

MISSING IN ACTION:

Women in Iraq's
Security Forces



**CENTER FOR
CIVILIANS IN CONFLICT**
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Cover: December 7, 2020, Kirkuk, Iraq:

A female civilian conducts a protection of civilians training for officers at the Kirkuk Police Academy. All training participants were male.

Credit: Mohammed Noruldeen/CIVIC Photo

ORGANIZATIONAL MISSION AND VISION

Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) is an international organization dedicated to promoting the protection of civilians in conflict. CIVIC envisions a world in which no civilian is harmed in conflict. Our mission is to support communities affected by conflict in their quest for protection and strengthen the resolve and capacity of armed actors to prevent and respond to civilian harm.

CIVIC was established in 2003 by Marla Ruzicka, a young humanitarian who advocated on behalf of civilians affected by the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Honoring Marla's legacy, CIVIC has kept an unflinching focus on the protection of civilians in conflict. Today, CIVIC has a presence in conflict zones and key capitals throughout the world where it collaborates with civilians to bring their protection concerns directly to those in power, engages with armed actors to reduce the harm they cause to civilian populations, and advises governments and multinational bodies on how to make life-saving and lasting policy changes.

CIVIC's strength is its proven approach and record of improving protection outcomes for civilians by working directly with conflict-affected communities and armed actors. At CIVIC, we believe civilians are not "collateral damage" and civilian harm is not an unavoidable consequence of conflict — civilian harm can and must be prevented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was co-authored by Jordan Lesser-Roy, CIVIC's researcher in Iraq, and Paula Garcia, CIVIC's former researcher in Iraq. Additional insights, review, and editing were provided by Ali Al-Assaf, Iraq Country Director; Lauren Spink, Senior Global Researcher; Sahr Muhammedally, Director, Middle East and South Asia; Liza Baran, Interim Director, Middle East; and Vanja Kovac, CIVIC's Gender Advisor. Natalie Sikorski, Program Manager, Middle East and South Asia, and Monica Zuraw, Communications Officer, facilitated production. Research assistance was provided by Mohammed Nooraldeen, CIVIC's Training and Community-Based Protection Officer in Iraq; Yasir Ali, CIVIC's Programs Associate in Iraq; Saman Omar, CIVIC's Program Advisor in Iraq; and Hana Qader, translator and fixer.

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ACRONYMS

CBP: Community-Based Protection

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CHM: Civilian Harm Mitigation

COVID-19: Novel Coronavirus

CPA: Coalition Provisional Authority

CPG: Community Protection Group

CRSV: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

CSO: Civil Society Organization

DCVAW: Department for Combatting Violence Against Women

DWE: Directorate for Women's Empowerment

EUAM Iraq: European Union Assistance Mission in Iraq

FFO: [German] Federal Foreign Office

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

FPU: Family Protection Units

FTI: Female Training Institute

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

GOI: Government of Iraq

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IHRL: International Human Rights Law

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organization

IOM: International Organization for Migration

ISF: Iraqi Security Forces

ISIS: Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, also known as Daesh

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party

KMOI: Kurdistan Ministry of Interior

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

KRI: Kurdish Region of Iraq

MENA: Middle East/North Africa

MOD: Ministry of Defense

MOI: Ministry of Interior

MOP: Ministry of Peshmerga

NAP: National Action Plan

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

NMI: NATO Mission Iraq

POC: Protection of Civilians

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

SSR: Security Sector Reform

UN: United Nations

UNAMI: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

UNSCR: United Nations Security Council Resolution

UNWOMAN: United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

WEDs: Women's Empowerment Departments

WPS: Women, Peace and Security

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Filling complaints, taking witnesses statements, or conducting investigations, it is all in men’s hands. Female [police] officers do not have these roles, only men. The female police officers are outside [the police station] searching women coming into the building. That’s their only role.”

