



Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Economic Participation in Iraq



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KEY MESSAGES

FINDINGS

1-

Although Iraq is one of the largest oil producers in the world with \$83.3 billion in oil revenues in 2019, non-oil private sector activities are limited and highly informal;

2-

Direct economic and social costs of regional conflicts and ISIS occupation are high, including a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs);

3-

The Government's policy response to COVID-19 included general social assistance and some measures to address health and violence against women. However, existing global trackers do not show that the government has implemented any measures related to women's economic security or unpaid care work.

KEY MESSAGES

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ

1-

Provide low-cost financing programmes and increase stimulus funding to support women's entrepreneurship.

2-

Launch assistance programmes such as temporary financial support for unemployed and informal workers.

3-

Expand the formal care economy to (a) ease the burden on women and allow them to engage in economic activities; and (b) create economic opportunities for women

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this report is to provide a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic participation in Iraq, list the measures taken by the government and other stakeholders, provide policy options for the government to increase women's economic participation, and respond to the challenges facing women in Iraq. Policy on women's economic empowerment and participation, should be informed by the fact that the lack of gender equality results from a complex interaction of individual, organizational and societal factors and cannot be explained in isolation from the broader socio-cultural milieu. Furthermore, policymaking to support women's empowerment during and after the pandemic is impacted by the political instability and lack of security caused by the political conflict and the instability of oil prices, which have exhausted both the economy and the health sector.

A. METHODOLOGY

The following framework was adopted to describe the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic participation in Iraq. It includes five impediments to women's economic participation even in normal conditions (middle column). These impediments are:

- a) Social norms that impede women's economic participation;
- b) Discriminatory laws that violate women's rights;
- c) Limited opportunities in education, employment, economic participation, freedom of expression, and more;
- d) Harassment in the public sphere and domestic violence in the household;
- e) Double burden for working women who are responsible for domestic work and care for children and the elderly.

In addition to these impediments to women's economic participation in most Arab societies, four decades of political conflict in Iraq, including the invasion by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), has resulted in social unrest, lack of security and forced displacement, with serious implications for women and girls and increased gender-based violence. The recent pandemic has further exacerbated these impediments (especially during the last three months) and added extra impediments including a lack of basic services such as education, transportation, financial services and access to markets. The pandemic has also increased health risks, especially among health workers,¹ and limited access to reproductive health services.

Table 1. Conceptual framework for women's economic participation in Iraq

Social norms					
		Laws			
Impact of pandemic	Increase	Limited opportunities	Increase		Impact of political conflict
	Increase	Gender-based violence	Increase		
	Increase	Double burden			
	Lack of basic services	Lack of basic services	Internal displacement		
	Health hazards	Health hazards	Lack of security		

The framework is adopted to understand the impact of the pandemic on women's economic participation in Iraq.

¹ - The percentage of females physicians is 45.9 per cent and nurses is 51.5 per cent (Statistical Yearbook 2018/2019).

B. IRAQ'S ECONOMIC OUTLOOK PRIOR TO AND DURING THE PANDEMIC,^{2,3}

Iraq is one of the world's largest oil producers, and the third largest oil exporter, with an 8.3 per cent market share worth \$83.3 billion in 2019. It holds the world's fifth largest proven reserves of petroleum at 144.2 billion barrels. Iraq is also one of the world's most oil-dependent countries: 56 per cent of GDP, 99 per cent of export revenues, 92 per cent of the Government's revenues and 90 per cent of taxes derive from oil. Overdependence on oil has increased economic volatility and discouraged investment in non-oil sectors. Non-oil private sector activity is limited, highly informal and generates very little government revenue.

Occupation of Iraqi territory by ISIS between 2013 and 2017 had a devastating impact on Iraq's economy. The devastating war with ISIS resulted in the displacement of nearly 6 million people at the height of the conflict. Currently, there are still around 1.4 million IDPs and around 4.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance⁴. The direct cost associated with the 2013-2017 conflict with ISIS is estimated at nearly \$47 billion across affected governorates. The conflict resulted in cumulative losses in output of \$107 billion, equivalent to 72 per cent of GDP at the start of the conflict in 2013. The impact was not only financial, as the conflict compromised the security and safety of millions of Iraqis, especially girls and women.

Unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are widespread, with estimates from 2017 suggesting that one third of the population is living in multidimensional poverty. Furthermore, poor service delivery and lack of proper governance along with increasing poverty and unemployment have led to public discontent, reinforcing Iraq's fragility trap.

The security crisis resulting from the conflict with ISIS, together with the economic crisis resulting from the oil price shock, caused an increase in inequality between regions (north and south vs. centre and Kurdistan) and between social groups within regions (especially displaced vs. non-displaced). The portion of the population living below the national poverty line in 2017-18 varies widely by region,⁵ with 31 per cent in southern Iraq and 30 per cent in northern Iraq compared to much lower figures of 11 per cent in central Iraq and 5 per cent in Kurdistan. In order to accurately capture this regional inequality, figures must be more granular than the national level and extend at least to the regional level.

Iraq's economy started to recover beginning in 2017. From 2017 to 2019, macroeconomic and fiscal indicators were broadly positive with an increase in GDP per capita and an inflation rate below 1 per cent each year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this nascent recovery. The first half of 2020 witnessed a year-on-year decrease in GDP of 6.8 per cent. With the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting supply chains, increasing prices and reducing remittances, poverty is estimated to increase in the short term by 7 per cent to 14 per cent. This implies that 2.7 to 5.5 million more Iraqis will join the ranks of the poor, who numbered 6.9 million individuals prior to the crisis. As a result of lockdowns and curfews since March 2020, the services sector, which has the highest portion of female employees, contracted by 20.7 per cent in the second quarter of 2020.

The economic impact of a second wave of the pandemic will depend heavily on the severity of cases and whether the country will have to undergo drastic lockdown measures. Given the Government's narrow fiscal space, it is facing multiple challenges in the short term. Health and livelihood risks must be addressed by reducing the spread of the virus and saving lives from a potential future surge in COVID-19.⁶ Furthermore, vulnerable segments of the

2-World Bank, 2020. Iraq Economic Monitor: Protecting Vulnerable Iraqis in the Time of a Pandemic, the Case for Urgent Stimulus and Economic Reforms. Available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/34749/154260.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>.

3-UNDP, 2020. Impact of COVID-19 on the Iraqi Economy. Available at https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/dam/iraq/docs/Health/UNDP%20Iraq%20Impact%20of%20Covid-19%20on%20the%20Iraqi%20Economy%20FINAL_web.pdf.

4-UN OCHA, (n.d.). <https://www.unocha.org/iraq/about-ocha-iraq>.

5-UNICEF, 2020. Assessment of COVID-19 Impact on Poverty and Vulnerability in Iraq. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/iraq/reports/assessment-covid-19-impact-poverty-and-vulnerability-iraq>.

6-According to WHO the number of confirmed cases reached 547,215 cases and the number of deaths reached 12,167 deaths as of November 28th, 2020. Available at <https://covid19.who.int/table>.

population need to be supported through well-targeted interventions (including expansion of the cash transfer programme). In the longer term, the government needs to address structural issues through a deeper reform programme while managing public sentiment to avoid political unrest.

Indices of state fragility give a bird's-eye view of a country's performance relative to other countries worldwide and can predict sustainability. The Fragility State Index (FSI) is an annual ranking of countries based on the different factors affecting their levels of fragility. It is a composite index that combines five sub-indices: cohesion indicators, economic indicators, political indicators, social indicators and cross-cutting indicators. The 2020 FSI⁷ for Iraq shows modest but meaningful improvement for four years in a row from 105.4 in 2017 to 95.9 in 2020, moving down from the category of "High Alert" to "Alert".⁸ Among the twelve indicators reflecting the five sub-indices, economic indicators (economic decline and poverty, uneven development and human flight and brain drain) are the best indicators in Iraq. The index combining economic variables showed a better performance than the other four indices.

C. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN IRAQ PRIOR TO AND DURING THE PANDEMIC

Iraq scored a 0.689 in the 2019 Human Development Index (HDI), for a rank of 120th worldwide. This figure includes a sizable gender gap between an HDI of 0.587 for women and 0.744 for men. The gender gap is mainly due to the difference in the GNI per capita, which was estimated among males as seven times the average GNI among females.⁹ Results of the Global Gender Gap (GGG) were consistent, as it ranked Iraq 152nd among 153 countries. The sub-index for the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity¹⁰ placed Iraq as the worst country worldwide. The female labour force participation (FLFP) rate in Iraq is one of the lowest in the world at 13 per cent and the LFP gender gap is ranked at 152nd out of 153.

Iraq scored 45 (on a scale from 0 to 100) on the World Bank Group's Women, Business and the Law 2020 Index. This index attempts to measure whether laws facilitate or hinder women's economic participation and is structured around the life cycle of a working woman, using eight indicators of women's interactions with the law as they begin, progress through and end their careers. As presented in table (4, last panel), Iraq scored 100 per cent on laws affecting women's decisions to work and 75 per cent on constraints on women's starting and running business. Laws and regulations affecting women's pay, laws affecting the size of a woman's pension and gender differences in property and inheritance affect economic participation as they scored 50 per cent, 50 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. On the other hand, three indicators reflect a gloomy picture, with mobility, marriage and parenthood scoring 25 per cent, 0 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The mobility indicator assesses constraints on freedom of movement, the marriage indicator assesses legal constraints related to marriage and divorce and the parenthood indicator examines laws affecting women's work after having children. These exceptionally low scores illustrate how family and personal laws are tied to the low female labour participation rate in Iraq.

Social norms establish specific roles and responsibilities for men (as providers) and women (as responsible for domestic care). Results from the World Values Survey and the Arab Barometer illustrate the strong hold that social norms have on organizations, communities and individuals and the effect of implicit and explicit biases in determining gender roles and the opportunities available to both women and men. Responses from the surveys indicate that most Iraqis agree that university education is equally important for both sexes. On the other hand, attitudes toward equal rights in employment are discriminatory against women.

7-The FSI ranged in 2020 between 14.6 for best country and 112.4 for worst country.

8-<https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/>.

9-UNDP, 2020. Human Development Report 2019.

10- WEF, 2020. Global Gender Gap Index.

Results from the two surveys include the following:

- a) A majority of women agree that “being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working”, with little difference between different levels of education;
- b) A majority of males and females agree that “men make better business executives than women”, even among highly educated females;
- c) A majority of Iraqis agree that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”, with younger generations less likely to tolerate gender inequality;
- d) A majority of Iraqi men oppose that “a woman travel abroad by herself”, with women less opposed to women’s freedom of mobility.

These social norms impact Iraqi women, who face a double burden with little institutional or household support. Women are the main members of their households responsible for caring for children, the elderly and members of the family with disabilities.

This caregiving burden remains regardless of whether a woman is or is not working.¹¹ Population dynamics in Iraq are creating large quantities of unpaid care work as the country is experiencing a high fertility rate (3.68 children per woman).¹² The availability of early childhood programmes is limited in most governorates, as the country has only 771 nurseries/kindergartens and only 36,700 children below 6 are enrolled,¹³ corresponding to a preschool enrolment rate of 7 per cent.¹⁴ Furthermore, the enrolment rate reflects inequality as 54 per cent of nurseries and kindergartens are in Baghdad. The limited availability of early childhood programmes likely makes working more difficult for mothers. However, no evidence seems to support causality as it may be possible that the low availability of early childhood programmes is due to low demand that can be explained by family and community support for working mothers.

Expanding the care economy in Iraq with all its components can contribute to increasing women’s economic participation as it will reduce the double burden on working women. In the meanwhile, it will increase job opportunities for women as they represent the majority of employees in the care economy sector. The shift from unpaid to paid care is usually associated with an expansion in early childhood programmes which improve the quality of education and contribute to increasing human capital. Furthermore, that shift will improve the quality of care provided to the elderly and persons with disabilities. Finally, the care economy is an opportunity for the growth of the private sector and can partially diversify the economy by increasing activity in non-oil sectors.

