



IRAQ

**GENDER ANALYSIS ON
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT IN
ANBAR, DIYALA,
KIRKUK, NINEWA AND
SALAH AL-DIN**

JULY 2022



IMPACT Shaping practices
Influencing policies
Impacting lives



Cover page photo representing beneficiaries of UNDP livelihood programme in Mosul (Iraq), copyright of UNDP Iraq.

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About the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Funding Facility for Stabilization (FFS)

UNDP is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

At the request of the Government of Iraq, UNDP established the FFS in June 2015 to facilitate the return of displaced Iraqis after the ISIL conflict, lay the groundwork for reconstruction and recovery, and safeguard against the resurgence of violence and extremism.

FFS works in 31 liberated towns and districts across Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din, helping local authorities quickly rehabilitate essential infrastructure and services, providing short term livelihood opportunities, building the capacity of local authorities, and promoting social cohesion.

About IMPACT

IMPACT Initiatives is a Geneva based think-and-do-tank, created in 2010. IMPACT is a member of the ACTED Group.

IMPACT's teams implement assessment, monitoring & evaluation and organisational capacity-building programmes in direct partnership with aid actors or through its inter-agency initiatives, REACH and AGORA. Headquartered in Geneva, IMPACT has an established field presence in over 15 countries. IMPACT's team is composed of over 300 staff, including 60 full-time international experts, as well as a roster of consultants, who are currently implementing over 50 programmes across Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Central and South-East Asia, and Eastern Europe.

SUMMARY

Introduction

The conflict against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) impacted livelihoods in Iraq in various ways, including the destruction of infrastructure and stunted governmental and private investment.^{1, 2} With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, livelihoods became even more precarious and severely affected women's mobility outside their homes, which was already limited due to cultural norms.³ Access to livelihood opportunities in Iraq remains unequal for men and women; an International Labour Organisation (ILO) study published in 2022 found that 64.7% of working-age men were employed, compared to only 7.7% of women.⁴ Women, especially female heads of household, are also at greater risk of external shocks, such as economic shocks. Iraq is ranked 146 out of 162 countries in the 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII).⁵ In legal terms, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution recognises the right to work for all Iraqis, and there are laws that protect women from discrimination in the workplace and provide for maternity leave.⁶

Since 2015, UNDP, through the Funding Facility for Stabilisation (FFS), has conducted programme activities on sustainable livelihoods with a specific focus on gender and using the Area Based Recovery Approach (ABRA) to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development activities. These activities mostly include cash for work (CfW), skills training, and business grants.^{7,8} In partnership with UNDP, IMPACT Initiatives (IMPACT) conducted a gender analysis of women's economic empowerment in five governorates in Iraq where these programmes are implemented: Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din. This gender analysis explored gender dynamics regarding barriers to and opportunities for accessing livelihoods. It aims to provide data and lessons learned to assist UNDP in informing and expanding their livelihood programmes to better support women's economic empowerment.

Building off a thorough review of available secondary resources on women's economic empowerment (WEE) and women's entrepreneurship development (WED), this gender analysis used primary data collected through focus groups discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to investigate women's access to livelihood opportunities in Iraq as well as key challenges to their participation in the labour market. A total of 46 FGDs, 29 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 35 KIIs were collected between 27 March and 5 June 2022.⁹

Key Findings

Building on the primary data collected through FGDs, IDIs, KIIs, and via the secondary data review, the following key themes and findings have emerged from this assessment:

¹ World Bank Group, Iraq Economic Monitor: From War to Reconstruction and Economic Recovery, (Spring 2018). Available [here](#).

² Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), Iraq's Economy after ISIS: An Investor's Perspective, (November 2017). Available [here](#).

³ OXFAM, Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraq (June 2020). Available [here](#).

⁴ ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook: 2022 Trends. Available [here](#).

⁵ UNDP, Gender Inequality Index (GII), 2020. Available [here](#).

⁶ Iraq's Constitution of 2005 (English version). Article 22, First. Available [here](#).

⁷ UNDP, Funding Facility for Stabilization, Iraq. Available [here](#).

⁸ UNDP, Area Based Recovery Approach (ABRA), Iraq 2018. Available [here](#).

⁹ In some locations, in person FGDs could not be conducted due to security concerns. As a result, IMPACT staff substituted 4 FGDs for phone-based in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) while still following the FGD questionnaire. This gave a total of 75 entries (46 FGDs, and 29 IDIs).

- **Information gathered from FGD and KII participants indicate that the challenges men and women face to access livelihoods differ.** This is further influenced by how Iraqi society traditionally understands women and men's roles, which in turn conditions women's capacity for economic empowerment. Participants highlighted how these gender norms affect women's mobility outside the home, management of financial resources and decision-making within the household, as well as freedom to work in specific sectors. Women's access to the labour market is further conditioned by the support of their husband, family and community. Female FGD participants often reported that they did not seek work opportunities because they feared that gossip from the community could damage their reputation. Taken together, these factors seem to contribute towards explaining the low percentage of working women in the country.
- **The consequences of the conflict and subsequent displacement, combined with more recent water scarcity and inflation, affect women and men's access to livelihoods.** Participants reported that as a result of these factors, they have lost cattle, productive assets, factories, and shops. Assessment findings suggest that the primary sector was the most affected sector, which was the second largest source of GDP in Iraq and the industry where more women worked in before the conflict. During the conflict with ISIL, widows and displaced women previously engaged in agriculture had to seek alternative income sources, often relying on support from their children. Work for men and women reportedly became less stable, with increased reliance on daily work and lower wages. However, due to needs that arose during displacement, more challenging living conditions, and the increased presence of NGOs, some participants reported that it became more acceptable for women to work in a wider range of employment sectors.
- **Domestic labour, such as housekeeping and childcare, continues to be seen as a woman's responsibility regardless of their employment status.** Participants highlighted some feelings of shame associated with men supporting women with domestic labour, and the majority reported that men did not provide this support at all. However, women who had participated in UNDP's livelihood programming or worked tended to report more often that their husbands and sons provided some kind of support at home (primarily childcare).
- **FGD participants reported that social norms dictate that all household members give their earnings to the head of household, who is most commonly a man, to manage expenses.** Even if women were earning income, most FGD participants reported that the decision-making process for household expenditure would not change. However, female FGD participants were more likely than their male counterparts to report that women did some of the decision-making, with only a limited number of male participants saying that they would collaborate with women to make decisions if the latter were to earn an income. Women reported that they sometimes made decisions on household income for daily necessities and men on the rest.
- **Some men and women reportedly interpreted cultural norms and traditions restricting women's working opportunities as protective measures and showed a preference for maintaining the status quo.** However, other men and women reported positive results from women's participation in income-generating activities: from improved household living conditions to enhanced status of women within the household (i.e. women were more respected or better treated by other household members). Participants attributed such positive results as stemming from women's involvement in those types of jobs that the community deems as socially acceptable and safe for women, such as in the case of jobs for NGOs. Participants did not report the same positive results for the women's status in the household if

women were to work in socially unacceptable jobs (such as the private sector and the service industry).

- **Women's access to education and productive skills training was limited by gender norms** such as limited mobility chances for women or lack of support from their husband, family, or community. **Women's access to information on livelihood opportunities and training was also reportedly inhibited by limited contact with other community members.** Access to information was easier in urban areas due to internet access but more limited in rural areas.
- Other than the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan for 2021-2022, there were no other known nationwide projects to increase the participation of women in the Iraqi economy. **KIs reported being unaware of other policies supporting women's empowerment at large.**
- Existing legislation in Iraq protects women in the workplace from sexual harassment and gender discrimination. However, this legislation is reportedly not enforced. Moreover, **legislation observes traditional social norms that, in some cases, pose barriers for women to find employment.** The Personal Status Law (articles 25, 89 and 90) limits women's capacity to open their own businesses, and unequal inheritance rights make it harder for women to obtain bank loans due to the requirement of being property owners.
- **Women's inclusion in governance processes related to economic empowerment was challenged by patriarchal norms** reinforcing men as the primary decision-makers.
- **Most FGD participants** – male and female – **reported being unable to find sustainable livelihood opportunities.** However, **participation in economic activities did seem to impact women's economic empowerment** in some ways. Women who were employed tended to report gaining self-confidence, more influence in decision-making, and feeling useful for their families and community.
- **FGD findings indicated that enhanced access to livelihoods for women could increase household-level tensions.** Although some respondents reported improvement in family relations from the additional income, some men also reported feeling ashamed for not being able to provide for their wives and families. In addition, women who worked reported suffering criticism and gossip from the community.
- **Participants highlighted the ways that UNDP projects have supported women's economic empowerment, and reported some of the limitations they found.** For example, participants stressed that these programmes provided temporary financial relief for families and positive experiences for the women who participated. However, they also noted that the knowledge obtained during cash for work (CfW) programmes or training was limited, and not always sufficient to find sustainable livelihood opportunities. Participants explained that such training and programmes need to be followed-up by practical support in the form of business grants, post-training guidance, and further development of skills and assets for the women to utilise for future work.
- **Many FGD participants reported desiring other types of trainings that would allow women and men to be independent from humanitarian support** and short-term livelihood programmes, as well as find sustainable livelihoods to empower themselves and contribute to the development of their community.

Additional details around these key findings, as well as a summary of key recommendations and conclusions, follow throughout the report.

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List of Acronyms

ABRA	Area-Based Recovery Approach
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CCCM	Camp Coordination and Camp Management
CfW	Cash for Work
CRC	Community Resource Centre
DSAG	Data Saturation and Analysis Grid
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix from International Organization for Migration
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
FFS	Facility for Stabilisation
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GFIW	General Federation of Iraqi Women
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IDI	In-depth Interview
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KI	Key informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODK	Open Data Kit
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WED	Women's Entrepreneurship Development
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WHO	World Health Organization

Geographic Classifications

Governorate	Highest form of governance below the national level
District	Also known as <i>kaza</i> , highest form of governance below the governorate level
Sub-district	Also known as <i>nahiyah</i> , highest form of governance below the district level

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) estimates, there are 1.2 million people internally displaced and approximately 4.9 million returnees in Iraq. Among them, a total of 2.5 million people are estimated to be in need of some form of humanitarian assistance.¹⁰ The conflict against the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) impacted livelihoods in Iraq in various ways, including the destruction of infrastructure and stunted governmental and private investments.^{11,12} With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, livelihoods became even more precarious and severely affected women's mobility which was already limited due to cultural norms.¹³ For example, a 2020 Oxfam report found that women's income and livelihoods were more affected by COVID-19 preventive measures than men's.¹⁴ Access to livelihood opportunities in Iraq remains unequal for men and women: an International Labour Organization (ILO) study published in 2022 found that 64.7% of working-age men were employed, compared to only 7.7% of women.¹⁵ Women, and especially female heads of household, are at greater risk of external shocks, such as economic shocks, conflict, and health crises.

Iraq is ranked 146 out of 162 countries in the 2020 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII).¹⁶ In legal terms, the 2005 Iraqi Constitution recognises the right to work for all Iraqis, and there are laws protecting women from discrimination and harassment in the workplace as well as providing maternity leave and support.¹⁷ Some laws also prohibit employers from allowing women to work overnight but, overall, there is a lack of enforcement to ensure that all these above-mentioned policies are respected in the private sector.¹⁸ Cultural norms affect women's mobility (e.g. being unable to leave the house alone or without their husband's permission, limiting women's ability to interact with men who are not relatives) and access to livelihood opportunities (e.g. married women being encouraged to stay at home instead of working, needing permission from their husband or male relatives to work).¹⁹ In 2019, through the World Bank's Mashreq Gender Facility initiative, which provides technical assistance on women's empowerment, the Iraqi government committed to increasing women's economic participation by 5% by 2023.²⁰ This would be achieved by implementing activities aimed at improving the social, legal and institutional environment for women's participation in the labour market and other activities that would increase economic opportunities for women.²¹

In addition to the Iraqi government initiatives towards achieving women's economic empowerment, UNDP has been working since 2015 to bridge the gap between humanitarian and development activities through the Funding Facility for Stabilisation (FFS), conducting programme activities on sustainable

¹⁰ Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO), March 2022. Available [here](#).

¹¹ World Bank Group, Iraq Economic Monitor: From War to Reconstruction and Economic Recovery, (Spring 2018). Available [here](#).