– Female police officer working in Mosul, March 2021¹

Security forces in Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), including the military and police units, fail to accurately and equally represent all Iraqi people or their protection needs due to an under-representation of female officers. While women comprise nearly half of the Iraqi population, only 25.2 percent of the parliament is female, and CIVIC found that there are few women in positions of meaningful power or decision-making ability within the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) or Peshmerga. This underrepresentation impacts the operational efficacy of security actors, and it affects protection of civilians (POC) and civilian harm mitigation (CHM) concerns, especially for girls and women. The lack of female officers poses critical mission success challenges, particularly in relation to apprehending female combatants and suspected terrorists. Furthermore, gender diversity has been shown to increase forces’ legitimacy within host populations and enhance tactical operations. For civilian women in Iraq, the lack of female presence in key offices and security ministries effectively prevents them from accessing resources and seeking justice for violations or abuses. Iraqi society largely dictates that women should not interact with men outside of their families, even within government and security offices. Thus, women who attempt to file complaints with police or other security actors may face shame and stigma from their communities.

While efforts have been made in recent years to enhance women’s participation in security conversations, operations, and ministries, the country will continue to face threats that could otherwise be mitigated if these gaps are not given immediate attention. Gender mainstreaming of security forces’ internal policies and procedures, attracting and hiring female officers, providing capacity-building trainings, and promoting women into decision-making roles are all vital for the overall safety and security of Iraq and its diverse population.

This report examines the status of women’s participation in Iraq’s security forces by analyzing current laws and international legal commitments, obstacles that inhibit women from joining or being promoted within the military and police, and the effects of the gender gap in women’s representation within Iraq’s security sector. It also provides recommendations to improve the situation. As Iraq emerges from behind the veil of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL, or *Daesh* in Arabic) and the threat of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), now is the time to address gaps and weaknesses within the security sector. Without women’s input and leadership in security-related policymaking and on-the-ground protection, there is an increased chance of instability and devolution into conflict if security forces fail to meet the country’s needs.²

Iraq was the first country in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region to develop a National Action

Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, “Women, Peace and Security” (2014), which was an important step toward enabling women’s participation in conflict prevention and resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction.³ However, the NAP failed to define timelines for implementation, allocate funds for related programming, or establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. In addition, the plan was written without the input of local organizations, women’s groups, and minority populations. In 2020, the Iraqi parliament adopted a second NAP on UNSCR 1325, but a final version of this document has yet to be released to the public and no concrete actions on implementation have been taken. The second NAP, covering 2019–2024, was drafted through a more inclusive process, but majority political factions have blocked the will of reform efforts.

There have been positive developments in Iraqi legislation and policy over the past decade in response to the security needs of girls and women, notably the establishment of the Directorate of Women’s Empowerment (DWE), offices such as the Family Protection Units (FPUs), and the Department for Combatting Violence Against Women (DCVAW) in the Kurdistan region. This progress indicates a willingness within the Iraqi parliament and regional governments for a broader shift and is a strong foundation from which to improve protection outcomes.⁴

CIVIC found that women currently in the Iraqi and Kurdish forces are not serving in decision-making positions or in tactical command roles. Furthermore, women are relegated to non-operational and mostly behind-the-scenes roles, such as office administration, conducting body searches at the entrances to government buildings, or serving in clinics. In these positions, female officers cannot meaningfully engage with civilians or provide needed insight and gender perspective during tactical operations and policy drafting. Even at the training level, women are absent from the military colleges and police academies. Teachers are vital to shaping the minds of the next generation, yet the Iraqi security education establishment deprioritizes women’s growth and input.

