



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 unreported[785](#) 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 wife[787](#) under the concept of ta'dib al-zawja ('domesticating the wife'), allowing such punishment[788](#) '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 increased[797](#) 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 temporary[819](#) 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](#) trafficking[824](#) 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 rates[835](#) 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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