¹² Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), Iraq's Economy after ISIS: An Investor's Perspective, (November 2017). Available [here](#).

¹³ Oxfam, Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraq (June 2020). Available [here](#).

¹⁴ Oxfam, Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Iraq (June 2020). Available [here](#).

¹⁵ ILO, Worlds Employment and Social Outlook: 2022 Trends. Available [here](#).

¹⁶ UNDP, Gender Inequality Index (GII), 2020. Available [here](#).

¹⁷ Iraq's Constitution of 2005 (English version). Article 22, First. Available [here](#).

¹⁸ United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM), Perceptions on Women's Economic Opportunities in Urban Areas of Iraq (2019). Available [here](#).

¹⁹ Oxfam, Social Norms Structuring Masculinities, Gender Roles, and Stereotypes: Iraqi men and boys' common misconceptions about women and girls' participation and empowerment (August 2021). Available [here](#).

²⁰ The World Bank. Iraq Women's Economic Empowerment Action Plan, 2019. Available [here](#).

²¹ Ibid.

livelihoods with a specific focus on gender and using the Area Based Recovery Approach (ABRA).^{22, 23} IMPACT Initiatives (IMPACT), in partnership with UNDP, conducted a gender analysis of women's economic empowerment in five governorates in Iraq where such programmes are being implemented: Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din. This analysis explored gender dynamics in terms of barriers to and opportunities for access to livelihoods, with the aim of providing indicative data and collaboratively develop programme recommendations to support UNDP in informing and expanding their livelihood programmes around women's economic empowerment. Table 1 below summarises the research questions and sub-questions explored as part of this assessment.

Table 1. Summary of research questions and sub-questions

Number	Research questions and sub-questions
1	<p>How do experiences with and constraints to labour force access, participation, control, and benefits vary between men and women (disaggregated by gender or age of respondent, governorate and beneficiary status)?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> How has the conflict affected women and men's access to livelihoods, power and control over economic resources? How is time distributed between men and women doing paid and unpaid work (housekeeping, caregiving, household administrative tasks)? How do perceptions of gender and cultural norms impact women's livelihoods and control over household resources? What are the aspirations of women and men in terms of livelihoods and economic empowerment? What are women and men's opinions and attitudes regarding women's economic participation?
2	<p>What is women's access to information, education, and knowledge to access livelihood opportunities (disaggregated by gender or age of respondent, governorate and beneficiary status)?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What are women's opportunities to learn skills or knowledge needed to participate in livelihood opportunities (education, trainings, workshops, etc.)? What are women's means to receive information on livelihood or learning opportunities?
3	<p>What are the current structural (political, legal, and social) barriers to or opportunities for women's economic participation (disaggregated by gender or age of respondent, governorate and beneficiary status)?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What are the existing policies and legislation that regulate women's participation in the labour force? To what extent those policies and legislations are supportive or challenging women's participation in the labour force? Separate from the policies and legislation barriers, what challenges and opportunities exist for women's inclusion in governance processes which relate to economic empowerment? What are the specific gender norms that may pose a barrier for the economic participation of women?
4	<p>Does access to sustainable livelihoods translate to women's empowerment at the household and community level?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> At the household level, to what extent are women able to administrate their own finances? At the community level, do women participate in community-based organisations, syndicates

22 UNDP. Funding Facility for Stabilization, Iraq. Available [here](#).

23 UNDP. Area Based Recovery Approach (ABRA), Iraq 2018. Available [here](#).

	<p>and/or similar groups? Do women have more access to financial systems (loans, bank accounts, etc.)</p> <p>b. What are the positive and negative results of women's access to livelihood opportunities (e.g. positive: improvement of self-esteem; negative: increased risk of GBV)?</p> <p>c. Are UNDP's current livelihoods projects effectively supporting women's economic empowerment? If not, how could UNDP programmes better support women?</p>
5	<p>What training programmes, capacity building interventions, or other initiatives would be most helpful to encourage women's economic participation in the labour force?</p> <p>a. Are there best practices and lessons learned from existing programmes?</p> <p>b. What are the existing programming gaps within the local structures to address and respond to women economic needs? How can these programmes support the needs of and work towards equality for both women and men?</p> <p>c. How easy is for women to have access to information, and knowledge to allow and increase their economic participation?</p> <p>d. Have the participation in livelihood activities or earnings created any family conflict or violence against women (gender-based violence etc.)?</p> <p>e. What elements are required to ensure that these interventions are sustainable?</p>

Overall, this report provides a detailed description of the methodology used as part of this assessment and then outlines key assessment findings, organised into the following overarching sections:

- 1) Gender norms, division of labour, economic participation and decision-making
- 2) Availability of livelihood opportunities for women
- 3) Structural barriers to women's economic participation
- 4) Supporting women's economic empowerment
- 5) Conclusions and recommendations

2. METHODOLOGY

As outlined above, the objective of this assessment was to analyse gender dynamics in terms of barriers to and opportunities for accessing livelihoods in the target governorates. Thus aiming to develop an evidence base and collection of lessons learned to inform the implementation and expansion of UNDP's livelihood programme activities. This gender analysis employed a mixed-methods approach and included three components (outlined below in more detail): 1) secondary data review, 2) focus group discussions (FGDs, substituted by in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) when FGDs could not be carried out), and 3) key informant interviews (KIIs).

2.1 Geographical Scope

This assessment targeted five governorates, Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah al-Din, where UNDP is implementing livelihood activities since 2015. Specific locations where to conduct FGDs within these governorates were chosen in agreement with UNDP based on a list of communities of implementation of activities and communities of interest for future potential targeting of livelihood activities. The choice of locations was also based on security and logistical considerations (see *Annex 1: Data Collection Locations* for a list of selected localities for FGDs and KIIs).

2.2 Secondary Data Review

The secondary data review provided an overview of findings focused on current livelihood opportunities for women and key barriers to employment (legal and cultural) in Iraq. The review process also looked at national and worldwide development reports on creating livelihood opportunities for women. The literature review included data from the ILO, UNDP, other UN agencies, the World Bank, humanitarian and development actors, as well as research produced by academics, other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research institutions. The identified knowledge gaps helped contextualise primary data on women's employment and livelihoods, gender and cultural norms, and women's potential vulnerabilities. The results of the secondary data review were used not only to contextualise the research but also to actively inform the design stage of data collection tools for both FGDs and KIIs.

Key findings from the secondary data review will be presented in the *Findings* section. Below is a list of some of the primary sources used:

- [Measuring Social Norms About Female Labor Force Participation in Jordan](#) – World Bank Group; Policy Research Working Paper 8916;
- Prior [REACH research conducted for UN Women in Iraq](#) in 2019, and in Jordan in 2016 and 2018;
- Relevant legal frameworks governing employment in Iraq such as the [Iraqi Constitution 2005](#), the [Labour Law 2015](#), and the [personal status law 1959](#);
- [Funding Facility for Stabilisation Annual Report 2020](#) (other quarterly reports were also reviewed);
- Oxfam, UN women, Japanese Cooperation. [Gender and Conflict Analysis in ISIS Affected Communities of Iraq](#);
- Oxfam, [Gender Analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iraq](#);
- Oxfam, UN women, Japanese Cooperation. [Gender profile of Iraq](#);
- Oxfam, [Social Norms Structuring Masculinities, Gender Roles, and Stereotypes: Iraqi men and boys' common misconceptions about women and girls' participation and empowerment](#);

- United Nations International Organization for Migration (IOM). [Perceptions on Women's Economic Opportunities in Urban Areas of Iraq: Motivations and Mechanisms to Overcome Barriers](#);
- UN Women, [Climate Resilient and Empowering Livelihoods for Women](#);
- UN International Labour Organization (ILO) Statistic: employment and literacy rates;
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC), [Labor Market and Livelihoods Competency Assessment – Iraq: Dohuk, Erbil, Diyala and Salah al Din governorates](#);
- DRC, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Mercy Corps, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam, [Gender Analysis of Livelihoods Programming and Individual, Household and Community Dynamics in Iraq: Summary Report](#);
- UNDP, [Annual Gender Report 2020](#), Iraq;
- Thuso and Welt Hunger Hilfe, [Women's Livelihoods Assessment – Ninewa, Iraq](#); and
- The World Bank, [Iraq Women's Economic Empowerment Action Plan](#).

2.3 Data Collection Methods

2.3.1 Focus Group Discussions

The primary data collection method used for this assessment was through FGDs with both UNDP programme beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. A total of 46 FGDs²⁴ with 8-12 participants each (divided by gender and age group) and 29 IDIs were conducted in the five governorates of interest. The distribution of the FGDs by governorate depended on the number of beneficiaries included in the lists provided by UNDP, as well as on the ability of data collection teams to access those locations from a security perspective.

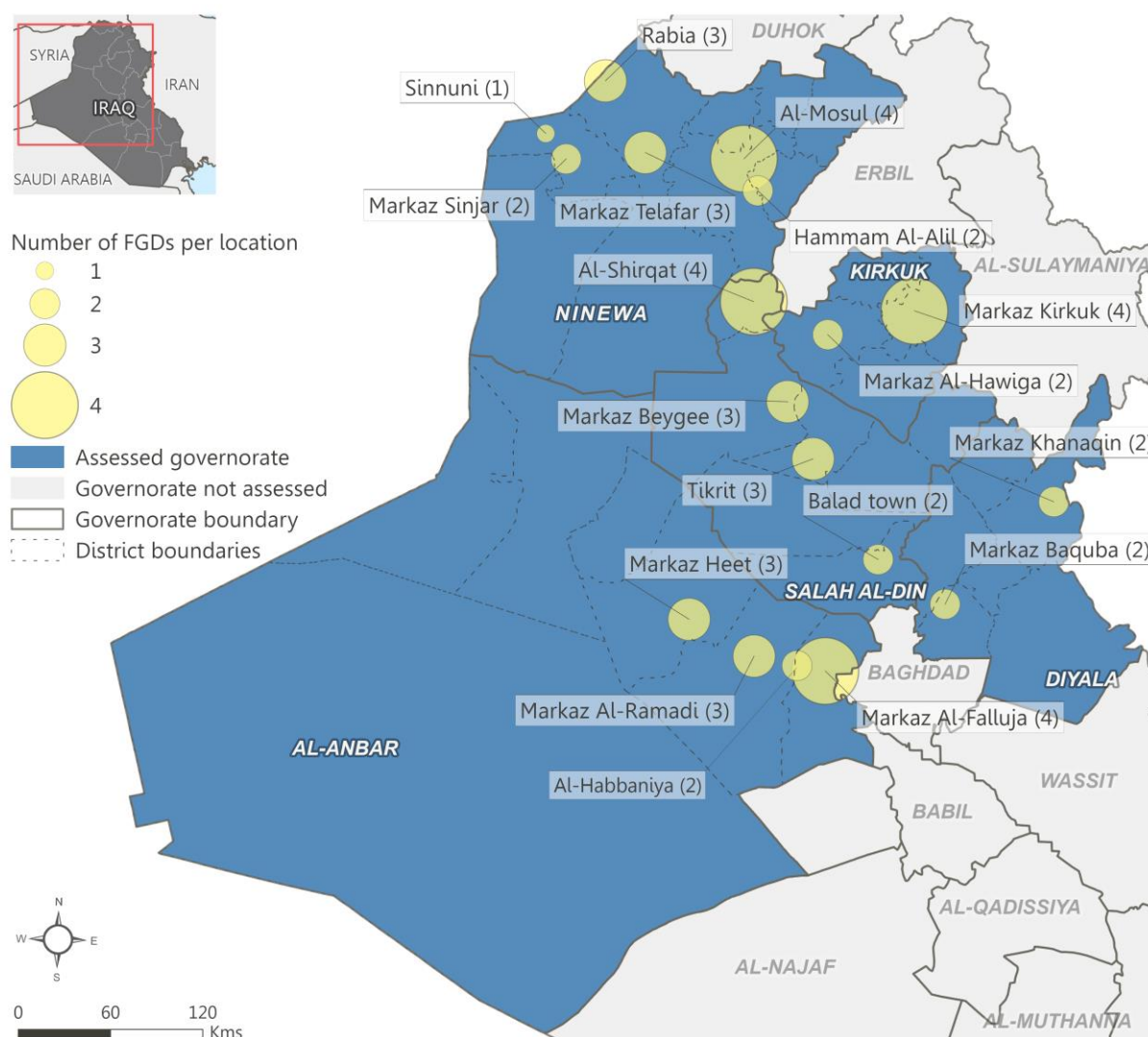
Table 2. Description of data collection methodologies used by type of scenario

Description of scenario		Proposed methodology
A	- Easy to access location.	- In-person FGDs.
	- IMPACT international staff has access, and no security restrictions or Local staff only can move to the location.	
B	- IMPACT can use local enumerators from the area but has access restrictions due to access or security restrictions.	- Mixed in-person and remote.
	- No international staff are permitted to travel.	
C	- IMPACT has no access and cannot use local enumerators, or has no female enumerators in the area to conduct FGDs with women.	- Support sought from UNDP staff or implementing partners to conduct the FGD on-site on behalf of IMPACT.
	- Due to unforeseen reasons, none of the methodologies proposed in the scenarios above are possible.	
D	- Due to unforeseen reasons, none of the methodologies proposed in the scenarios above are possible.	- FGDs will be replaced by remote phone-based in-depth interviews (IDIs), conducted via IMPACT's call centres.
	- Due to unforeseen reasons, none of the methodologies proposed in the scenarios above are possible.	