As illustrated in table 2, females are more likely to participate in household chores and, even among those who participate in them, females spend more time on them than males do. The gender gap in the participation rate and time spent is wider for cooking and cleaning. The ratio of female to male participation is at least 10 to 1 and the ratio of time spent is nearly 3 to 1. The ratio of female to male participation is nearly 5 to 1 for childcare and 4 to 1 for other household duties.

11-raq Time Use Survey, 2007. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/sd-10-tp3_0.pdf.

12-United Nations, 2019. World Population Prospects 2019, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

13-Nearly two thirds of children in preschools are children of working mothers.

14-<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.PRE.ENRR?view=chart&locations=IQ>.

Table 2. Participation in household activities and time spent (minutes/week) by sex and place of residence, 2007

		Governorate's capital		Other urban areas		Rural areas	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Cooking	Time spent	140	49	149	61	151	44
	Participating (percentage)	72.1	5.3	79.9	6.9	72.7	5.8
Cleaning	Time spent	136	34	131	46	145	37
	Participating (percentage)	65.5	4.0	65.9	5.6	63.8	4.6
Care for children	Time spent	129	61	115	71	123	64
	Participating (percentage)	35.9	7.6	37.1	6.9	36.2	7.3
Other household duties	Time spent	120	97	120	93	139	93
	Participating (percentage)	61.1	15.4	67.5	18.5	71.5	16.4

Source: Time use survey, Iraq 2007.

Many economic sectors have been affected by the economic shock caused by the pandemic. Six out of ten female workers are working in the service sector, most of them in informal employment. Due to the pandemic, these females have been more likely to lose their jobs, have their hours cut and lose income. On the other hand, women working in the public sector have been less affected. School closures and elder care during the pandemic have added to the disproportionate amount of time that Iraqi women already spend on unpaid care work compared to men. This impact must be taken into consideration when designing interventions to support women during future waves of the pandemic.

Increases of gender-based violence have been reported in several countries. Despite the lack of statistics on this issue in Iraq during the pandemic, it is expected that women and girls have faced greater amounts of domestic violence during home confinements. The prevalence of violence during the pandemic needs to be measured and studied and should inform interventions to protect women and girls.

D. INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND GIRLS DURING THE PANDEMIC

International experience

A desk review was conducted of measures taken by developing countries to increase women's economic participation during the pandemic. The review was based on COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker by UNDP and UN Women, which examined 2,517 measures responding to the pandemic across 206 countries and territories. "Out of these, 992 measures across 164 countries and territories have been identified as gender sensitive. Most of these measures (704 in 135 countries) focus on stepping up action to address violence against women and girls (VAWG). Measures to strengthen women's economic security (177) and address unpaid care work (111) are much fewer in number". In total, 199 countries and territories have adopted 1,310 social protection and labour market measures in response to COVID-19. However, only 18 per cent of these measures are found to be gender sensitive. Similarly, 130 countries and territories have adopted 503 fiscal and economic measures to help businesses, but only 10 per cent of these measures aim to strengthen women's economic security.¹⁵ Tables 3 and 4 list selected good practices in terms of labour market and fiscal and economic measures that have been implemented in developing countries and are appropriate for consideration in Iraq. The tables can be consulted by policymakers, international organizations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to design appropriate interventions in Iraq given the local context.

15-UNDP and UN Women, 2020. COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. Available at <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/womens-empowerment/COVID-19-Global-Gender-Response-Tracker.html>.

Table 3. Labour market measures implemented by developing countries during the pandemic

Country	Labour market measures
Barbados, Ecuador, and Peru	Promote the rights of domestic workers through information campaigns and regulatory adjustments
Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Paraguay	Take measures to support women's entrepreneurship through subsidized loans, virtual trainings, financial education, home delivery and digital marketing platforms.
Egypt	Launch a package of educational programmes for women to prepare them to compete in the labour market.
Liberia	The Government has extended credits for street vendors. The "Market Women and Small Informal Petty Traders Bank Loan Program" has been approved, with modifications to add credit unions and related entities registered and doing business before 1 January 2020. The Government will fully pay the loans owed by market women, and petty and small traders in affected counties as part of the requested budgetary reallocation. This programme will further help banks increase lending to new borrowers
Morocco	The Ministry of Tourism, Handicrafts, Air Transport and Social Economy has introduced a certification system for cooperatives to produce 30,000 reusable masks per day. Some 15 cooperatives have been certified with a total of 103 members, 100 per cent of whom are women
State of Palestine	The Palestine Monetary Authority launched a low-cost financing programme, "Istidama", to support the sustainability of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including women-run SMEs, with a total value of \$3 million to address the economic consequences of COVID-19.