In interviews, women expressed a strong desire to participate in the security forces along front lines and in leadership roles but felt that they had limited support from their communities, the forces themselves, or the governments in Baghdad and Erbil. Pervasive patriarchy limits women from seeking higher education, and it creates shame and stigma for women who interact with non-related men or who work outside the home. Within the forces, issues such as hiring policies, capacity-building and trainings, and infrastructure—often as basic as not having separate bathrooms—contribute to an environment that is unwelcoming for women. Lastly, there is a lack of faith in government actions aimed at enhancing women’s participation in society and increasing protection for female civilians. Previous efforts, like the NAP and the establishment of specialized offices to handle cases of gender-based violence (GBV), have fallen short due to missing accountability mechanisms, few champions at

“In interviews, women expressed a strong desire to participate in the security forces along front lines and in leadership roles, but felt that they had limited support from their communities, the forces themselves, or the governments in Baghdad and Erbil.”

the federal level, and crippling budget shortages. The lack of access to security actors and a lack of representation within the security sector create a dangerous and tenuous situation for female civilians who wish to report violence, engage in anti-terrorism operations, or seek legal support for issues such as divorce or documentation. One woman speaking about domestic violence in Hawija noted, “For many women, they want to commit suicide because it [the lack of female officers] is a really bad situation. We [women] don’t have anywhere to go.”⁵

As a society in transition, Iraq’s population has many unique vulnerabilities that increase the need for protection and the potential for security crises. For the security forces, the lack of female officers prevents the capture and interrogation of persons suspected of aiding ISIS or participating in Iraq’s rapidly increasing illicit drug trade. There are solutions and partners available to rectify these problems, but Iraqi society, the forces and their ministries, the governments, and international and local organizations will have to come together to enact meaningful change.

CIVIC’s recommendations broadly address a comprehensive set of actions to target needed behavior change at the community and ministerial levels; steps to enact progressive policies that address the need for women in decision-making and leadership within Iraq’s security forces; an education campaign to raise awareness about the importance of equality and diversity in security forces; and meeting the infrastructure and training needs of female and male officers. We also identify gaps in policies, as well as implementation of existing policies, to address victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and the need for referral pathways and support to victims of CRSV. Women cannot continue to be absent from Iraq’s security forces. The country and its people will not be adequately protected until the security sector represents the whole population—not just the men.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG):

- Establish an oversight mechanism and provide funding for the implementation of the second National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSC Resolution 1325 and work to ensure the voices and perspectives of conflict-affected girls and women are included throughout the implementation process.
- Develop a gender-sensitive national security strategy that emphasizes increasing women's inclusion as commissioned officers at the tactical, operational, and decision-making levels and provide funding for hiring security officials through gender-inclusive and gender-aware hiring practices.
- Increase support for security infrastructure throughout Iraq, with attention to facilities and uniforms suitable for female officers, trainers, and supervisors.
- Amend existing laws on security force composition to include gender quotas and include gender as a protected characteristic.
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns targeting the Iraqi population that focus on tackling existing stereotypes and biases as well as shifting community perceptions on women holding front-line, operational, and high-authority roles in the security sector.
- Improve the inclusion of female civil servants and security officers in security-related, high-level decision-making and managerial positions within all the different security forces, as well as within the interior and defense ministries in Federal Iraq and the KRI.
- Enact and enforce laws and policies that forbid, prosecute, and punish harassment and bias based on gender in and by security institutions and forces, including but not limited to sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination. Support the strengthening of mechanisms for reporting on and responding to harassment.

To All Security Forces:

- Implement hiring practices to attract qualified female candidates and ensure that they have equal access to trainings and promotions by enacting gender-inclusive policies and creating an enabling working environment with zero tolerance for harassment. Establish functional complaint mechanisms for workplace harassment so that all members of security institutions can safely report discrimination and harassment.
- Update existing infrastructure to meet the needs of female security force members, such as separate dormitories, lavatories, and, when appropriate, trainers.
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns targeting all levels of security forces to combat anti-female biases and show how diversification and the inclusion of women improves the effectiveness and efficiency of the security sector.
- Increase the number of female police and military personnel involved in operational, tactical, and policy-making spheres, and ensure they are trained, equipped, and tasked to fully and meaningfully participate in required duties.

- Ensure that all police stations and military outposts are staffed with female officers 24 hours a day to better meet civilian needs.
- Design and undertake scenario-based trainings for military and police personnel on CHM and the protection needs of girls and women, including responses to domestic violence and sexual assault that extend beyond the typical response of “reconciliation.”
- Design and undertake gender-sensitive, capacity-building CHM and POC trainings for all forces, and ensure male and female officers receive training in joint or gender-segregated sessions depending on cultural norms.
- Ensure all FPU and DCVAWs (and their related hotlines) are staffed 24 hours a day with a trained and empowered female officer.