²⁴ In some locations, in person FGDs could not be conducted due to security concerns. As a result, IMPACT staff substituted 4 FGDs for phone-based in-depth individual interviews (IDIs) while still following the FGD questionnaire. This gave a total of 75 entries (46 FGDs, and 29 IDIs).

Once key security risks were identified, the IMPACT team, in consultation with UNDP and the ACTED Country Security Manager,²⁵ developed a set of scenarios listed below in **Error! Reference source not found..** These scenarios were developed to mitigate potential risks and ensure that data collection activities could be safely and successfully completed.

Map 1. Locations of completed FGDs, by governorate



The primary methodology used in most locations was that presented in scenario A. The locations that were not conducted under scenario A were: Habbaniyah, Kirkuk, Hawija, Baquba, Khanaqin and Al-Shirqat. The reasons for these changes were proactively communicated to UNDP during data collection, and can be summarised as follows:

- In Habbaniyah, IMPACT and UNDP could not identify a venue for the FGDs and scenarios B and C could not be applied. After consultation with UNDP, it was agreed to use scenario D and conduct individual interviews (IIs) via IMPACT's call centres.
- In Baquba and Khanaqin scenario C was implemented. The ACTED Country Security Manager deemed the area inaccessible for international and local staff, and IMPACT lacked female

²⁵ The ACTED Country Security Manager is responsible for in-country security decisions related to IMPACT staff.

enumerators based in Diyala to conduct the FGDs with women. UNDP identified a partner – Youth Activity Organization (YAO) Iraq – to provide qualified female staff that could lead these FGDs. An IMPACT Field Coordinator provided a support role.

- Before the end of Ramadan (27 April 2022), the ACTED Country Security Manager identified increased security concerns in Kirkuk, which could pose a risk to both international and local staff travelling to the area. Data collection was put on hold to monitor the situation. Since the decision from the ACTED security department did not change within the data collection period, IMPACT and UNDP agreed to adjust the strategy for data collection. Some locations in Kirkuk (Al-Abbasi and Daquq) were removed from the original FGD plan, and Al-Shirqat was added as a replacement location. IMPACT implemented scenario D in Hawija, and scenario B in Kirkuk town and Al-Shirqat.

Due to cultural sensitivities and lessons learned from previous data collection activities in Iraq, FGDs were organised by sex, with either female or male participants only. In addition, to ensure a gender-sensitive approach to the research, IMPACT deployed a team of female-only enumerators to facilitate FGDs with female participants and a team of male and/or female enumerators to facilitate FGDs with male participants. Wherever possible, FGDs were also separately organised by age group; when not enough participants were found to conduct a FGD with only community members from the same age group, IMPACT teams tried to recruit participants from various age groups to have a wider variety of views and opinions represented. Lastly, separate FGDs were conducted for beneficiaries of UNDP livelihood activities and non-beneficiaries. FGDs were conducted between 27 March and 5 June 2022.

2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews

To triangulate data collected through the FGDs and provide a higher-level and more institutionally focused overview of livelihood activities in Iraq, IMPACT conducted a series of KIIs to obtain expert information on livelihoods and gender and women's empowerment. KIIs were conducted simultaneously with the FGDs between March and May 2022 to ensure an effective use of logistical resources for site visits. A total of 35 KIIs were conducted, that is, between 6 and 9 KIIs per governorate. Depending on the location of the key informant (KI), interviews were conducted either in-person or remotely via phone. KIs were purposively selected by UNDP from their implementing partners and key informants list, according to their expertise and portfolio of services provided related to gender, women's empowerment, employment, and livelihoods across Iraq. Governorate-level KIs included local authorities, government representatives, representatives from women's empowerment organisations, and/or other KIs who were knowledgeable about the areas of focus for this assessment.

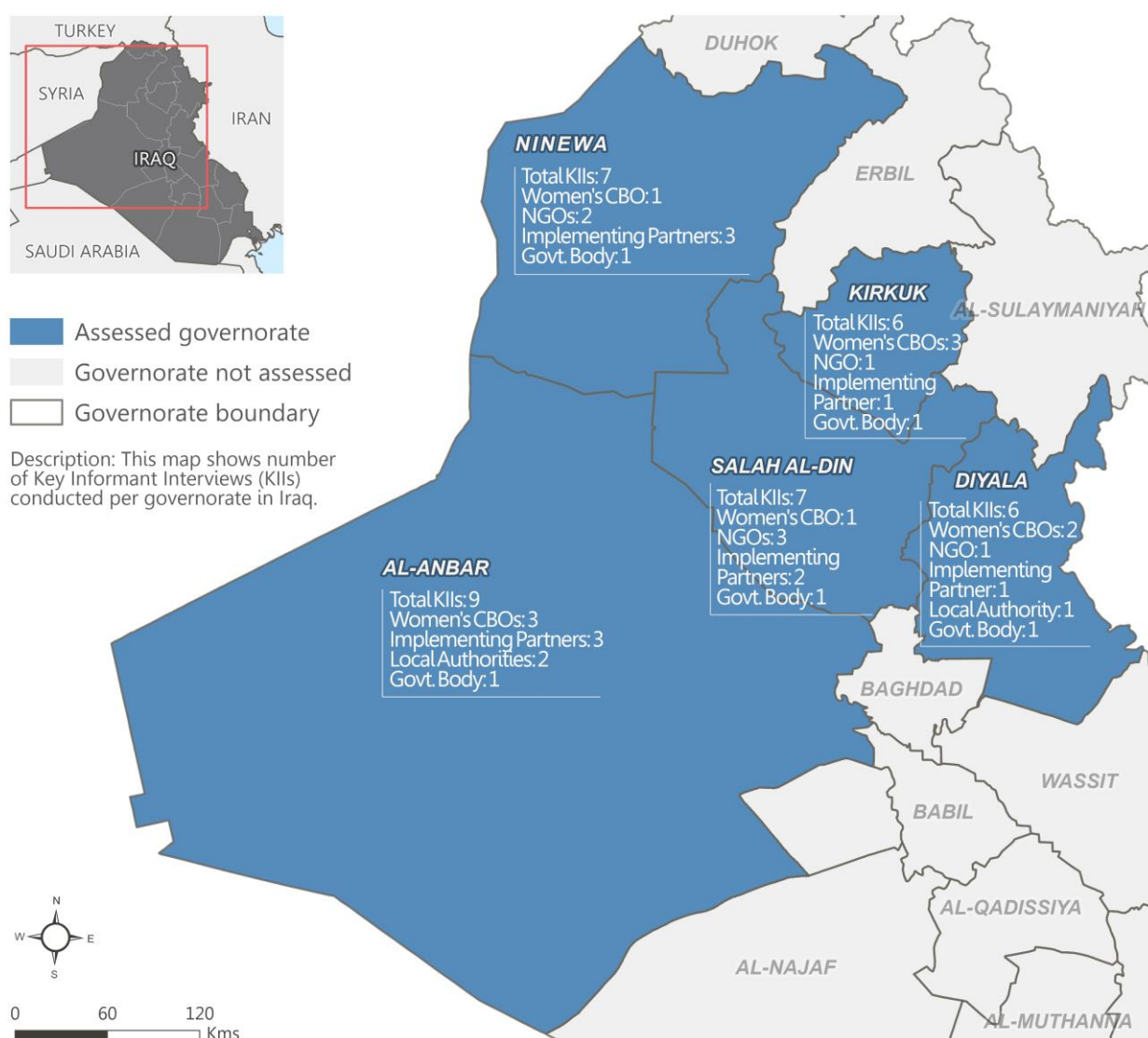
Staff and members from the following institutions and organisations were interviewed for the KIIs:

- Government bodies such as the governorates' women's empowerment sections;
- Local authorities such as governors;
- Employment and livelihood services (i.e. NGO or international organisations' employment programmes such as Community Resource Centres (CRCs));
- Implementing partners of the FFS; and
- Community based organisations (CBOs) working on women's empowerment.

The rationale for conducting KIIs was to gain a more nuanced understanding of the main institutions, actors, structures and processes engaged in gender and livelihoods in each of the selected locations and therefore add more contextual knowledge to the issues of women's participation in the labour market, working conditions, and challenges and barriers to accessing livelihood opportunities faced by

women. The KIIs also provided an appropriate avenue for obtaining key information on the current legislative framework in Iraq, with a specific focus on those legal aspects affecting women's engagement in the labour market and provided an overview of perceptions on the current status of labour standards in Iraq.

Map 2. Locations of completed KIIs, by governorate



2.3.3 Covid-19 Standard Operating Procedures

Given the case prevalence of COVID-19 in Iraq at the time of data collection, the specific risks to already vulnerable communities, and mindful of the humanitarian principle of “do no harm”, as well as of general considerations for duty of care (i.e. ensuring both field staff and local communities are not spreading and/or exposed to the risk of contracting COVID-19 due to data collection activities), IMPACT, with inputs and review from the World Health Organization (WHO) and Global Health Cluster colleagues, developed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)²⁶ to guide research teams on how to undertake data

²⁶ IMPACT SoPs for Data Collection during COVID-19. Available [here](#).

collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. The SOPs for data collection during COVID-19 were strictly followed to ensure the safety of both research participants and IMPACT staff.

2.4 Analysis

Translation of the notes for all FGDs and KIIs was conducted on a daily basis during data collection, and included considerations and issues brought up by enumerators during daily debriefs. Once the KIIs and FGDs were translated, decoding was used throughout the analysis process by recording reflective notes about the data. In line with the IMPACT Qualitative Analysis Minimum Standards Checklist, notes from FGDs and KIIs were used to fill out a Data Saturation and Analysis Grid (DSAG) on an ongoing basis throughout data collection. Data analysis was primarily conducted using Microsoft Excel, with quality and reliability checks conducted by IMPACT HQ.

As part of the analysis and report-writing process, IMPACT delivered a first draft of the final report to UNDP for internal review to ensure that key findings and results are relevant to their programme activities. Once feedback from UNDP was integrated, the report was finalised and shared again with UNDP.

2.5 Challenges and Limitations

Over the course of data collection, some challenges and limitations were identified. Every attempt was made by the team to mitigate the potential impacts of these challenges whenever possible. Challenges, limitations and their associated mitigation measures included:

- FGDs were planned to be separately organised according to participants' age group. However, in some locations, FGD participants did not fit the age profile, inconvenient which was not clear until after they showed up for the discussion. FGDs were therefore conducted regardless of age.
- The distribution of FGDs was not equal across all five governorates, therefore, some of the gender-related dynamics and aspects characterising the governorates where fewer locations were covered, such as Kirkuk and Diyala, may not be part of the current analysis. This was accounted for during the analysis stage and is highlighted throughout the final report as relevant.
- The distribution of KIIs and their profiles were not equal in all five governorates due to differences in availability. However, IMPACT aimed to have a range of 6-8 KIIs per location. This was accounted for during the analysis stage and is highlighted throughout the report as relevant.
- In order to avoid the prevalence of certain similar respondents' profiles (beneficiary status, employment status, ethnicity, marital status, urban or rural origin, educational background, or experiences in the specific context of their location) within a group, FGDs were assembled with the aim of engaging participants from different backgrounds in each location.
- FGDs were conducted in Sinjar and Sinuni before the security events of 1 May 2022.²⁷ When interpreting the findings, readers should take into account that participants' profiles and situations reported at the time of data collection might have been affected by these events and not correspond to reality anymore.