Table 4. Fiscal and economic measures implemented by developing countries during the pandemic

Country	Fiscal and economic measures
Armenia	Provide public support to the agricultural sector through targeted loans in the form of co-financing and/or loan/leasing interest rate subsidies. Agriculture accounts for 32 per cent of female employment and 26 per cent of male employment in Armenia..
Egypt	The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency allocated a financing portfolio amounting to EGP 5.4 billion (\$343 million) to finance projects for women. It is expected that 216,000 micro-projects will be implemented over five years, and 250,000 jobs and projects will be funded through banks and civil society organizations that cooperate with the agency.
India	The Small Industries Development Bank has opened an additional financial window for the health-care sector under its flagship scheme called SMILE (Loan Fund for Micro Small and Medium Enterprises).
Jordan	Support the health sector, including through assistance for purchasing medical equipment and tax exoneration for entities in the medical supply chain. Human health and social work activities account for nearly 13 per cent of female and nearly 3 per cent of male employment in Jordan.

Nigeria	The Government has approved a three-month repayment moratorium for all TraderMoni, MarketMoni and FarmerMoni loans, as part of the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). TraderMoni is a federal loan programme specifically for petty traders and artisans across Nigeria, MarketMoni is specifically targeted to women and FarmerMoni to farmers. Overall, women comprise 59 per cent of GEEP recipients.
Senegal	Put in place measures to facilitate access to small business loans during the Covid-19 pandemic, of which around 90 per cent of beneficiaries are women

According to a regional initiative,¹⁶ a solidarity wealth tax could alleviate poverty in the Arab region. The report estimated the cost of the poverty gap in Iraq at nearly \$1.7 billion in 2019 and \$2.4 billion in 2020 and estimated that the wealth tax on the richest decile needed to cover the poverty gap is 0.9 per cent in 2019 and 1.4 per cent in 2020. Even though this policy is relevant to the current situation in Iraq, especially after the pandemic, imposing such a measure will heavily depend on a resolution of the conflict, public trust in the Government and good governance.

E. GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Government of Iraq has taken several steps to curb COVID-19. As of 12 September, close to 2 million tests had been performed nationwide, with 282,672 positive results. Out of these, 217,396 people recovered and 7,881 died. Early on, with the support of donors and the United Nations system, the Government invested in new laboratories to expand testing capacity, increased the availability of personal protective equipment for health staff and established several isolation wards for COVID-19 patients. The Ministry of Health has issued and is regularly updating public health guidelines. Given the evolving situation, measures are likely to change at short notice.¹⁷

In early 2020, the High Committee for Health and National Safety was established to help contain the outbreak. Federal authorities implemented curfews and movement restrictions to limit social contact, with some lifting of restrictions from May 2020 onwards. Schools and universities were closed but are now gradually reopening with certain additional distancing rules. Businesses and factories, except for restaurants, have been allowed to reopen provided they respect precautionary health and physical distancing measures. The Iraqi Red Crescent Society has undertaken a nationwide disinfection campaign to sterilize markets, shops, residential areas, hospitals, health facilities, prisons, mosques and shrines. Travel between provinces has been restricted, and all government bodies have been directed to support health services. International travel both into and out of the country has also been limited, with visitors subject to restrictions on their movement upon arrival in Iraq. These controls have gradually eased.¹⁸

The Central Bank launched several schemes to support the financial sector, including payment holidays, deferral of loan interest and general liquidity facilities. It announced a moratorium on interest and principal payments by small and medium enterprises through its directed lending initiative (the '1 trillion Iraqi Dinar' initiative) and encouraged banks to extend maturities of all loans where possible. The bank has encouraged the use of electronic payments to help contain the transmission of the virus and instructed vendors to eliminate fees for such payments for six months. On the fiscal side, authorities reduced spending on non-essential areas and safeguarded budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Health. The Committee for Health and National Safety is introducing a cash transfer scheme targeting workers in the private sector who do not receive salaries or benefits from the Government.¹⁹

16-ESCWA, 2020. Wealth Inequality and Closing the Poverty Gap in Arab Countries: The Case for a Solidarity Wealth Tax, ESCWA. Available at https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/wealth-inequality-closing-poverty-gap-arab-countries-english_1.pdf.