To the United Nations (UN) and Partner Organizations:

- Continue technical and financial support for Federal and Kurdish authorities’ security sector reform (SSR) efforts, especially around gender mainstreaming at all levels, awareness-raising about the importance of women’s inclusion in the security forces, and the unique protection needs of girls and women.
- Promote and fund capacity-building initiatives for women in Federal and KRI security institutions and forces with the overall goal of mitigating harm to civilians and improving civilian protection.

To Community, Tribal, and Religious Leaders, Civil Society, and Media:

- Conduct awareness-raising on the community benefits of increased women’s participation in security forces, lead efforts to combat stigma against women and their families when they work in the security sector, and encourage the acceptance of women as equally powerful members of the forces when applicable.
- Work with provincial, regional, and national authorities to better meet communities’ protection needs through the recruitment and hiring of female officers in civilian-facing, tactical, operational, and leadership roles.
- Advocate to decision-makers at the security ministries, agencies, and parliament for the improved integration and full participation of women in all security institutions and forces in the country.
- Work with security forces to raise awareness about the FPU and DCVAWs, and create community knowledge of hotlines.

III. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the qualitative analysis of 54 interviews and 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) that took place between July 2019 and November 2021. These interviews and FGDs included 36 members of the security sector, 29 Iraqi civilians, and 6 members of international advisory and/or non-governmental agencies who were consulted as subject matter experts. Interviews were carried out in both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) in Baghdad, Erbil, Nineveh, and Kirkuk governorates.

All interviews for this report were conducted using a semi-structured interview process that took place in the interviewees' preferred language with the assistance of a translator. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted via phone or video call. When possible, in-person interviews were conducted in safe and secure locations.

CIVIC took measures to ensure representation from Federal Iraq and the KRI and worked to highlight the voices of female security sector actors and female civilians. Researchers were cognizant of factors such as age and ethnicity, and they interviewed civilians from Arab, Kurdish, and Turkman populations. Fourteen men and fifty-five women were interviewed in order to allow for more female perspectives on the male-dominated security sector. Interview subjects were identified via CIVIC's Community Protection Groups (CPGs) as well as through connections established during CIVIC's training and advocacy efforts with the Iraqi Ministry of Defense (MOD), the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Kurdish Ministry of Interior (KMOI), and the Ministry of Peshmerga (MOP).

For the purpose of anonymity, interviewees' names and identifying information have been withheld. However, as necessary, CIVIC provides details such as location and sector of work to contextualize quotations, anecdotes, and information provided. Each interview and FGD is assigned a unique number, as cited in our footnotes. CIVIC interviewers made the aims of the research clear, and all of the interviewees gave informed consent for their participation. Additional background research as well as a review of key publications from international organizations and local journals also enhanced our understanding of the subject matter and contributed to the findings, recommendations, and overall context of this report.

This research was limited due to lack of access to reliable information from government and security sector officials regarding the numbers of women in security roles and the budget allocations within Federal Iraq and the KRI for security sector hiring, training, and reform. Furthermore, limitations stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the geographic scope and nature of interviews.

The findings and recommendations presented here are not intended to serve as a comprehensive list and analysis of all the obstacles women face to entering or progressing in the security forces. The analysis conducted is not intended to provide statistically significant results or conclusions. More research would be needed to thoroughly map these challenges and their effects. However, CIVIC's research identifies priority issues that the Iraqi and Kurdish authorities should begin to address and that can serve as a starting point for more in-depth analysis.