²⁷ Aljazeera, "Estimated 3,000 people flee armed clashes in northern Iraq", 2 May 2022. Available [here](#).

3. FINDINGS

This findings section covers the main results that emerged from the analysis of FGDs and KIIs, supported by a secondary data review. While FGD and KII findings are specific to the five governorates of interest for UNDP programming and where primary data was collected, secondary data may refer to certain governorates only or provide nationwide information. The results in this report cannot be in any case generalised to the entire population of interest but they aim at providing indicative insights on gender dynamics with respect to access to livelihoods and individual empowerment opportunities.

3.1 Gender Norms, Division of Labour, Economic Participation and Decision-Making

3.1.1 Gender Norms in Iraq

Social²⁸ and gender norms²⁹ are critical underlying factors in determining women's access to work (as well as the types of work available to them) and their responsibilities aside from paid work, thus having the potential to be both barriers or enabling factors to women's economic empowerment. This section explores key gender norms in the Iraqi context (including changes in those norms after 2014)³⁰ and how these affect division of labour, women's economic participation, and financial decision-making processes within the household. Particular attention will be paid to how existing gender norms impact access to and control of resources, and to attitudes towards gender and women's capabilities in the assessed communities.

Women in Iraq are seen primarily as caregivers and relegated to domestic tasks. In contrast, men are seen as protectors, livelihoods providers and the main decision-makers of their family, roles that put them in the public sphere.³¹ This can result in a division where women undertake more frequently unpaid domestic labour and men are assigned with income-producing labour. These norms are often reinforced by community dynamics and reduce the ability of women to explore other roles in society. In this respect, international sanctions and the various cycles of conflict that have affected Iraq since the 1980s with the Iraqi-Iranian war, coupled with the economic and security consequences of conflict on populations, have pushed Iraqi women into more conservative gender roles within the household, leaving them with few viable economic opportunities.³² During the conflict against ISIL and post-conflict instability, women's interactions outside their homes were further

²⁸ Social norms can be described as collective definitions of socially approved conducts and implicit rules or ideals that are commonly (re)produced through social interaction. IDCR, "The Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women", available [here](#).

²⁹ Gender norms are context-dependent social norms that express the expected behavior of people of a particular gender. They often interact with other norms relating to other forms of social marking such as race and class, and they reinforce gender-based inequalities across the political, social and economic spheres. IDCR, "The Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women", available [here](#).

³⁰ The conflict with ISIL in 2014 has affected gender norms in different ways. On the one hand, displacement forced families to change some dynamics to survive and on the other, ISIL imposed additional measures further restricting women's mobility and community engagement opportunities that many Iraqis adopted, often to protect the women and girls. These extreme gender norms are being slowly being dismantled. Oxfam, Social Norms Structuring Masculinities, Gender Norms, and Stereotypes, August 2021. Available [here](#).

³¹ Oxfam, Gender and Conflict Analysis in ISIS affected communities of Iraq. Available [here](#).

³² UN sanctions in 1990 severely affected the Iraqi economy, and thus families were often unable to afford education for both boys and girls, prioritising the education of boys. IOM. "Perceptions on Women's Economic Opportunities in Urban Areas of Iraq," 2019. Available [here](#).

reduced.³³ Even though the security situation has largely improved at the time of writing, the long-term effects of conflict remain visible.

The social norms and perceptions that commonly define women's responsibilities towards their families and communities, as reported by KIs, included:

- Women are deemed to be responsible for handling household chores, such as cleaning and cooking;
- Women must take care of their children and husband;
- Women have to respect a conservative dress code that is defined by the community;
- Women have to accept and respect the fact that control over decision-making in the community is held by men; and
- Women are not allowed to leave their houses without a suitable companion, such as another woman or a male family member (highlighted mainly by KIs from Diyala).

FGD participants and KIs commonly reported that these gender norms are reinforced at the community level and that “rumours” are often used as a control mechanism for ensuring that women and girls respect these norms. Female FGD participants commonly mentioned fearing or having experienced community members spreading rumours about themselves or other female community members when their behaviour was not deemed acceptable by traditional social norms. Existing literature confirms that the circulation of gossip and rumours are often used by society as a tool to control women's behaviour outside of the household.³⁴ To better contextualise this, it is also important to understand the notion of family honour in the Arab culture, which revolves around women's compliance with gender norms and a male-defined understanding of femininity.³⁵ In some cases, the dishonour of women can be seen as dishonour of the whole family,³⁶ which in turn can result in families seeking to protect women by controlling their behaviour.

This consideration of honour was highlighted by some FGD participants in Rabia and Mosul, who reported that they did not see a need to change social norms for women since they were in place to protect their honour. However, other participants provided a conflicting view. For example, a male participant in Telafar and a female participant in Tikrit mentioned that tribal traditions were the ones that were oppressive to women and that many of these norms do not have religious foundations sustaining their enforcement. They suggested that Islamic norms would be more open to women's freedom of movement and participation in the labour market than what tribal traditions would prescribe in their areas. In the case of Telafar, other male participants agreed that their traditions were oppressive to women but also reported that they followed them regardless because they were traditions.

In the FGDs, participants discussed that **widows and female IDPs had to become the main breadwinners within the household as many men and boys were killed or injured during the conflict.** This was further exacerbated by worsening living conditions and limited access to livelihoods during displacement. Some female FGD participants shared that this change meant that in some cases, especially in (but not limited to) female-headed households, women were more responsible for providing for their families while also carrying out their traditional housework, ultimately placing an increased burden on them.

³³ Oxfam. Gender and Conflict Analysis in ISIS affected communities of Iraq. Available [here](#).

³⁴ Oxfam, Social Norms Structuring Masculinities, Gender Norms, and Stereotypes, August 2021. Available [here](#).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cultural Atlas. Iraqi Culture: Family. Available [here](#).

Most KIs reported that gender norms, although largely unchanged from before 2014, now have become somewhat less strict regarding women's involvement in income-generating activities. According to KIs, those changes can be attributed to the increased presence of NGOs, who sometimes implement programmes targeted at women and demonstrate to the community that women can work in a safe environment, and access to social media, which exposes communities to other ways of living. In addition, displacement needs forced women and men to overcome cultural barriers regarding women's access to employment, allowing women to seek livelihood opportunities to meet their basic needs.

Findings from the FGDs highlight that gender norms and the extent to which women and girls are expected to abide by them vary across the country. Some gender norms seemed to be less strict in urban areas than in rural areas, as highlighted by FGD participants in Kirkuk, Al Shirqat, Mosul, Balad and Baquba, according to whom women in their localities would be freer to move, pursue higher education, and seek employment. **Participants also observed differences between ethno-religious groups, especially in north Ninewa.** These differences were related to women's mobility outside the home, their education, and their freedom to participate in the labour market. For example, women in Sinjar and Sinuni (where most residents are Yazidi) were reportedly more free to leave their homes to work, work with men in mixed-gender environments, and work in different roles that may be deemed as socially unacceptable in other areas where there are predominantly Arab and Islamic cultures (such as working as drivers). Conversely, women in Telafar (where most residents are Turkmen, Shia and Sunni) reported more strictly following gender norms and tended to accept more limited job types such as working from home or as a government or NGO employee. In Mosul, although men said that women travelling alone in a taxi were not seen as respectable, many women in Mosul reported using taxis to go to work.

3.1.2 Access to and Control of Resources

Because of the existing gender norms outlined above and the low participation of women in the labour market, most women in the assessed areas were economically dependent on their husbands, fathers, male children or grandchildren, or in-laws. This economic dependency often translates into limited to no influence over financial decision-making within the household. Regarding the management of resources within the household, FGD participants reported that traditional social norms in Iraq dictate that the main decision-maker should be the head of household, which is commonly the eldest man of the family or a widow. **According to FGD participants, norms dictate that all household members give their income to the head of household to manage, meaning that the control of resources within the household is traditionally male-dominated.** In addition, some FGD participants reported that, in cases of female-headed households, these women do not necessarily become decision-makers, but rather their in-laws or eldest sons take over the management of resources and make decisions on how household income is spent. FGD participants also reported that even women who earn an income do not have control over how the money is spent, and that who makes the decisions doesn't change according to who brings the income, indicating that traditional gender norms around decision-making do not necessarily change following women's participation to the labour market. Only in a few FGDs did participants report that, when the woman in the household has an income, then decisions over how to spend that income are taken jointly.

In some FGDs, participants reported that men and women would jointly make decisions around how to spend the household income or that men would consult women before making a decision. Of these participants, some specified that men would usually manage the monthly

expenses, such as utilities or significant costs, and that women would manage the daily necessities. In fewer instances, participants mentioned that women have a stronger influence on financial decision-making within the household as they are believed to have more in-depth knowledge about how income should be spent. The above information was more commonly reported by female FGD participants than their male counterparts in the following locations: Anbar (Ramadi, Fallujah), Ninewa (Mosul, Telafar, Rabia) and Salah al-Din (Beiji and Balad). These geographical and gender differences may be explained by a possible tendency for men to downplay the role of women in their household when talking with other men in their community for fear of looking less masculine.

When asked about access to formal financial systems, both male and female FGD participants reported that access is limited, irrespective of gender. According to World Bank data from 2019, only 23% of Iraqis have access to a bank account,³⁷ with FGD participants adding that this mostly applies to people working in the public sector. In many FGDs, participants reported that access to formal financial systems such as loans and business grants depends on meeting several requirements such as showing proof of employment, owning property, or having a guarantor. In addition, to start a business, women need special permission from their husbands to leave their homes, which means that women need to undergo an extra layer of screening and wait additional time before their documentation for opening a business can be processed.³⁸ However, in most FGDs, participants reported not knowing how formal financial systems function, thus indicating that such systems are not commonly used in the assessed areas.

3.1.3. Attitudes Towards Gender and Capabilities

All KIs were asked to report factors contributing positively to women's economic success in Iraq. **KIs most commonly reported that having received a formal education, technical and soft skills, a good financial situation, and the support of their families benefited women in finding employment.** Considering that literacy rates for women tend to be lower than for men, education and skills training are less likely to be available for women than for men.³⁹ This was a common topic among FGD participants who stated that women needed access to higher education and trainings in order to improve their access to livelihood opportunities.

However, most KIs also reported factors which could hinder women's economic success in Iraq. **Nearly half of the KIs reported that age could be a barrier to women's employment since younger women were preferred.** Some also specified that their marital status influenced their employment, with single women preferred over married women. Other barriers were that jobs were often attributed to a specific gender or that gender norms restricted women's access to education and employment. Needing personal connections to access employment was not a barrier faced by women only but also by men.

The disagreement on whether age is a barrier for women to seek employment was a result of having different perceptions of the implications of women's ages for the labour market. For example, **participants reported that some employers in the private and public sectors would prefer to employ younger women** (between 20 and 40 years old) **because they were perceived to be more productive than older women.** A few KIs reported that employers preferred younger women because they were more likely to accept jobs under more exploitative working conditions, including

³⁷ World Bank, Bringing Back Business in Iraq: Analytical Note. January 2019. Available [here](#).

³⁸ World Bank, Iraq: Doing Business 2018. Available [here](#).

³⁹ According to data from 2017, literacy rates for men were 96% and for women 79%. However, literacy rates for youth were more balanced (96% for men and 92% for women). World Bank Data finder, available [here](#).

extended working hours and long hours standing, and older women had more family responsibilities than younger women. Others perceived that older women (not necessarily older than 40) would have more experience than younger women (who are forced to accept less specialised jobs) and hence are more likely to be hired for higher level positions.

Still, **most KIIs reported that men had more job opportunities since they had fewer movement restrictions and cultural barriers to access employment compared to women**, and that they received more family and community moral and financial support to access employment and education. This is confirmed by some literature reflecting similar biases against hiring women.⁴⁰

Table 3. Most commonly reported reasons why women may be favoured or discriminated against in the workplace

Preference for women	Discrimination against women ⁴¹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communicators • More patient and quiet workers • Generally better workers in specific jobs (agriculture, teaching, nursing, administration) • Women's wages are often lower than men's 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women are believed not to be able to do physically engaging jobs • More difficulties in moving to work locations • The security situation makes it harder for women to work outside their home • More often absent from work (childcare, maternity leave) • Women should work segregated from men in a different workspace

In addition, FGD participants showed gendered views on money management, with women being considered more prudent and savings-driven compared to men and, therefore, as having less pressure to spend money. This might be due to the fact that men face fewer barriers in finding livelihood opportunities than women.