17-UNDP, 2020. Impact of Covid-19 on the Iraqi Economy, p. 15. Available at https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/dam/iraq/docs/Health/UNDP%20Iraq,%20Impact%20of%20Covid-19%20on%20the%20Iraqi%20Economy%20FINAL_web.pdf.

18-Ibid.

19-Ibid.

The COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker developed by ESCWA ²⁰ presents broad categories on stimulus interventions introduced by the government, highlighting the 1.2 billion dollars spent on social assistance, including cash assistance and waiver of utility bills. The COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker ²¹ was developed by UNDP to monitor policy measures implemented by governments worldwide to address the COVID-19 crisis. It highlights responses that have integrated a gender lens and includes national measures directly addressing women's economic and social security, including unpaid care work, the labour market and violence against women. The tracker listed the following three measures to reduce violence against women:

- a) Continued functioning and expansion of shelters, as the Government has taken necessary measures to make the shelters available during the pandemic to provide services to women;
- b) Continuity of the health sector's response to violence against women, throughout the Department of Forensic Medicine of the Ministry of Health, which specializes in the intake and handling of rape cases;
- c) Using hotlines and reporting mechanisms (Kurdistan Region of Iraq) throughout the general directorate of combating violence against women who is responsible for providing services to women and recording claims.

No measures related to women's economic security or unpaid care work are mentioned by the tracker. A more comprehensive gender-sensitive list of interventions need to be considered with the second wave of the pandemic

The COVID-19 response: what have women, peace and security (WPS) got to do with it?

"The lessons we can draw from the WPS agenda have never been more important and we make the following recommendations to donors, INGOs and governments:

- Fund and support women's grassroots organizations and networks in conflict-affected countries as they take on key roles in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19, whilst continuing to work for peace.
- Protect women on the frontline of the COVID-19 response so that health workers have access to training, accurate health information and equipment, as well as measures to mitigate their risk of Gender-based violence (GBV) while carrying out their work.
- Prioritize programmes to prevent and respond to GBV to maintain ongoing services and adapt programmes to new risk factors and trends during COVID-19. This is essential for ensuring women's needs are met and reducing the likelihood that GBV prevents them from accessing broader support related to COVID-19.
- Empower women at all levels to be involved in decision-making and design of the COVID-19 response to ensure that responses reflect and respond to their needs on the ground with realistic strategies."

By: Naomi Clugston and Michelle Spearing

Source: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2020/05/07/the-covid-19-response-what-has-women-peace-and-security-got-to-do-with-it/>.

20- <http://covdata.unescwa.org/RPT/RPTDSH1.aspx>.

21-COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker <https://data.undp.org/gendertracker/>.

Table 5. Iraq in numbers

Total population: 40.2 million		Men	
Adult (15+) labour force participation rate (percentage)		72	15
Adult (15+) labour force participation rate (percentage)		66	11
Youth (15-24) employment to population ratio (percentage)		39	5
Share of informal employment in total employment (percentage)		70	49
Adult (15+) unemployment rate (percentage)		8	22
Youth (15-24) unemployment rate (percentage)		20	38
Employment by sector (percentage): Agriculture		6	21
Industry		28	14
Services		61	59
Employment by sector – Formal (percentage): Agriculture		1.4	0.0
Industry		7.7	0.7
Services		90.9	99.3
Employment by sector – Informal (percentage): Agriculture		41.3	24.6
Industry		19.2	32.8
Services		39.5	42.6
Employment status – Formal (percentage):a Employers		3.2	0
Employees		96.8	100
Self-employed workers		0	0
Contributing family workers		0	0
Employment status – Informal (percentage): Employers		3.6	0
Employees		58	45
Self-employed workers		38.4	55
Contributing family workers		0	0
COVID-19b Confirmed cases: 604,549 Confirmed cases per 1 million: 15,029. Deaths: 12,911 deaths Deaths per 1 million: 321		People in need of humanitarian assistance: c 4.1 million Internally displaced persons: 1.4 million	