IV. BACKGROUND

In 2021, the World Economic Forum found that Iraq ranked 154th out of 156 countries in terms of gender equality.⁶ Through research, observations, and engagement with civilians, government ministries, security forces, and international organizations, CIVIC found that the gender gap is greatly apparent in Iraq's security forces and in terms of protection outcomes for female civilians.⁷

Since 2003, there have been governmental efforts aimed at increasing equality for men and women within Iraq, such as constitutional articles⁸ and commitments to the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. By and large, however, these efforts continue to receive little funding or political will and have not yet improved outcomes for female Iraqis. Within the security sector, this inaction translates to a lack of female officers, few women in critical decision-making positions or in front-line operations, and furthers the proliferation of cultural attitudes that prevent women from joining the forces. For Iraq's female civilians, the situation translates to a lack of access to security actors and the continuation of gender-based violence (GBV).⁹

Legal Overview

Iraqi Law and Gender-Based Discrimination

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution, the National Human Rights Plan, and similar binding documents regulate non-discrimination in all areas of society, with special attention given to the country's security forces and police.¹⁰ Article 9 of the constitution establishes that "the Iraqi armed forces and security services will be composed of the components of the Iraqi people with due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion."¹¹ However, this article fails to qualify gender as a potential area for prejudice. Similarly, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) Order 22 (August 2003) on "the creation of a new Iraqi army" forbids religious and ethnic discrimination but does not explicitly include gender as a protected characteristic.¹² Laws 149 (1968) and 176 (1980) regulating the Iraqi police also fail to mention gender.¹³ There are also no positive obligations in Iraqi law that require the government to take steps to promote the recruitment of women into the different security agencies or address gender-based discrimination. With the exception of the CPA order, these articles and laws apply to security forces and related ministries in both Federal Iraq and the KRI.¹⁴

Iraqi Law and Protection for Female Civilians

Iraqi women suffer from a high rate of domestic violence from family and community members. Between January and November 2020, there were 9,080 reported cases of domestic violence against women within Federal Iraq.¹⁵ At the time of this writing, Federal Iraq has no law criminalizing domestic violence against women and children. The Iraqi Penal Code punishes assaulters who cause "injury," but it also provides an exception for would-be domestic abusers in Article 41, which enshrines the right of husbands to punish their wives.¹⁶ As such, domestic violence is difficult to prosecute within Federal Iraq. By contrast, the KRG successfully passed a law on domestic violence in 2011 that criminalizes physical and psychological violence against family members.¹⁷

The government of Federal Iraq has taken steps to further the WPS agenda, including by establishing the Directorate for Women's Empowerment (DWE) in 2014, founding Women's Empowerment Departments (WEDs) in 2020, and creating FPU in each governorate.¹⁸ The DWE and WEDs seek to address gender mainstreaming in policymaking at the governorate and federal levels, respectively.



Mohammed Noruldeen/CIVIC Photo

October 14, 2020, Kirkuk, Iraq: CIVIC conducts a protection of civilians training for officers at the Kirkuk Police Academy. Of the 35 participants, one female officer undertook the training.

At the time of this writing, there were WEDs within the MOI and Ministry of Defense (MOD). At the governorate level, the DWE drafts reports on the gender impact of social development programs and existing or upcoming laws, policies, and governmental decisions. It also provides follow-up on the implementation of gender-related strategies and policies.¹⁹ The non-binding character of the DWE recommendations limits its impact, but one of its positive achievements in promoting women’s integration in the security sector is a standardized practice of including at least one woman in the police recruitment panels for women wanting to join the police force. Previously, the panels were composed only of men.²⁰

Devised as specialized police units that can investigate violence against women and children, the FPU’s represent, in theory, a lifeline for those seeking to address issues of GBV. If a GBV or domestic violence case is reported at a local police station, for example, it would be referred to the FPU. However, the units are often only staffed by male officers with little or no training on GBV and the protection concerns of girls and women.²¹ Accordingly, many domestic violence cases are subjected to “reconciliation,” in which the survivor is asked to “reconcile” with the perpetrator instead of receiving further protection or support. For women in Iraq, this course of action can have lethal effects, including suicide.²² Notably, a hotline is operated by the FPU’s for reporting and referrals, although this resource is also staffed by men.