3.2 Availability of Livelihood Opportunities for Women

As in other conflict-affected countries, women in Iraq have been negatively impacted by a general lack of information, services, and opportunities in areas of displacement and settlement.⁴² The conflict destroyed infrastructure and severely affected the private sector with a decrease in cash liquidity, making it difficult for individuals to invest in productive assets or businesses. In addition, despite more recent improvements to the security situation in the assessed areas, the effects of conflict on the availability of livelihood opportunities remain as former business or factory owners are not keen to return to their areas of origin, thus affecting private investments in those areas. Additionally, COVID-19 restrictions meant the loss of livelihoods for many Iraqis, and the devaluation of the Iraq Dinar in December 2020 has negatively affected the purchasing power of families.⁴³

⁴⁰ World Bank. Iraq Investment Climate Assessment, 2012. Available [here](#).

⁴¹ The number of responses to this question in FGDs was very low and there was no specific question on favourable or discriminatory views of women in the workplace. Findings from this section have thus combined results from the FGDs and KIIs with secondary data from the World Bank report [Iraq Investment Climate Assessment, 2012](#), particularly for the discrimination column.

⁴² USAID. Gender in Iraq, 2021. Available [here](#).

⁴³ FAO, IFAD, WFP. Food Security in Iraq: Impact of COVID-19, with a special section on water shortages and adaptation, November 2020 - May 2021. Available [here](#).

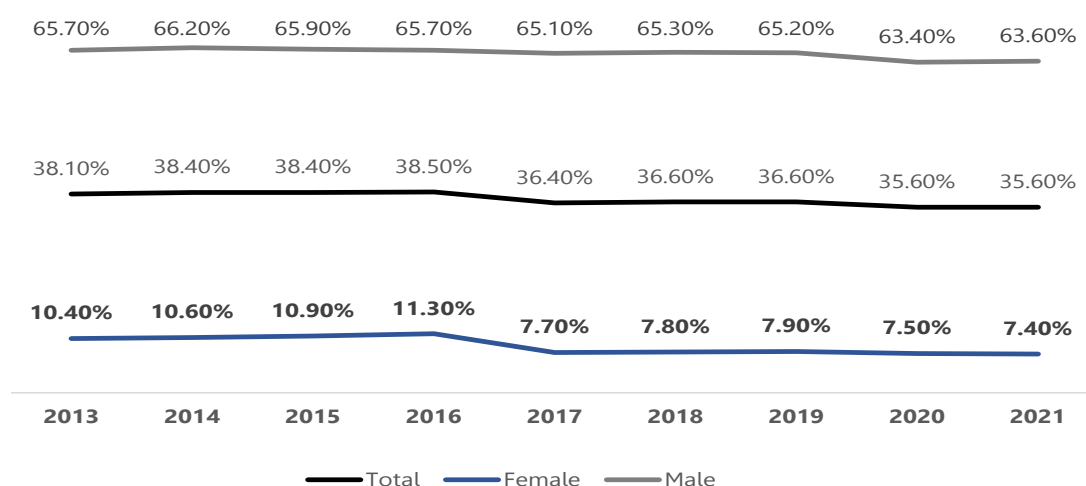
3.2.1 Changes In Livelihoods since 2014

Before 2014, more women were employed in agriculture and farming, particularly in family enterprises. To a lesser extent, women were also employed in public sector jobs such as teaching or nursing.⁴⁴ After 2014, the availability of sectors for women and men changed. When asked about the livelihood opportunities available to them, FGD participants discussed that in most locations, livelihood opportunities decreased because of conflict, especially in the primary sector (agriculture, livestock, herding). The livelihood opportunities currently available were often precarious (irregular without a contract) as daily workers, and average salaries had reduced.⁴⁵ As a result, more household members, including women, turned to the labour market to find job opportunities to support them and their families. This can be seen in official data, which shows a slight increase of women employed in Iraq following ISIL's appearance and slowly decreasing after the situation stabilised.

"My husband passed away in 2012, and in 2014 when I started a cattle business, they stole everything from me. I had to run away and start from zero. My children need to pay their tuition at university so life is very difficult now. I used to work buying milk and making dairy products, making Qamar, cheese and yogurt, and then selling it but during my displacement they stole everything. When I was in the IDP camp I was making custard at home and my children sold it. I also worked for an NGO doing awareness sessions for children."

- Female FGD participant in Telafar

Figure 1: Employment rates in Iraq between 2013 and 2021, by gender⁴⁶



FGD participants reported perceiving the fact that women were allowed to look for jobs outside of the household as a sign of increased opportunities for them. However, available secondary data does not support these perceptions, with the rate of women employed in Iraq decreasing from 10.6% in 2014 to 7.4% in 2021.⁴⁷ This contradiction between secondary data and participants' perceptions could be explained by an increased number of women working outside the home and in more publicly visible sectors such as humanitarian and development organisations, while women employed in other sectors decreased, especially in the primary sector (e.g.

⁴⁴ World Bank. Iraq Investment Climate Assessment, 2012. Available [here](#).

⁴⁵ Ground Truth Solutions. Falling through the cracks: Iraq's daily workers live without security, savings or support, June 2021. Available [here](#).

⁴⁶ ILO. World Employment and Social Outlook: Iraq. Available [here](#).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

agriculture, livestock, shepherding, fishing) or owning micro-businesses (e.g. home business like dairy product production or sewing), as some female participants discussed during FGDs. It is indeed important to note that the primary sectors in which women were employed before 2014, have been severely affected not only by conflict and displacement, but also by the loss of purchasing power to invest in productive assets such as cattle, seeds, and machines, as well as by water scarcity and climate change.⁴⁸

In Ninewa, Kirkuk and Diyala, climate change was mentioned by FGD participants as one of the key causes for a decrease in access to livelihood opportunities. More precisely, participants from Rabia reported suffering from drought over the last two years, which affected their livelihood opportunities. Water scarcity was also commonly mentioned by participants in Hawija and Khanaqin as a key factor negatively affecting farming activities and thus as a driver of migration from rural to urban areas. Climate change also affected some livelihood projects from NGOs, such as one for beekeeping in Sinjar, which reportedly did not account for climate change and the lack of green areas. In 2021 the areas with higher precipitation deficit were in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Ninewa, north Kirkuk and Diyala, and some locations in Salah al-Din.⁴⁹ This information underscores the importance of livelihood programmes taking climate change into consideration, particularly in these areas facing the largest precipitation deficit. This could be addressed by focusing on developing alternative sectors unaffected by climate change or designing holistic programming that addresses or mitigates its effects, supporting the recovery of agriculture.

Nonetheless, while participants in most FGDs reported a decrease in livelihood opportunities in the aftermath of conflict, some participants also mentioned a perceived improvement in the opportunities available to them. The most commonly cited reasons for this were an increased sense of security (especially in those areas previously occupied and controlled by ISIL) and the expanded presence of NGOs in hard-to-reach areas. In Telafar, for example, participants reported that before ISIL the security situation was unstable due to al-Qaeda's presence in the region. Their job opportunities were limited to agriculture and grazing, while now women and men work in more diverse sectors (i.e. working with NGOs, sewing from home, opening a shop or a beauty salon at home), and men can go to bigger cities like Mosul. Out of those who reported perceiving an increase in available livelihood opportunities, the majority were female participants who commonly mentioned having access to more job opportunities thanks to NGO programmes targeting women. Such positive changes were most frequently mentioned by FGD participants in Salah al-Din governorate, with only a few instances being reported for Ninewa and Anbar.

Table 4. Indirect consequences of conflict that reportedly have been supporting or hindering women's economic empowerment

Consequences of conflict somehow supporting WEE	Consequences of conflict somehow hindering WEE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displacement's effects and more direct contact with other communities favoured communities' acceptance of women's employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of previous sources of livelihoods, especially in the primary sector where many women worked in. Harsher living conditions due to the lack of economic resources and loss of shelter.

⁴⁸ Oxfam, Unfarmed Now, Uninhabited When? Agriculture and climate change in Iraq, March 2022. Available [here](#).

⁴⁹ REACH Iraq, Precipitation Change Map Over Populated areas in 2021, February 2022. Available [here](#).

- Increased contact with NGOs improved community acceptance of women's employment
- Worse living conditions made it more acceptable for women to work and participate in the household's decision-making processes
- Reliance on child labour, especially for female-headed households.
- Increased number of female-headed households which often leads to more workload and pressure on those female heads of households

3.2.2 Current Livelihood Options for Women

Despite many women still being unable to participate in the labour market, FGD participants also reported that women currently have access to a wider variety of employment sectors than before 2014. Participants reported that more women were working for NGOs and participating in livelihood programmes, and some said that some women worked in their own beauty salons, worked from home in sewing or tailoring, or worked more in the public sector. This was also possible because according to FGD participants more women were now improving their skills and furthering their education, which was further supported by trainings received through UNDP's implementing partners.

The main employment sectors where the community would encourage women to participate were in the public sector (health or education sector), with NGOs, home-based employment, or specific business targeted at women.

Figure 2. Most commonly reported sectors of women's employment



There were some types of jobs that FGD participants perceived as not respectable in their community. Most jobs that were considered shameful for women were related to the private sector. The reasons given were that they were not sex-segregated and there was no trust in other employees to keep women safe. Other participants mentioned that women should work where they would not have contact with too many men and could have set working hours. For example, in Mosul women were said not to be allowed to drive a taxi because the freedom and lack of working hours would put the women's honour at risk. Conversely, women in Sinjar did not seem to have the same limitations since they showed interest in the idea. Another example of communities disagreeing on honourable work for women was related to beauty salons. Whereas in most communities it was seen as an acceptable job, some participants in Mosul and Telafar considered it to be a shameful job for a woman, although not

all participants agreed on this. Many agreed that working outside of the home should not interfere with the women's domestic labour, and hence jobs should not be far from their homes.

Table 5. Types of employment reportedly perceived as respectable or not for women

+	Types of employment considered respectable	Types of employment considered not respectable	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs • Public sector (education or health) • Home-based livelihoods • Agriculture, livestock • Gendered vocational jobs such as: tailoring/handcrafting, beauty salons • Managerial positions in the private sector • Sex-segregated jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private sector • The service industry: hotels, restaurants, cafes, gyms • Bars, nightclubs, or other places that sell alcohol • Beauty salons (for some communities) • Non-sex-segregated jobs 	

3.2.4 Changes in Women's Mobility Limitations when Working

Although it was not the norm, **those women who worked, or participated in UNDP trainings or other livelihood programmes, were reported to have increased freedom of movement and social interactions according to FGD participants.** They mentioned that NGO-run programmes on livelihoods have raised awareness around the importance of women's participation in the labour market and that, because of the trust that community members have in these NGOs, communities have become more open to the idea of women working outside of the household. Others reported that livelihood programmes expanded women's freedom and independence by giving them more confidence and the tools needed to open their own micro-business near their homes. Some highlighted that it was very positive that transportation support (financial or by providing transportation options) was offered, facilitating their mobility.

3.2.5 Changes in Women's Decision-Making Power and Social Status when Working

In most FGDs, **participants reported that the status of women who worked or participated in UNDP livelihood programmes improved both at the household and community levels.** However, in some instances, FGD participants cited that women's status remained unchanged even after they entered the labour market. According to participants, this was more frequent at the community than the household level since sometimes the community still criticises women who engage in work other than domestic labour.

"Most consider the women only as housewives, spending most of their time at home. But when women work and earn an income that supports their families, all the family looks at her as a key member who they can depend on in the absence of the head of household."

-Male II participant in Hawija

For those participants who reported that women's engagement in the labour market led to an amelioration of their social status, the main reason was that women were perceived as contributing towards increasing household income and improving its living conditions. Some FGD participants also added that women's participation in the labour market was accompanied by an increase in their ability to control resources and influence over financial decision-making within

the household, ultimately contributing towards a de-stigmatisation of working women in the community. In addition, some participants mentioned that women who started working were treated better by their husbands and/or children. A few respondents said that husbands and children often treated women better, and that to some extent, increased the equality between wife and husband (mostly reported by participants in Beiji and Hawija). This improvement was related to the community and family's perception that women were sacrificing themselves to help their families or that families could cover their needs and decrease the stress of their husbands. This could indicate that increased participation of women in the labour market could reduce the risk of women suffering domestic violence.⁵⁰ However, some participants reported that this increased respect for women within the household is conditional on the type of work they engage in, which would need to be either carried out from home, in the public sector, or through other activities that are considered "respectable" for women.

