

Introduction

The Iraq Foundation is an independent non-governmental organization working in Iraq since 2003. With support from the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq (UNAMI) and technical assistance from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Iraq Foundation is conducting a project to strengthen women's participation in political life at the national and subnational levels, and to strengthen the capacity of women seeking public office. The project comprises two phases. The first phase, which ran from 1 October 2019 to 15 February 2020, conducted needs assessments and research aimed at documenting and understanding the challenges and unmet needs of women who run for elected public office. This information will serve as a foundation for strategies and action plans to provide women with training and tools to successfully run for elected office. Five governorates were examined in the first phase, namely Baghdad, Basra, Ninawa, Najaf and Salaheddin. They were selected because they provide a representative diversity in terms of social and political environments. Salaheddin and Ninawa are provinces in the areas liberated from Islamic State; Najaf is a province strongly influenced by the religious establishment; Basra is a southern province that has recently faced unrest and public dissatisfaction; and Baghdad represents the widest spectrum of social, cultural and economic diversity.

The present report, comprising seven sections, documents the findings of the research that was carried out in the first phase of the project. Section one sets out the methodology and limitations of the research, and the tools applied (desk review, individual interviews with MPs and PC members, focus group discussions with different social groups, rankings, and case studies). Section two outlines society's understanding of women's political participation and representation in

Iraq, by providing the findings of the focus group's responses to various questions. Section three identifies the challenges that women candidates face, and presents relevant findings as experienced by the interviewees. Section four describes useful experiences that helped elected women overcome challenges, and win seats outside the quota. Section five outlines the needs of interviewed women to enhance their preparedness for political participation and election. Section six provides recommendations on policies to address barriers and promote women's participation and representation in elected public life. Section seven sets out the concluding recommendations based on the findings of the research and the literature reviewed.