In the KRI, the KRG has created a High Committee on Women’s Affairs under the Prime Minister’s Office, as well as the Department for Combatting Violence Against Women (DCVAW) under the KMOI, which investigates GBV and cases of domestic violence. Yet, as a staff member of an

international organization working on GBV and gender discrimination told CIVIC, “Even at the DCVAW, which deals with domestic violence and is supposed to have the highest numbers of female police officers, most of the officers are still men.”²³ With only eight offices at the time of this writing, the DCVAW offices are also limited in geographic scope, thus far underserving the KRI region.

International Legal Commitments

Iraq has made several commitments within the framework of the WPS agenda and is a signatory to key international human rights law (IHRL) conventions that mandate progressive gender equality. Over the past several decades, the UN has passed ten resolutions on WPS that focus on both drawing attention to the unique impact that armed conflict has on women and girls and improving women’s inclusion in decision-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding processes. For example, Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, calls for the creation of “effective institutional arrangements to guarantee [women’s] protection and their full participation in the peace process.”²⁴ Resolution 2242, adopted in 2015, expresses deep concern about “the frequent underrepresentation of women in many formal processes and bodies related to the maintenance of international peace and security, the relatively low number of women in senior positions in political, peace and security-related national, regional and international institutions.” It calls on Member States to “ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention and resolution of conflict....”²⁵

Iraq ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 and, in 2014, passed a NAP to implement UNSC Resolution 1325.²⁶ Notably, Iraq was the first Arab country to create an action plan for WPS implementation. Despite this initial progress, however, little has been done to carry out the objectives of or fund the NAP, and Iraq has fallen behind other nations (globally and regionally) on gender equality. The NAP suffers from accountability and operational issues, particularly around funding and monitoring.²⁷ During the plan’s period of application (2014–2018), the Iraqi government devoted significant attention to immediate security concerns related to ISIS rather than focusing on long-term reforms. In addition, the government suffered from political infighting and high turnover among officials, which hampered legislative processes and appropriate budget allocations.²⁸

Moreover, Iraq maintains reservations to CEDAW. Notably, it maintains reservations to Article 2(f), which calls for signatories to “take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women,” as well as to the Option Protocol, which recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to receive complaints from individuals or groups on a country’s adherence to CEDAW.²⁹ The Committee is not able to monitor Iraq’s compliance with CEDAW if it does not ratify this protocol, which limits the accountability of Iraq’s government.

In December 2020, a new NAP was approved by the GOI.³⁰ Based on analysis by relevant stakeholders, the new NAP has some clear improvements over its predecessor. For example, the drafting process was more inclusive and involved consultations with civil society. The DWE, as well as provincial and ministerial WEDs, will play a greater role in the implementation and monitoring of the plan. Furthermore, the implementation of the second NAP aligns with activities being carried out in support of SSR by several international organizations, including the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNWOMEN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the European Union Assistance Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq), and the NATO mission Iraq (NMI). Gender mainstreaming is a cross-cutting element in the SSR program that

