

2.6.1 Violence against women

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In a June 2025 report, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reported on harmful practices affecting women and girls in Iraq, including female genital mutilation (FGM), temporary marriages (*mut'ah*), forced marriages, and child marriages conducted by religious leaders that avoid existing legal restrictions.754 A policy paper focused on the KRI found that violence against women can take many forms, including what it described as the 'patriarchal trifecta of oppression': FGM, forced marriages, as well as honour-based violence and killings, which are believed to operate in an interlinked manner, especially in the KRI.755 Marital rape is not criminalised.756 Perpetrators of sexual assaults can avoid punishment by marrying their victims.757 See also section 2.9 Individuals perceived as transgressing moral and Islamic norms.
Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread in Iraq,758 and has been on the rise, according to the CRC report published in July 2025.759 The high prevalence is partially due to prevailing cultural norms, economic dependency of women on men, and a lack of legal protection.760 Instances of GBV have been further exacerbated by conflict and instability.761 Comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of violence against women are not available due to underreporting762 and stigma related to the risk of damaging the 'family honour' if the cases are made public.763 In addition, violence against women has increased in the online space.764

Based on Article 403765 of the Iraqi Penal Code,766 in January 2023, the Ministry of the Interior launched the online Ballegh platform,767 used also to target women.768 The platform enables the public to submit complaints over so-called 'derogatory or degrading' online content769 and to facilitate the control of the online content.770 Government targeted prominent women also through the Ballegh platform, 'especially those who defy traditional social expectations'.771 (See also 2.9 Individuals perceived as transgressing moral and Islamic norms).

With regard to FGM, while the federal Iraq does not have a legislation explicitly banning FGM, it has been illegal since 2011 in KRI,772 following the passing of the Act of Combating Domestic Violence in Kurdistan Region-Iraq.773 The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported in December 2024 that Iraqi authorities have made 'significant strides' in addressing it. According to the report, its prevalence – traditionally the highest in KRI774 – has been steadily decreasing when comparing 2011 and 2018 data, 'indicating the steady progress toward the total elimination of FGM in Iraq.'775 WADI776 indicated that despite the recorded decline in the practice of FGM in the KRI, in Erbil, it continues to be 'quietly practiced'.777

Since 2023, the ongoing anti-gender speech has worsened conditions for women advocacy groups,778 which have faced targeted campaigns against them,779 in particular on Telegram

780 but also on the government's Ballegh platform.781 Activists and feminists had to sign forms stating that they would not use the term gender, leading some to quit their work.782 See also section 2.8 on LGBTIQ . Efforts to combat violence against woman and girls remained limited because of societal norms and inadequate enforcement of existing legislation.783 Women's access to justice is impacted by patriarchal interpretation of Islamic law, place of residence, ethnicity and social status.784 Many violations are unreported785 and are resolved through traditional tribal mechanisms instead.786

Domestic violence

Despite the constitutional prohibition of violence, Article 41 of the Iraqi Penal Code permits a husband to use physical violence against his wife787 under the concept of ta'dib al-zawja ('domesticating the wife'), allowing such punishment788 'within certain limits prescribed by law or custom'. 789 The Penal Code provides mitigated sentences if the crimes were done for 'honourable motives'.790

Some 75 % of women in Iraq experience domestic violence,791 which remains 'a critical issue', disproportionately affecting women without formal education, younger women, women living in rural areas, women with disabilities,792 and displaced women and girls.793 Although some progress has been achieved,794 notably in the 'policy reforms and awareness campaigns,' efforts to improve the situation of women in Iraq have been hindered by deep-rooted norms and systemic barriers, 795 including a combination of traditional and religious influences on the other.796 In the KRI, women have continued to experience increased797 rates of GBV since 2014, particularly in the form of domestic violence, sexual violence, and honour-based violence. 798 In November 2024, authorities in the KRI declared that perpetrators of femicides will not be included in any general amnesties.799 Kurdistan24 reported on 25 000 cases of domestic violence in Iraq in 2024.800 In 2024, 48 cases of women killed were documented in the KRI, while between January and May 2025, 14 such cases were recorded.801 Implementation of Act No. 8 of 2011 on combating domestic violence in the KRI is hindered by the lack of resources. 802