Some FGD participants also reported that, as women's economic participation often translated to increased income for the household, some families started giving more attention and support to the education and professional training of women and girls. In some cases, it was reported that families even encouraged women to find a job. Nonetheless, participants stressed that this support is not always consistent nor available, and that some families may promote women's and girl's education but not necessarily their participation in the labour force.

However, community members' opinions on the positive or negative effects of women's engagement in work other than domestic labour varied. Some FGD participants said that women's participation in the labour market translated into increased responsibilities and overall burden on them. More specifically, some widows in Falluja who participated in FGDs reported feeling unsatisfied with the fact that they now have to carry out household activities while also providing for the family and looking for jobs. They thought that the weight of the double responsibility was too heavy and preferred the previous status quo and division of gender roles. In addition, some FGD participants reported that a number of families were concerned that women's participation in the labour market would translate into the emasculation of their husband or the male head of household, as women earning an income could be perceived as being "stronger" than men. This concern was mainly brought up by male FGD participants, especially in Kirkuk (Hawija), Ninewa (Mosul and Rabia), and Diyala (Baquba). Some women in Beiji and Balad also expressed that their husband's family would say that wives who work become independent or start controlling men. While some findings indicate that intra-familial conflict decreased when women participated in livelihood opportunities, this perception of working women endangering the social order could increase conflict within the household. These findings highlight the importance of livelihood programming targeted at women to involve men and the community to avoid increasing these tensions.⁵¹

"Because of customs, the community blames men for allowing woman to work since he should be the one responsible to cover the wife's needs. Usually, the husband's family pressures the men since they are afraid she will become independent."

"In some households the husband and the wife are very in agreement and support each other but it is usually when the woman is already working before the marriage and the husband is aware."

"Sometimes, when the woman works, the man suffers from psychological issues, thinking that he is weak because he is unable to cover her needs and be responsible for her."

⁵⁰ World Bank. Regional Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence in the Middle East and North Africa, 2021. Available [here](#).

⁵¹ Ibid.

Some participants also highlighted that there was community backlash, mainly that the women were the target of gossip, or that they did not support the normalisation of women in the workplace because it conflicted with their domestic responsibilities. This seemingly correlates with the general preference for women working from home or nearby, with some participants highlighting that this way they would also be able to carry on their domestic activities.

3.3 Structural Barriers to Women's Economic Participation

3.3.1 Societal and Cultural Barriers

The previous sections have covered some of the societal barriers that women face in accessing employment. The vast majority of KIs reported that cultural and gender norms constitute a key barrier to women's access to employment and to women's economic empowerment more broadly. Such norms can be summarised into two main categories: 1) societal norms around women's responsibilities towards the household and 2) societal norms regarding women's access to employment.

Social norms regarding women's responsibilities to their family and community that were reported as **barriers to women's access to employment** included: **women's domestic responsibilities** (housekeeping and childcare), which limited the freedom of movement and time for women to work; **women having to follow a conservative dress code**, wearing conservative clothes in line with community perceptions; **Iraq's patriarchal society giving men authority and control over women** (e.g. women needing the men's permission to leave their homes); **women not being allowed to work in non- sex-segregated spaces**; and finally, **women not being allowed to leave their houses without a suitable companion** (another adult woman, or a male-relative). According to KI reports, this way of thinking often resulted in women who worked suffering from discrimination, blackmail, and exploitation against women at the workplace.

Regarding norms around women's economic empowerment, some KIs mentioned that women only have access to certain sectors that are deemed "respectable" for women by community members, while most job opportunities that are available in sectors that are considered "shameful" for women remain inaccessible (see Table 4, page 25). The geographical distance to the workplace often constitutes a physical barrier to accessing certain job opportunities for women, as cultural norms dictate that their mobility should be limited.

3.3.2 Policies and Legal Framework

When the Ba'ath regime took power in 1968, they began putting into place a number of laws and policies to improve the status of women in Iraq. The regime established the General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), a key institution for the legal and political reforms to come. These subsequent reforms contributed to increasing the literacy rate for women to 75% by 1987, and increasing the number of women employed across Iraq. However, much of this progress was reversed in the 1990s when, alongside conservative and religious groups, the Ba'ath regime issued political and legal reforms observing religious laws within national legislation.⁵² This change in legislation, combined with the economic crisis suffered after the Iranian and Gulf war, and UN sanctions, resulted in a reduction in

⁵² The political reform gave more power to tribal and religious leaders, and the legislation was changed to reflect patriarchal values. For example, honour killings were recognised in the penal code. Sami Zubaida, *The Rise and Fall of Civil Society in Iraq*, May 2, 2003 Open Democracy. Available [here](#).

women's literacy and employment rates by 2000.⁵³ This shift in the last phase of the Ba'ath regime and the inclusion of tribal and conservative religious views in the regime's strategy can be seen in subsequent laws such as the Constitution of 2005,⁵⁴ the Penal Code, the Labour Law 2015, and the Personal Status Law 1959 (188) and its amendments. The Constitution of 2005 forbids different treatment of Iraqis before the law on the basis of gender, but other legal codes differentiate between rights for men and women. For example, the Penal Code article 41 is often used to justify and decriminalise gender-based violence (GBV).^{55 56}

The Labour Law of 2015 prohibits employment discrimination based on gender, and chapter 10 is dedicated to protecting and regulating women's labour rights, providing maternity leave,⁵⁷ and criminalising sexual harassment in the workplace.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, KIs stressed that these laws and policies protecting women from sexual harassment in the workplace were not applied or enforced. The law also forbids women from working at night or in sectors considered hazardous or dangerous.⁵⁹ Over half of the KIs interviewed reported being aware of some policies and/or legislations supporting women's participation in the labour market. These included some rights established in Labour Law 2015 such as: the provision of maternity leave, retirement plan,⁶⁰ and access to annual leave.⁶¹ Most KIs also reported being aware of the criminalisation of sexual harassment in the workplace but stated that it was mostly enforced in NGOs and not in other workplaces.

Regarding other laws that may affect or limit women's participation in the labour market, **the Personal Status Law declares that a woman cannot travel outside of the house without the permission of the husband, and that she is only entitled to half of any inheritance** (while men have full inheritance rights).⁶² This, in turn, affects women's ability to

Articles 25, 89 and 90 of the Personal Status Law of 1959 (188) indirectly limit women's economic empowerment.

apply for a bank loan or start a business as, for example, FGD participants reported that banks would often require that the person has a property. Such requirements often represent a barrier for women in accessing financial loans to start a business.⁶³ Another example is that, to open a business, women need an official document where the husband gives written permission to the woman to leave the

⁵³ Human Rights Watch, Briefing Paper: Background on Women's Status in Iraq Prior to the Fall of the Saddam Hussein Government, November 2003. Available [here](#).

⁵⁴ Article 2(1) of the Constitution of Iraq says that Islam is the official religion of the State and is a foundation source of legislation: No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam. Iraqi Constitution 2005. Available [here](#).

⁵⁵ Rudaw. Iraq's top court rejects plea against law allowing domestic violence, 21 February 2022. Available [here](#).

⁵⁶ Article 41 of the Penal Code. "There is no crime if the act is committed while exercising a legal right. The following are considered to be in exercise of a legal right: (1) The punishment of a wife by her husband, the disciplining by parents and teachers of children under their authority within certain limits prescribed by law or by custom". Available [here](#).

⁵⁷ Article 5 of the Iraq Labour Law, 2015 condems any type of discrimination. Article 87 says "A female worker is entitled to a maternity leave at full pay of not less than fourteen (14) weeks per year". Available [here](#).

⁵⁸ Article 42 of the Iraq Labour Law, 2015 "The worker has the right] To have a working environment, free from any harassment. Available [here](#).

⁵⁹ Article 43 (2) of the Iraq Labour Law 2015. Available [here](#).

⁶⁰ Law on Retirement and Social Security, art. 39. Available [here](#). The retirement age for women is 55 and 60 for men. Both should have proof of having worked for 20 years. A women can retire earlier if she proves she had worked for 25 years.

⁶¹ "Every worker is entitled to one fully paid day of rest per week." ILO. Chapter IX, Article 74 b, Iraq Labour Law, 2015. Available [here](#).

⁶² Personal Status Law 1959, 188 and its amendments. Art 25, 89 and 90. Unofficial translation to English, available [here](#).

⁶³ World Bank. Bringing Back Business in Iraq: Analytical Note. January 2019. Available [here](#).

household, thus making women's participation dependent on their male counterparts.^{64, 65} These examples also show that, despite the existence of some laws that attempt to protect women in the workplace, the presence of other laws not necessarily related to the labour market can create structural barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Most KIs seemed not to be aware of laws that regulate women's access to livelihood opportunities. Only one KI reported being aware of the policy from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which has a livelihood loans provision run in partnership with UNDP, covered by the memorandum of understanding signed by both parties in April 2022.⁶⁶

Most KIs reported that the above-mentioned policies and legislation are often not implemented in their workplace, with only a small number of KIs reporting that they are systematically implemented and respected. KIs also mentioned feeling that existing legislation and policies around maternity leave and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), for instance, are more enforced in the public sector than in the private sector, which may discourage women from applying to jobs in the latter.

3.3.3 Additional Structural Barriers

Limited access to information

The majority of KIs reported that women had access to the information and knowledge needed to allow and increase their economic participation. However, over half of them also reported that not all women in their communities had equal access, and some KIs reported that women did not have access to information at all. These factors were specifically reported in Anbar, Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salah Al-Din governorates. The factors highlighted as enabling women's access to information and knowledge were the internet, increased contact with other community members, the loosening of gender norm around women's access to employment, and the presence of NGOs.

Participants highlighted a number of key factors influencing women's lack of access to information and knowledge. One key factor was that, **because gender norms limited women's freedom of movement outside of their homes, they were in less contact with other people.** Similarly, **access to social media is often only possible in urban areas due to insufficient telecommunication infrastructure in rural areas.** There is sometimes a lack of education and vocational centres in different areas due to the destruction of buildings, and other times a lack of awareness of women and girls' rights inhibits their access to this type of information. Finally, the fear of gossip from the community if they attempt to access trainings or livelihood opportunities was also cited as a limiting factor.

A few KIs reported that the main types of information that women lack access to revolve around women's legal rights (including labour law), training courses to increase soft and vocational skills, and business management skills. These findings align with information reported by FGD participants, who mentioned that the reason why men were the main decision-makers of the household or would carry out financial transactions was that they spent more time outside the home and interacted with more people, and hence had better access to information sharing.

⁶⁴ World Bank. Iraq: Doing Business 2019. Available [here](#).

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive list of laws affecting women's livelihood opportunities and differentiate them from men, a table can be found in the factsheet from [World Bank, Women, Business and the law \(2020\)](#).

⁶⁶ UNDP. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and UNDP partner to boost employment opportunities in Iraq, 2022. Available [here](#).

Transportation and infrastructure

While mobility poses challenges to most citizens in Iraq due to the poor state of road infrastructure, lack of public transportation, and high transportation costs, **women are exposed to additional movement restrictions. Their mobility outside of the home is often regulated and limited by cultural and gender norms, and security concerns** (e.g. women should not take a taxi alone to go to work but rather move in groups or with male members of the family).

Table 6. Summary of barriers and possible adaptation strategies

Type of Barrier	Description	Adaptation Strategy
Gender norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's role in society is limited to the domestic space • Women should not spark gossip within the community • Women should not mix with men • Women should not leave the house without a suitable companion • Women should not have too much freedom of movement outside the house • Women should spend only a limited amount of time outside the house • Women should still carry out their caregiving and domestic responsibilities even if they work • Women should not participate in certain labour sectors • Women's honour must be protected by men 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness sessions and training with men to destigmatise the idea of men and boys participating in domestic labour and childcare • Awareness sessions and activities with the community to destigmatise women participating in the labour market • Consider providing childcare support such as day-care services during programme activities
Legislation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To open up a business, women need a written document in which their husband (or another male member of the family) allows them to leave the house • Inheritance laws make women less likely to inherit property compared to men, which affects their access to formal financial systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness sessions with men to increase their support to WEE and WED • Support business grants targeted at women
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to information due to gender norms • Limited transportation options (i.e. cannot travel alone in a taxi) • Mistrust around the ability of companies working in the private sector to protect women in the workplace • Because women's role outside of the home is limited, women often have less access to skills training, education, and employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support information sharing on livelihood opportunities, skills training and other projects • Awareness sessions to support girls and women's education and skills training • Supporting the creation of women-led micro-businesses

3.4 Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

In most FGDs with beneficiaries, participants reported having witnessed or experienced some positive changes as a result of women's participation in UNDP livelihood activities.

