup>. Some of the coping strategies documented in previous crises including an increase in *al-mu'tah* (temporary marriage), trafficking of women and boys, increased child labour and early marriage<sup>13</sup>. Primary education is free in Iraq: 87.4% of girls are enrolled and 90% of boys but there are significant differences between rural and urban areas. Women are twice as likely as men to be illiterate<sup>14</sup>. Women and girls are less likely than men to read newspapers and rely primarily on television for information<sup>8</sup>.

**Participation:** Most Iraqi men believe that women have a limited role in solving problems at the household level. The majority of women require male permission to access health services: 72.4% in rural areas, 64.1% in urban<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, consultation between couples is common with almost 60% of men reporting that they regularly discuss the household finances with their wife<sup>8</sup>. Many Iraqi men and women believe that political participation is a man's role<sup>14</sup>. Although women comprise over 25% of Parliamentarians, this has not led to more inclusion of



women's issues<sup>6</sup>. Although in the KRI, inclusion levels are higher (43% of parliamentarians women 2014)<sup>17</sup>. Women remain under-represented at local government levels. In the past, the Ba'athist *Federation of Iraqi Women* (GFIZ) had branches in every village in Iraq and many women were active in community organisations like school boards<sup>19</sup>. Today, less than 10% of women participate in local civil society<sup>14</sup>. Access and free movement especially for women and girls are closely linked to the security situation. Foran (2008) reported that "*the constant threat of such violence has immobilised women and girls not directly affected by the violence to the effect that they will not or cannot leave the home to access essential services*".

**Gender Based Violence and Protection:** Protection concerns and gender based violence issues are relatively well documented but there remains little case reporting and limited services for survivors. The 2012 I-WISH reported that 46% of married women had been exposed to at least one kind of domestic violence (emotional, physical or sexual) while 46% of girls (10-14 yrs) reported violence (beaten or insulted) by a family member. This was less common in Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI) than in other parts of the country. KRI has much higher levels of female genital cutting (44% of women) than other parts of Iraq (1%)<sup>16</sup> and high levels of "self-immolation" (suicide by setting on fire) which is commonly perceived as violence against women<sup>17</sup>. Levels of reporting all types of violence against women are low. Early marriage is an issue for young women: 5% reported being married below 15 years old and 22% below 18 years old<sup>2</sup>. In another survey, most women reported feeling unable to walk freely down the street because of sexual harassment<sup>18</sup>. *Al-mu'tah* (temporary marriages) have become more common since 2003 and offer fewer protections for women<sup>6</sup>. Iraq is both a source and a destination for trafficking of women, girls, and boys. So called '*honour killings*' by family members may be a consequence of reporting rape or trafficking<sup>7</sup>.

**Legal and Policy Framework:** Iraq has had legal provisions on gender equality since 1959. Iraqi women can own land, work and open a bank account without permission from their husbands. There are gaps notably around personal law, domestic violence is not illegal, honour killings, and freedom of movement, although in 2011 KRI passed a Law on Combating Violence within Family which prohibits violence against women and girls (including female genital mutilation, forced and child labour and child marriage). Iraq is a signatory to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* and the *Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*.

**Diversity:** Iraq is a diverse country with a population comprising different ethnic groups with different faiths including: Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, and other smaller groups like the Armenians, Circassians, Persians, Mandaeans, and Afro-Iraqis. Different groups and those in rural or urban areas may have different gender norms. Although Arabic is the national language, other languages are also used in specific regions including Kurdish (multiple dialects, including Sorani and Kumanji), Farsi, Azerbaijani and languages from the Caucasus. It is important to take the time to understand the specific gender context for each area.

<sup>1</sup> World Populations Prospects (2012) Iraq in 2015 by sex <http://esa.un.org/wpp/unpp/p2k0data.asp>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Planning Iraq (2012) [Iraq-Woman Integrated Social and Health Survey](#) (I-WISH)

<sup>3</sup> IOM-Iraq, Special Report Female Headed Households (2012) <http://www.jauiraq.org/documents/1864/Woman-Factsheet.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Republic of Iraq (2008) [Family Health Survey 2006/2007](#)

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF State of the World's Children 2015 Iraq [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html)

<sup>6</sup> Huda Ahmed (2010) *Iraq in Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Siobhan Foran (2008) [GBV in Iraq: the effects of violence –real and perceived- on the lives of women, girls, men and boys in Iraq](#)

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Planning Iraq (2012) [Iraq-Woman Integrated Social and Health Survey](#) (I-WISH)

<sup>9</sup> Siobhan Foran (2008) [GBV in Iraq: the effects of violence –real and perceived- on the lives of women, girls, men and boys in Iraq](#)

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Planning Iraq (2012) [Iraq-Woman Integrated Social and Health Survey](#) (I-WISH)

<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Planning Iraq (2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/25/world/middleeast/iraqi-widows-numbers-have-grown-but-aid-lags>

<sup>12</sup> Huda Ahmed (2010) *Iraq in Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010)

<sup>13</sup> USAID Iraq (2010) [Gender Assessment](#) [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADW085.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADW085.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> UN Iraq (2013) [Women in Iraq Factsheet](#)

<sup>15</sup> World Bank (2013) [Opening Doors: Gender Equality and Development in the Middle East](#)

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF (2012) [Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey Iraq](#)

<sup>17</sup> Oxfam GB (2010) 'LANA' Programme Baseline Report

<sup>18</sup> Women for Women (2008) [Stronger Women Stronger Nations Iraq Report](#)