<i>Sustainable Development Goals Indicator</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Current assessment</i>	<i>Trend</i>
Demand for family planning satisfied by modern methods (percentage of married females aged 15 to 49)	54.6	2018	Major challenges	Moderately improving
Ratio of female-to-male mean years of education received (percentage)	69.8	2018	Major challenges	Stagnating
Ratio of female-to-male labour force participation rate (percentage)	17.1	2018	Major challenges	Stagnating
Seats held by women in national parliament (percentage)	26.4	2020	Significant challenges	Decreasing
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births)	79	2017	Challenges remain	On track or maintaining SDG achievement
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 adolescent females aged 15 to 19)	71.7	2017	Major challenges	Stagnating
Adjusted GDP growth (percentage)	-2.4	2018	Significant challenges	Information unavailable
Adults with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider (percentage of population aged 15 +)	22.7	2017	Major challenges	Moderately improving
Unemployment rate (percentage of total labour force)	12.8	2019	Major challenges	Decreasing
Population using the internet (percentage)	75.0	2018	Challenges remain	On track or maintaining SDG achievement
Mobile broadband subscriptions (per 100 population)	39.8	2018	Major challenges	On track or maintaining SDG achievement

<i>Country score card on gender gap e</i>	<i>Rank f</i>	<i>Score g</i>	<i>Women aged 20-24 who</i>
Global Gender Gap Index	152	0.530	were married before 15:
Economic participation and opportunity	153	0.227	
Labour force participation rate, (percentage)	152	0.172	Women aged 20-24 who
Wage equality for similar work, 1-7 (best)	-	-	were married before 18:
Estimated earned income, int'l \$1,000	151	0.130	
Legislators, senior officials and managers (percentage)	113	0.279	Total fertility rate: 4 child per woman
Professional and technical workers (percentage)	133	0.431	
Educational attainment	144	0.812	Adolescent fertility (15-19): 83 child per woman
Health and survival	76	0.975	
Political empowerment	118	0.105	

<i>Women, business and the law ^a</i>	
WBL Total Score 2020	45
Mobility (examines constraints on freedom of movement)	25
Workplace (analyses laws affecting women's decisions to work)	100
Pay (measures laws and regulations affecting women's pay)	50
Marriage (assesses legal constraints related to marriage)	0
Parenthood (examines laws affecting women's work after having children)	20
Entrepreneurship (analyses constraints on women's starting and running businesses)	75
Assets (considers gender differences in property and inheritance)	40
Pension (assesses laws affecting the size of a woman's pension)	50

Notes:

a- ILO, 2018.

b-WHO Health Emergency Dashboard, from 3 January 2020 to 13 January 2020. Available at <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/iq>.

c-<https://www.unocha.org/iraq>.

d- Sachs, J., and others, 2020. The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19. Sustainable Development Report 2020. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Available at https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/2020_sustainable_development_report.pdf.

e-WEF, 2020.

f-Out of 153 countries.

g-0.00 = imparity 1.00 = parity.

h-World Bank, 2020. Women, Business and the Law 2020. Available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32639/9781464815324.pdf>.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are directed to government, international organizations, including United Nations agencies, the private sector and civil society organizations. As the challenges facing women's economic participation are multifaceted, all stakeholders must coordinate closely to implement these recommendations and maximize their results in order to mitigate the risks associated with a new wave of COVID-19.

Support efforts to address social unrest: All stakeholders should help reduce the impetus for large scale protests that might aggravate social divisions by improving governance and public services and reducing corruption. Stakeholders must prioritize creating a better mechanism for including different segments of the population, especially youth and women, and progress on this point should be substantiated with opinion polls periodically measuring public sentiment at the national and sub-national levels.