Honour-based violence

Honour killings, referred to as *ghasl al-yar* ('washing away disgrace/shame') are reportedly used to kill individuals involved in 'black cases' (*qadiyah souda*). According to Haley Bobseine, senior Iraq researcher and analyst specialising in tribal affairs, those may include perceived or actual sexual misconduct, rape, or same-sex relations.803 Honour-based violence is rooted in patriarchal and tribal norms as well as cultural perceptions of women's 'proper' roles.804 Honour killings are prevalent throughout Iraq and the KRI, occurring more frequently in more conservative, rural, or poor areas. Conversely, the frequency of such crimes is thought to have slightly decreased in cities. According to tribal custom, the female's brother, husband, or father is in charge of 'washing away the dishonour' perceived as caused by their female relative.805 Honour crimes are perpetrated mostly against females.806 Cases of honour killings have been falsely reported as suicides to cover up the crimes and avoid legal consequences;807 killed women were then buried in secret graves found across the country.808 Up to 70 % of reported suicides are thought to be honour killings not investigated as such due to the tribal influence.

809 In September 2024, the deaths of two teenage girls were reported as suicides, later discovered to be murders to 'expunge shame'.810 Haley Bobseine observed that honour killings 'are enabled by the Iraqi criminal law and there is not much interest in challenging these norms.' 811 Reportedly, there are no state protection mechanisms towards honour killings, although some NGOs have provided temporary, emergency protection support for some individuals at heightened risk. However, such programs have become targets themselves due to their work and some have ceased operation.812 Shelters are present in the KRI, run by government authorities and some NGOs, yet they are often inadequate. No official shelters are reported to be present in the federal Iraq.813 According to a former spokesperson for the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, at least 150 women and girls are killed in Iraq in honour killings annually.814 In January 2025, a 26-year-old woman affiliated with Peshmerga forces was killed by her brother because of a 'social issue'.815 In February 2025, a Kurdish woman was killed by her husband in Erbil over a 'social dispute', a euphemism used to describe honour killings, marking eight recorded femicide that year.816 In May 2025, a man killed his sister in Erbil and, according to the police, the case was about a 'social issue'.817 In June 2025, a teenagers' body was found in Soran, Erbil, with burn injuries, raising suspicions of an honour killing.818

Forced and unregistered marriage

Unregistered marriages, also called temporary819 or pleasure marriages (*Nikah Mut'ah*)820, have continued to be practiced,821 although not foreseen by the law.822 Such temporary arrangements are reported to be widely misused for sexual exploitation, prostitution,823 trafficking824 and as a way to circumvent legal restrictions on child marriage,825 forced marriage and polygamy, as well as to avoid paying spousal maintenance in case of divorce.826 Human Rights Watch describes the impact of unregistered/temporary marriages on women's rights as significant. Lacking civil status, women in unregistered marriages cannot give birth in state hospitals and are not entitled to social benefits provided to widows, abandoned wives, and divorced women.827 On another note, consanguineous marriage is increasing in Iraq due to sectarian and ethnic tensions. Polygamy increases as women get older, reaching three times the rate in the 45+ age group.828 For information on amendments on Personal Status Law, See section 2.2 on Latest legislation impacting on civil and human rights.

Female-headed households

Unemployment of young females in Iraq exceeds 28 %, driven by limited job opportunities, skill–labour market mismatches, and restrictive social norms and discrimination.829 Some working women, including divorced women, experience social stigma and their families prevent them from working.830 Women are disproportionately affected by poverty, particularly in conflict-affected areas, with female-headed households experiencing 30 % higher poverty rates than the national average.831 Women engaged in informal work cannot benefit from social protection and security.832 According to UNFPA, state protection services for women are 'limited and poorly coordinated'.833 Women acting as heads of households face worsened financial situation,834 high unemployment rates835 and practical challenges when approaching government officials.836 A system of social welfare for women has been implemented,837 which includes the so-called 'social welfare salary' and 'martyr's salary'. However, the existing support is reportedly insufficient to cover basic expenses; in practice, women depend on

donations from relatives or humanitarian organisations.838 In unregistered marriages, difficulties to obtain both marriage and death certificates hinder women's access to these benefits, such as monthly salaries provided to widows, divorcees, and abandoned wives under Social Protection Law No. 11 of 2014.839 In case of divorce, women are denied the right to inheritance or spousal maintenance.840

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