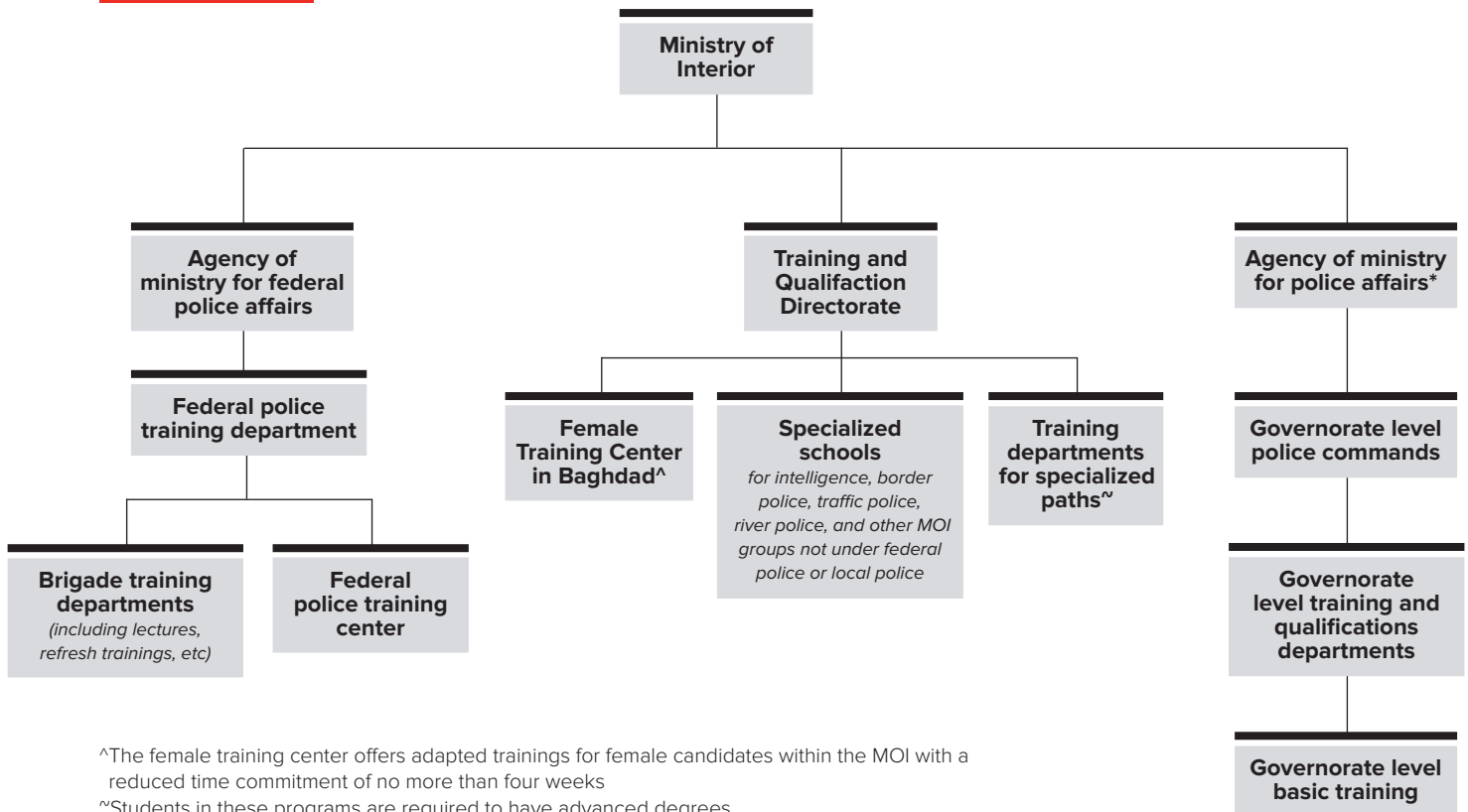
includes, but it is not limited to, improving the inclusion and participation of women in the security forces.³¹ As the UNDP noted, “It is not sufficient to merely enable women to attend the [police] trainings.” Rather, it is essential “that they are respected and can play a significant role in the Iraqi police force.”³²

Still, the second NAP has potential limitations. For example, its objectives, targets, and activities remain vague. Most activities and targets are worded in terms of conducting assessments, capacity building, and evaluations, but there are few indicators that establish numerical targets, such as a percentage increase in the number of women in a specific security force or in decision-making positions.³³ Nonetheless, the continued willingness of Iraqi authorities to work in partnership with these international organizations is important for progress in terms of implementing the new NAP and increasing the presence and roles of women in the security forces.

Forces in Federal Iraq and the KRI, Training Centers, and Additional Information on Ranks

Within Iraq, the security sector is divided between groups under the administration of Federal Iraq and groups under the administration of the Kurdistan Regional Government. These ministries all follow a Soviet-style hierarchy for commissioned officers—positions that require an advanced degree and training.³⁴ The infographics on the following page provide a simplified oversight and education structure view of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior forces, Kurdistan Region of Iraq Ministry of Interior forces, and Kurdistan Peshmerga and associated forces as referenced through this report. This graphics are not intended for reference beyond this report.