Participants reported that participation in these programmes contributed to increased household income and an improvement in their living conditions, including reducing household debt and increasing their purchasing power. Participants added that participation in the livelihood activities strengthened women's confidence and self-esteem, ultimately benefitting their mental well-being and that of their families while also equipping them with new skills and capacities.

Some participants mentioned having witnessed improvements in the area of women's mobility outside of the home as a result of participation, and that some women have been encouraged by their families to continue working when the programme terminated. Perhaps most importantly, some female beneficiaries reported feeling more useful to others and their communities after having participated in those activities, with some adding that working alongside men was a useful professional experience.

This is in contradiction to the previously noted preference for sex-segregated jobs. Such testimonies may indicate that, under the right conditions of safety and security in the workplace where women's rights are respected, the collaboration between men and women is not only perceived as acceptable but also positive.

Positive outcomes from women's participation in UNDP's livelihood programmes:

- Improved living conditions
- Decrease of debt
- Improved women's self-esteem and confidence
- Improved women's mobility outside the house
- Improved their decision-making capacity
- Improved relationship between men and women

3.4.1 Practices Supporting Women's Participation in the Labour Market

Almost one-third of KIs highlighted the presence of some best practices in the workplace that have supported women's participation in the labour market.

Enhanced working conditions

Some of these practices revolve around **improving working conditions for women**, such as reducing the number of working hours for married female employees so a woman can manage both paid work and domestic labour. According to an ILO study on WEE and WED, one of the reasons why women entrepreneurs do not always perform as well as their male counterparts is that they often carry the sole responsibility for domestic labour, meaning that they have less time than men to devote to their businesses.⁶⁷ A KI in Anbar reported that some employers reduced working hours for married female employees or that employees used to assign fewer tasks to women compared to men. Although these practices seemed to be an attempt to support married women, they could hinder women's career progress. A small proportion of KIs also mentioned the importance of having gender equality policies for equal access to employment, as is already the case for jobs in some NGOs. Other key best practices reported by KIs revolve around women's mobility and commuting to work. KIs mentioned that

⁶⁷ ILO, Engaging Men in Women's Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Development Interventions, 2014. Available [here](#).

supporting women by providing safe transportation to work or ensuring that female employees are allocated to centres close to their residence may contribute towards increased economic participation.

According to KIs, **to promote increased equality in access to employment for women and men, legislation and policies should focus on: the creation of job roles being more suitable for women** and therefore improved freedom for women to choose their profession; and **protection of women from sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)**.

3.4.2 Engaging Men and Boys in Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

Researchers working on women's economic empowerment and masculinities have underscored **the importance** of engaging men and boys towards gender equality, and **of investing in gender-transformative programmes that seek to transform gender roles and promote more gender-equitable relationships between men, boys, women and girls**.⁶⁸ Gender transformative programmes acknowledge the complexity of gender identities and insist that men and boys can also benefit from gender equality as, for example, the pressure that comes with being the main breadwinner is eased and that men can build healthier relationships with their wives and children (as some FGD participants also reported). In addition, engaging men and boys in supporting women's economic empowerment is not only preferable but also necessary, as men and boys can often act as gatekeepers (or facilitators) of women's economic empowerment by denying (or supporting) women's access to and control of financial resources, physical mobility or the opening of a business as discussed in the previous sections.

In most FGDs, participants reported that men commonly do not provide support to women in carrying out domestic labour, meaning that women who engage in work outside of the household are expected to carry out those tasks either before or after work. Some reported that men would provide some form of support with household responsibilities while the women were working, and just a few female participants said that their sons would perform household chores. During FGDs, female participants were more likely to say that men provided some support at home than male participants, and this type of support seemed more frequent in Ninewa than in other locations. In addition, those participants that cited men's support with household tasks mostly referred to childcare, while also acknowledging that the support was dependent on the condition that the woman would work outside of the house. Other participants reported that, even when women work outside of the household, domestic labour and responsibilities often fall onto other women within the household rather than men.

Male FGD participants reporting that they contribute to childcare were in Anbar (Habbaniyah), Ninewa (Mosul, Sinuni, Telafar), Salah al-Din (Beiji, Tikrit, Balad, Al Shirqat), Kirkuk (Hawija), and Diyala (Khanaqin). Interestingly, in Sinjar, both male and female FGD participants reported that men contribute to domestic tasks, including housework. Participants from Sinjar mentioned that awareness-raising sessions conducted in their communities had helped them better understand the importance of men and boys actively contributing towards domestic labour. **Several women in the following locations reported that their husbands and sons supported them at home:** Balad, Baquba, Hawija, Kirkuk, Mosul, Sinjar, and Sinuni.

As previously discussed in section 3.1.2, **a minority of women reported that men and boys were reportedly willing to provide support in domestic tasks or include women in family decision-making in the absence of the husband**. According to FGD participants in Sinjar, past

⁶⁸ ILO, Engaging Men in Women's Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Development Interventions, 2014. Available [here](#).

awareness sessions aimed at better showing the benefits of women's economic empowerment have been effective in addressing some of the issues and barriers to participation discussed in this report. Such findings, even though geographically limited, show that for sustainable change regarding men and boys engaging in WEE, it is essential to promote gender equality and raise awareness not just within the household but also at the community level, where most gender norms are produced and reproduced. The locations where some men seemed more engaged were: Balad, Baquba, Hawija, Kirkuk, Mosul, Sinjar, and Sinuni.

While engaging women in economic activities can empower them and improve their resilience to future shocks, when women are given the opportunity to earn an income – often for the first time – poor programme design can fuel backlash by male community members or male co-workers, increasing intimate partner violence and other forms of GBV, such as SEA, including in the workplace. Even though only a small number of FGD participants engaged in discussions around women's economic empowerment and GBV, some female beneficiaries reported that their participation in the labour market led to an increase in their social status within the household and that, as a result, male relatives and husbands would treat them better. Nonetheless, in some FGDs (and in all FGDs with female participants in Anbar governorate), participants raised a concern that those women who engage in work outside of the household are often exposed to the judgement of the community and to rumours that may put into question their honour. This, in turn, could trigger instances of increased tension in the household as men may feel like they need to re-establish traditional gender roles. Therefore, it would be important to consider how any future UNDP livelihood activities conducted in new areas can be accompanied by activities aimed at engaging men and boys, and raising awareness around the importance of gender equality and the benefits that may derive from women's economic empowerment.

3.4.3 Key Institutions Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

Worker's unions

Most FGD participants reported being unaware of the existence of workers' unions in Iraq, with slightly more women seeming to be aware than men. **Participants seemed more aware of workers' unions in the largest urban centres** (Mosul, Fallujah, Khanaqin) but with some exceptions (Telafar, Balad). Many of those who reported being aware of workers' unions reported that it was difficult for women to join due to family responsibilities, mobility restrictions, and the problem of interacting with other men. A similar proportion of participants reported that unions were useful compared to those reporting that they were not. Participants noted that money is needed to participate in these unions, which can sometimes be a limiting factor. Unions were also reported to provide awareness sessions on workers' rights or spread information specific to different industries and their legislation. However, due to the low number of responses, there is limited information defining perceptions of how unions work. Several women who were aware of unions reported being interested in joining them.

Women's community-based organisations

Women's CBOs were found to be active in the five governorates covered in this analysis. FGD participants reported that these CBOs provided legal assistance for women, awareness sessions for women's rights, and awareness sessions on gender roles in Iraqi society. Participants also indicated that generally, participation in these groups was viewed as positive and broadly accepted. Women were also interested in joining or creating them as a way to support other women in their community.

Key governmental and non-governmental institutions

Some of the institutions working on women's economic empowerment are the World Bank and the government of Iraq, thanks to the Mashreq Gender Facility, which in September 2021 drafted the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan for 2021-2022.⁶⁹ In addition, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in partnership with UNDP, designed a livelihood loans provision programme, which could boost women's economic empowerment.⁷⁰ IMPACT interviewed one KI in each governorate working in the Women Empowerment section. While KIs from Ninewa and Salah al-Din reported having collaborated with UNDP, KIs from Anbar, Kirkuk, and Diyala did not. According to findings from FGDs and KIIs, NGOs have been key actors promoting change and positively impacting the economic empowerment of women. Following the findings on livelihood opportunities that are currently available and the structural barriers that women face in accessing these opportunities, there are some government institutions that could be taken into consideration to collaborate with for future programming (see Annex 2: List of Key Institutions for Women's Economic Empowerment).

3.4.4 UNDP, NGOs, and Implementing Partners' Interventions for Women's Economic Empowerment

Engagement in UNDP projects

Almost two-thirds of KIs reported being engaged in some form in UNDP livelihood projects, with only four KIs reporting that they are not directly engaged in these activities but had heard about them, and eight KIs mentioning being engaged with other donors and agencies who run similar programmes. The three most frequently reported activities that KIs were engaged in include: livelihood projects such as cash for work in cleaning schools and the clearance of rubble; livelihood loans and in-kind distribution programmes for women; and vocational and skills trainings. Overall, half of the KIs reported that programmes implemented in the areas assessed met or partially met the needs and priorities of the community. KIs said that the activities successfully target the most vulnerable women (e.g. single female heads of households) in areas in need through a systematic screening and recruitment process based on clear selection criteria. Two KIs reported more specifically that the activities conducted were of high quality, effectively supported the most vulnerable women, and that implementing partners maintained a line of communication with programme beneficiaries even after the programme ended.

"After the implementation of livelihood activities, a small sewing factory was established by women in the town."

- KI in Ramadi district, Anbar

"After the implementation of livelihood activities, women established online livelihood projects."

- KI in Samarra district, Salah al-Din

A number of KIs added that, by participating in some of the above-mentioned programmes, women and men reportedly have better access to livelihoods, thus contributing to the economic development of those areas. One KI in Samarra district (Salah Al-Din governorate) also reported that the activities strengthened social cohesion within the community and encouraged further returns.

⁶⁹ World Bank. Press release: Iraq and the World Bank Group Join Forces to Boost Iraqi Women's Economic Empowerment, 21 September 2022. Available [here](#).

⁷⁰ UNDP. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and UNDP partner to boost employment opportunities in Iraq, 2022. Available [here](#).

However, **almost one-third of KIs reported that the programme activities do not meet the needs of the community, especially in Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah Al-Din governorates.** KIs reported that the number of beneficiaries selected is insufficient to cover all vulnerable households and that short-term activities that do not focus on strengthening resilience may negatively affect the economic sustainability of beneficiaries. Two KIs reported that the lack of financial support after programme completion negatively affected sustainable livelihoods for participants and recommended the implementation of programmes influencing economic development. In addition, two KIs reported that the indirect implementation from UNDP (through partners) was believed to be affecting the quality of the programmes namely in Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din governorates. Lastly, two KIs added that organisations implementing activities in Ninewa (Mosul district) and Diyala governorates do not communicate and coordinate enough with local authorities and, as such, their programme activities may be less effective.

Training, programmes, or capacity-building interventions to increase women's employment, promotions, and job retention

According to FGD participants, the most common type of training received by women was sewing or tailoring. Other less commonly available trainings include agriculture and livestock, make-up and hairdressing, baking or cooking, and computer skills. Only a small number of FGD participants reported receiving nursing, parenting, explosive remnants of war (ERW) removal and first aid courses.

Overall, **findings from the KIIs and FGDs show that there are a number of vocational and soft skills trainings that community members think would increase women's employment, promotions, job retention, and, therefore economic empowerment more broadly.** Regarding vocational trainings, FGD participants and KIs mentioned some activities that are commonly implemented by organisations, such as tailoring, agriculture and cooking, but also less traditional trainings such as nursing, supporting people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD,) marketing, and online businesses. In terms of soft skills, FGD participants mentioned the importance of women having IT skills, being able to speak English, and leadership and public speaking skills. Lastly, 10 KIs reported that strategic trainings on business management and how to set up women's cooperatives may support women in participating in the labour market.