Foster digital transformation: Iraq must undergo a digital transformation to move towards a digital economy that can create greater opportunities for women's economic participation. To this end, affordable access to high-speed internet must first be provided as it will help in offering home-based educational and employment opportunities, promoting private sector participation in non-oil sectors and diversifying the economy. This investment will support women's economic participation while increasing the resilience to the pandemic and building human capital. Secondly, policies need to be adopted to increase the proportion of cashless payments, increase youth's digital skills, and scale up the digital entrepreneurship ecosystem. Effective interventions in these domains are recommended as they will increase women's economic participation while modernizing the economy. Thirdly, delivering digital government services and improving access to data will boost accountability, transparency and trust while creating more jobs for women and decreasing social unrest.

Develop the care economy: One of the challenges to increasing women's labour force participation and female employment is the unequal distribution of unpaid care work among men and women, with much of the responsibility falling on married women. Tapping into the potential of the care economy can increase Iraqi women's economic participation in two ways. Firstly, it can play a major role in reducing the double burden on women and secondly it can open opportunities for women's employment. Furthermore, expanding the care economy can be a major driver for private sector growth. For example, the suggestion to launch a national drive to increase preschool enrolment will also contribute to building human capital in Iraq. Parallel to developing the care economy sector, advocacy is needed to introduce paternity or parental leave.

Support women's entrepreneurship: With no gender gap in education but a wide gender gap in employment, there is ample opportunity to support women's entrepreneurship to contribute to an increase in women's economic participation. This can be achieved through low-cost financing programmes, increased funding for direct stimulus, subsidized loans, financial inclusion, eased taxation and skill development to sustain small and medium enterprises.

Increase investment in social protection systems and expand coverage: This can be achieved by supporting working women through establishing new childcare facilities, flexible working conditions and facilities for the elderly and persons with disabilities. Support is needed for cash transfer programmes for the most vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and displaced women and girls, as part of the emergency response and in the longer term. Cash transfers to women could be complemented with a bundle of services such as: mobile phones and mobile cash services including mobile applications, training and coaching, incentives for formalization, business plan competitions and lines of credit for women-owned firms.

Create new employment opportunities for women: Central government and local authorities are encouraged to provide a policy framework that capitalizes on public works programmes and cash for work programmes which have shown potential to generate female employment in specific contexts. They are also advised to create alternatives for women, increase access to credit and develop the care economy. A new technology-centred capacity building programme could open new frontiers for increasing women's participation.

Bridge the digital divide: This can be achieved by working in tandem on both the supply side and the demand side, especially in deprived areas. Expanding the deployment of high speed internet will provide the needed technological infrastructure. In parallel, raising demand and building trust in digital marketing platforms as a substitute for traditional markets can help disadvantaged segments of the population survive the pandemic while creating digital platforms for economic growth. This should go hand in hand with investing in training women and girls in communication and information technology which will contribute to fostering entrepreneurship and increase readiness for distance learning and working from home.

Protect jobs, small and medium enterprises and vulnerable workers in the informal economy: It is suggested to launch an intervention package to support unemployed and informal workers through temporary financial support, especially for female-headed households. Extra support can be considered for formal sector workers through temporary suspension of social security contributions and wage support conditional on worker retention at firms. Special legislation needs to be introduced to allow women to work from home and benefit from flexible working hours in order to balance social obligations and professional duties during the pandemic.

Invest in producing sex-disaggregated data and evidence-based research: This should include producing accurate and timely sex disaggregated statistics on the number of COVID-19 cases and number of deaths related to the pandemic, to estimate the national burden of the disease and manage efforts to prevent and control COVID-19. New data is needed to better reveal inequalities between regions and indicators are needed for IDPs. The government is also encouraged to work with international organizations to provide accurate and timely sex disaggregated data to understand how COVID-19 impacts individuals differently with respect to economic participation, including employment by sector, layoffs, financial inclusion and microfinance. This should inform the development of rapid assessment surveys, household surveys (labour force, violence against women and time use survey), qualitative research, public opinion polling and sectoral analysis, which can lead to a better understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on women's economic participation and illustrate new opportunities for women's employment.

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