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3.11.5. Single women and female heads of households

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: November 2024

The analysis below is primarily based on the following EUAA COI reports: Country Focus 2024, 1.3.2; Targeting 2022, 7.3; some information included in the Targeting 2019 has also been added. Country Guidance should not be referred to as source of COI.

Living alone for a woman is not socially accepted in Iraq and such women face obstacles due to prevailing social, religious and cultural norms.

Step 1: Do the reported acts amount to persecution?

Being a single woman or a female head of household in Iraq enhances the risk for such women to be exposed to acts, which would amount to persecution, such as rape, sexual exploitation, trafficking. Both state and non-state actors have been perpetrators of such acts.

The severity and/or repetitiveness of other acts that single women and female heads of households could be subjected to and whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures, should be considered. Women without the support of a male member of their family or tribe often face stigmatisation from their families and from society. They are also vulnerable to economic insecurity.

Step 2: What is the level of risk of persecution?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for a single woman or female head of household to face persecution should take into account **risk-impacting circumstances**, such as:

- **Personal status:** Even though divorce rates have increased in Iraq, divorced women, including in the KRI, still face stigma and discrimination, including the risks of losing their rights to child custody, property rights and financial support. They are also exposed to

economic hardship and sexual harassment. Divorced and widowed women are reported to be exposed to sexual exploitation. Female-headed households, widows and single women also face additional obstacles, including legal impasses, in obtaining security clearance and/or documentation for themselves or their children.

- **Home area and residence:** Although the situation of single women is described as generally better in the KRI, conservative attitudes and traditional norms create several challenges for single women in the KRI as well. Women from female-headed households in IDP camps have been subjected to sexual violence, including rape and sexual exploitation by government forces and camp residents. Women in IDP camps have also adopted negative coping strategies.

- **Perception of traditional gender roles in the family or community:** The risk of persecution is dependent on how the (extended) family and surrounding society, perceive the traditional gender norms. Women who have been repudiated by their family and lack a social support network, are considerably worse off [Targeting 2019, 3.5.5].

- **Economic situation and education:** The situation of single women may vary depending on their level of education and on their financial independence. As reported in 2018 for the KRI, although it is possible for an educated woman with an income to live in a city on her own, as long as she does not have an honour conflict with her family, in practice that possibility has been reduced due to deteriorating societal restrictions and financial situation in the country.

Step 3: Is there a ground for persecution?

Where well-founded fear of persecution is substantiated for a woman or a girl under this profile, this may be for reasons of membership of a particular social group e.g. divorced women or widows, due to their common background which cannot be changed and distinct identity in Iraq, in relation to stigmatisation by society.

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