The rest of the KIs reported that any type of capacity building that ensures women's access to skills and updates their specialities was needed, while one KI did not answer the question.

According to FGD participants and KIs, awareness sessions related to gender awareness and supporting women's empowerment would support women in looking for job opportunities, opening their own businesses and expanding their professional experience. Some participants added that, through these interventions, women would be more financially independent and could potentially facilitate their access to the labour market.

4. CONCLUSION

The overall objective of this assessment was to provide a gender analysis of women's economic empowerment in five governorates of Iraq where UNDP is implementing livelihood activities. More specifically, building on available secondary data, the assessment aimed to provide a more nuanced understanding of key challenges to women's access to and participation in the labour market in the assessed areas, as well as provide programmatic recommendations for future activities that UNDP may implement under the FFS.

The rationale for conducting this assessment was to understand to what extent women's access to employment opportunities had been affected by the conflict against ISIL, whose economic effects still remain visible across the country. In particular, conflict negatively affected agriculture and farming (activities that used to employ a high number of women before the conflict) due to security risks and limited access to land. At the same time, internal displacement and the increased number of female-headed households enabled new interactions between members of different communities, as well as between communities and NGOs. Such interaction, coupled with the necessity for women in female-headed households (but sometimes in male-headed households as well) to provide for their families, seems to have played a positive role in normalising women's access to and participation in the labour market across various sectors, even if with exceptions. Despite some of these above-mentioned improvements, the proportion of employed women across Iraq remains low (around 7%).⁷¹

Based on findings from the FGDs and KIIs conducted across 18 locations, it emerged that the key barriers to women's employment are often related to gender norms, which may be more or less restrictive depending on the geographic location and related culture. Among the assessed areas, stricter gender and social norms around women's participation in the labour market were reported in Anbar governorate, Diyala, and several locations in Ninewa (e.g. Hamam al-Alil, Telafer, and Rabia), where the most (and sometimes only) acceptable way for women to work was reportedly from their home, protected against criticisms from other community members. FGD participants and KIIs from urban areas such as Kirkuk, Mosul, and Tikrit reported being open to women working outside their home as long as they were employed in sectors and roles deemed socially acceptable and safe for women, and that would not cause them and their families dishonour. Interestingly, Yazidis are reportedly less concerned about women engaging in work activities that would be deemed as socially unacceptable by other population groups.

Other key reported barriers to women's access to employment were: i) legal barriers (such as needing the husband's permission to open a business, or unequal inheritance rights, which in turn negatively affect women's access to bank services and loans), ii) restrictions to women's mobility outside the home, especially if unaccompanied, and iii) poor access to information due to the above-mentioned mobility restrictions and, as a result, limited interaction with other community members. In particular, FGD participants suggested that the mobility barrier could be partially removed if employers offered financial or material support to organise transportation services designated for women.

Overall, women mentioned a number of positive effects from participating in UNDP's livelihood programmes and job opportunities such as improved confidence, self-esteem, and improved familial relations. According to them, UNDP's activities have also contributed towards mitigating some of the barriers that often hinder women's access to employment opportunities such as mobility restrictions as well as towards normalising the idea of women's participation in the labour market. Nonetheless, some women also reported having experienced negative consequences after participating to UNDP's

⁷¹ ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook: 2022 Trends. Available [here](#).

activities, such as becoming exposed to community gossip and to criticisms from male family members who may have felt emasculated by the fact that women would be able to earn their own income. In addition, women commonly reported having increased charges since many women need to take care of childcare and domestic labour tasks on the top of their work. The unequal distribution of family and home-related responsibilities among household members continues to pose a barrier for women to access employment. An enhanced participation in the labour market may not translate into a win for women's empowerment if women cannot decrease their burden from unpaid labour. Support in the form of day-care was suggested during women's FGDs.

In addition, programme beneficiaries reported in FGDs that UNDP's activities were insufficient for them to find sustainable livelihoods, since CfW programmes were commonly short-term and did not necessarily provide the knowledge or skills needed to find jobs based on the opportunities available in the market. FGD participants commonly reported that activities needed to be followed by further programming that would support translating the knowledge gained during training into long-term livelihood opportunities, especially in the areas of accessing business grants and productive assets.

4.1 Recommendations⁷²

Capitalising on UNDP's programmatic expertise in the areas of gender and livelihoods, IMPACT and UNDP held a joint analysis review meeting to discuss how key findings from this assessment could be used to improve future programming on women's economic empowerment. Some of the key recommendations that were collaboratively developed during the meeting are summarised below and presented in a non-hierarchical order.

- **Programming should focus on sustainable livelihoods and durable solutions**, such as providing training in line with job opportunities in the market or market needs. UNDP could achieve this by:
 - Undertaking a labour market assessment on existing infrastructure (for example, factories that were closed during the conflict and that may be re-opened) and labour gaps in the areas of interest (e.g. the community needs first aid or midwives' training because there are no health services in the area), to then use as a base for designing future training activities.
 - Providing training with a follow-up programme, guidance sessions, and/or grants that would allow the participants to purchase productive assets or start a business that could employ other women. Including business grants, and could help to ensure that training translates into real job opportunities that are in line with labour market demand.
 - Designing programme activities that take into account and are also sensitive to climate change and environmental degradation, which have been severely affecting livelihood opportunities available in the areas assessed, particularly in the primary sector.
- Programme activities should be designed with the **objective of positively transforming gender norms and roles across sectors while still being sensitive to the context in which such activities are implemented**:

⁷² In interpreting the recommendations, it should be noted that: (a) the list is non-exhaustive and further recommendations may be drawn from the data and existing literature; (b) recommendations should be considered with caution in the context of additional programming information, and each will require an assessment of eventual risks and relevance prior to their implementation; and (c) IMPACT is an organisation specialised in field research and assessments: programmatic recommendations lie outside of its area of expertise.

- When designing CfW programmes, particular attention should be given to the demographic profile of participants (e.g. age, forms of impairment, mobility), especially for those activities that are physically demanding. In doing so, CfW activities would promote inclusion and ensure that beneficiaries can safely participate in programme activities.
- Acknowledging that some communities will not accept women engaging in certain types of jobs, implementing partners should design programme activities that would still allow women to effectively put into practice the skills learned during training. According to UNDP, an example that has proven to be successful in more conservative communities would be to opt for “hybrid solutions” that include training outside of the house and incentives to then develop home-based businesses.
- Based on recommendations from FGD participants, UNDP should consider actively supporting the creation of women-led micro-businesses that could in turn create more job opportunities and employment for other women in the community, as well as contribute towards de-stigmatising the private sector as a male-dominated and unsafe space for women to work in.
- Ensuring that all activities implemented to foster women's economic empowerment actively engage men and boys in awareness-raising sessions to reduce the social stigma around women's participation in the labour market, as well as to sensitise men and boys on the importance of sharing the burden of domestic labour with women and girls.
- **UNDP should continue carrying out risk evaluations and gender analyses in the areas of current and intended programme implementation** to better understand the needs, priorities and concerns of women and girls, men and boys, as well as to ensure that programming is context-sensitive and does not cause harm to community members.
 - In order to support normalising women working in non-gender-segregated environments, UNDP should consider how to continue implementing gender-mixed programme activities while ensuring that the safety and security of women in those activities are respected (e.g. against harassment or sexual violence).
 - UNDP could consider conducting activities that support information sharing to improve women's access to information and mitigate the barriers that women face as a consequence of their limited mobility outside their homes.
- **UNDP and other implementing partners should carefully consider how women's participation in the labour market often translates into increased responsibilities and workload for them as they are still expected to carry out domestic labour.** To avoid an imbalanced share of paid and unpaid work between women and girls, and men and boys, and to show how women's economic empowerment can benefit both genders, UNDP programming may consider:
 - Conducting awareness sessions and activities involving women and girls, men and boys not only to remove the social stigma around women's participation in the labour market but also around men and boys' participation in domestic labour, which is still perceived by many communities as a source of shame.
 - Conducting awareness sessions and activities involving women and girls, men and boys to work around ideas of positive masculinities and challenge the belief that men will be emasculated if women have their own source of income and actively participate in household decision-making.

UNDP's recommendations to other stakeholders

During the joint analysis review session held with IMPACT, UNDP discussed key areas of improvement towards increased WEE and WED which may be of concern to other state and non-state stakeholders. Key recommendations that emerged during the discussion are summarised below:

- **To support the enforcement of laws protecting women in the workplace, security services providers should be provided with soft skills training** on how to collect and act upon reports around harassment, sexual violence and other GBV-related issues in the workplace.
- **Key government stakeholders could support women's access to leadership positions, especially in government institutions and departments,** thus contribute toward setting a positive example for all women and girls in Iraq and normalising the idea of women's participation in the labour market as a dignified activity.

5. ANNEXES

Annex 1: Data Collection Locations

Table 7. Final distribution of FGDs in each location, by gender and beneficiary status

Governorate	Location (sub-district)	UNDP programme location	Beneficiary women		Beneficiary men		Non-beneficiaries (women)		Non-beneficiaries (men)		Scenario
			18-30 years old	Over 30 years old	18-30 years old	Over 30 years old	18-30 years old	Over 30 years old	18-30 years old	Over 30 years old	
Anbar	Al-Falluja-Markaz Al-Falluja	yes	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	A
	Al-Ramadi - Al-Habbaniya	no	0	0	0	0	6 IDIs		8 IDIs		D
	Al-Ramadi - Markaz Al-Ramadi	yes	1	1	1		0	0	0	0	A
	Heet - Markaz Heet	yes	2		1		0		0	0	A
Diyala	Khanaqin - Markaz Khanaqin	yes	1		1		0	0	0	0	C
	Baquba – Markaz Baquba	yes	1		1		0	0	0	0	C
Kirkuk	Al-Hawiga - Markaz Al-Hawiga	yes	0	8 IDIs	0	8 IDIs	1		1		D
	Kirkuk - Markaz Kirkuk	no	0	0	0	0	2		2		B
Ninewa	Mosul - Al-Mosul	yes	1	1	0	1	0	0	1		A
	Mosul - Hammam Al-Alil	yes	1		1		0	0	0	0	A
	Sinnuni	yes	1		0		0	0	0	0	A
	Sinjar - Markaz Sinjar	yes	1		1		0	0	0	0	A

	Telafar - Markaz Telafar	yes	1		1		1		0	0	A
	Telafar - Rabia	yes	1	1	0		0	0	1		A
Salah al-Din	Balad - Al-Dujeel	no	0	0	0	0	1		1		A
	Al Shirqat	no	0		0		2		2		B
	Beygee - Markaz Beygee	yes	2		2		0	0	0	0	A
	Tikrit	yes	2		1		0		0	0	A
Total			21		14		8		7		50

Table 8. Final number and profile of KIIs, by location

Governorate	Women CBOs	NGOs	Implementing partners	Local authorities	Government bodies	Total
Anbar	3	0	3	2	1	9
Diyala	2	1	1	1	1	6
Kirkuk	3	1	1	0	1	6
Ninewa	1	2	3	0	1	7
Salah Al Din	1	3	2	0	1	7
						35

Annex 2: List of Key Institutions for Women's Economic Empowerment

- **Ministry of Communications:** for the improvement of public transportation and telecommunications.
- **Ministry of Electricity:** the improvement of electricity provision, especially in rural and remote areas, could facilitate access to the internet and hence to information.
- **Ministry of Industry and Minerals:** there were factories that had been destroyed during the conflict and where many men and women used to work.
- **Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Water Resources:** to develop a more strategic approach to climate change and its direct connection with the agricultural sector in Iraq.
- **Ministry of Trade:** to encourage the small private sector (micro-business), remove barriers for women to open businesses, and develop plans for business grants targeted at women.
- **Ministry of Human Rights and Ministry of Justice:** to advocate for legislative change that supports women's economic empowerment and removes legal barriers; to advocate for better enforcement of the law and the protection of women and girls.
- **Ministry of Planning:** to oversee socioeconomic policies that promote women's economic empowerment.
- **Women's Empowerment governorate sectors:** key institutions at the governorate level that can provide support for further programming.



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