

2.8 LGBTIQ

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In April 2024, an amendment to the 1988 anti-prostitution law was adopted, imposing prison sentences for same-sex relations.⁹⁴⁶ In addition, the anti-LGBTIQ law explicitly targets transgender women with penalties for ‘imitating women’. The law also outlaws undergoing or performing gender-affirming procedures, except for individuals born with intersex characteristics.⁹⁴⁷ While Iraq did not have an explicit anti-LGBTIQ legislation before this amendment,⁹⁴⁸ LGBTIQ individuals faced prosecutions under vague laws,⁹⁴⁹ such as those criminalising ‘immodest acts’ and ‘prostitution’, as well as Sharia law.⁹⁵⁰ LGBTIQ individuals were reported as living in fear already before the April 2024 legislation.⁹⁵¹ There is no legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in Iraq.⁹⁵² The situation of LGBTIQ individuals is therefore reported as ‘extremely unsafe’.⁹⁵³ Individuals face threats to their physical safety, including harassment, assault, arbitrary detention, killings,⁹⁵⁴ kidnappings,⁹⁵⁵ torture, sexual violence,⁹⁵⁶ as well as online targeting.⁹⁵⁷ Risks were reported to emanate from armed groups,⁹⁵⁸ society at large,⁹⁵⁹ family,⁹⁶⁰ and state agents.⁹⁶¹ The lack of accountability for abuses, combined with the prevailing patriarchal social norms, exacerbate the situation. LGBTIQ individuals are compelled to keep their identity secret to avoid abuses.⁹⁶² Authorities use vague penal code provisions to prosecute LGBTIQ individuals.⁹⁶³ According to IraQueer, an Iraqi NGO supporting LGBTIQ rights based in Sweden, it is ‘nearly impossible’ to live openly as a LGBTIQ individual in Iraq, which the same source describes as ‘extremely dangerous’.⁹⁶⁴ NGOs openly supporting LGBTIQ rights cannot operate in Iraq without risking closure or prosecution.⁹⁶⁵

Since the 2019 Tishreen (October) protests, sociopolitical discourse focused on criticising gender and homosexuality, portraying them as a ‘western plot aimed at undermining Islamic values and societal norms’, according to scholar Balsam Mustafa.⁹⁶⁶ This trend has had a negative repercussion particularly on female activists, feminists, and LGBTIQ individuals.⁹⁶⁷ Starting in 2023, the Iraqi government has forbidden media companies to use the words ‘homosexuality’ and ‘gender’ and instructed them to use the word ‘sexual deviance’ when referring to homosexuality.⁹⁶⁸ Public discourse online was reportedly distorted by wrong translations of ‘gender’ into Arabic and equating the term with homosexuality.⁹⁶⁹ NGO and media sources indicated that online space has become increasingly dangerous for LGBTIQ individuals in 2024,⁹⁷⁰ LGBTIQ people were also targeted online⁹⁷¹ and people who have expressed their LGBTIQ identity online faced harassment and death threats.⁹⁷² In 2024, authorities pressured social media companies to remove LGBTIQ content.⁹⁷³ Media companies were also reported to contribute to homophobia by referring to LGBTIQ individuals using derogatory language and slurs.⁹⁷⁴ Anti-LGBTIQ sentiment has been fuelled in the recent years by politicians, media

personalities⁹⁷⁵ and religious leaders, describing homosexuality as ‘immoral’.⁹⁷⁶ Conservative actors have framed homosexuality as an ‘western import’ that is not in line with Iraqi traditional values⁹⁷⁷ (See also [2.6. Women and girls](#)).

Iraqi authorities accentuated their repression of LGBTIQ people in 2024.⁹⁷⁸ Since the passing of the April 2024 amendment to the anti-prostitution law, hate crimes against the LGBTIQ people have increased.⁹⁷⁹ People wishing to undergo gender-affirming healthcare reportedly do it on their own at home or move abroad for surgeries.⁹⁸⁰ Transgender individuals face difficulties when obtaining legal recognition from the authorities,⁹⁸¹ which hinders their access to services.⁹⁸² According to Haley Bobseine, same-sex relations and perceived violations of gender and sexual norms can also lead to honour killings.⁹⁸³

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