Federal Iraq

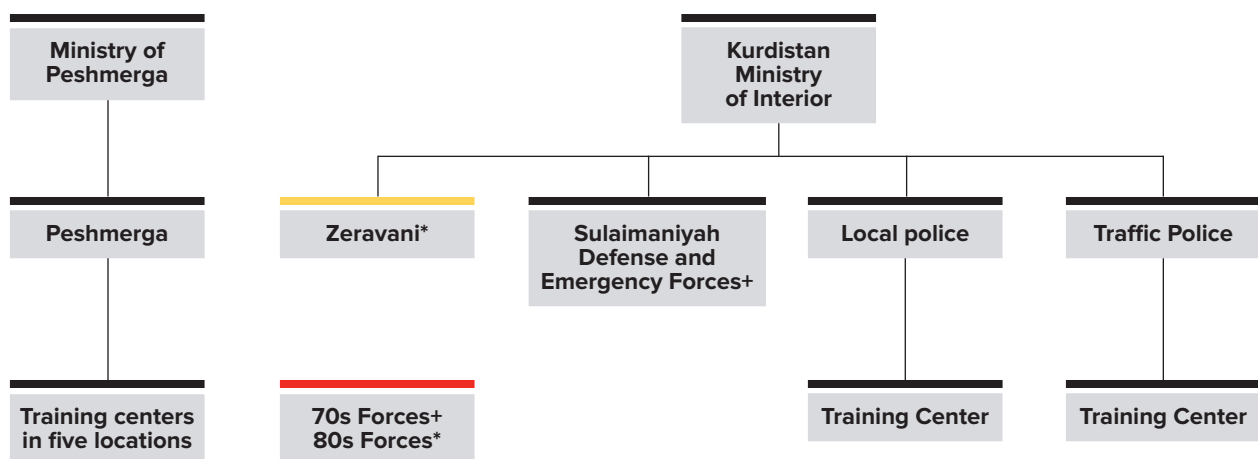


^The female training center offers adapted trainings for female candidates within the MOI with a reduced time commitment of no more than four weeks

~Students in these programs are required to have advanced degrees

*Local police also includes International Organization for Migration (IOM) community police units

Kurdistan Region of Iraq



+Forces linked to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

*Forces linked to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)

YELLOW linked to MOP via trainings at Erbil Training Center

RED linked to MOP via salaries, weaponry, and selected trainings

V. WOMEN IN IRAQ'S SECURITY FORCES

Throughout the course of this research, CIVIC was unable to confirm the number of women serving in the security forces and found that government ministries were unable or unwilling to provide reliable estimates. Indeed, research and engagement revealed that the number of female officers in the MOI, MOD, MOP, and KMOI is miniscule compared to overall numbers and that, of the women employed, few are in positions of considerable authority or decision-making power. It appears that women's engagement in and unique perspectives on security issues are missing throughout Iraq.

HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE KRI

There are many historical examples of women in the KRI taking up arms, engaging in hostilities, and serving in non-combat support roles, such as logistics and the provision of medical care.³⁵ KRI forces, mainly the Peshmerga, began incorporating women into their ranks decades ago, even including some in lesser combat roles.³⁶ There are records of Kurdish women taking up arms against the central Iraqi government and joining their husbands fighting in the mountains since the 1960s.³⁷ Women also participated in the Kurdish uprisings against the Baathist regime, albeit in small numbers. As one official from the MOP stated, "Kurdish women are different—life is hard here, so they're used to fighting."³⁸

In 1996, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) President Jalal Talabani established a female-only Peshmerga unit serving within the PUK Peshmerga forces. The PUK unit began with only four members and has since grown to be a brigade with hundreds of members.³⁹ The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) subsequently created a female-only Peshmerga brigade as well, and there are currently several such brigades in operation.⁴⁰ Moreover, both parties created female-only brigades in their respective military police forces: the KDP's Zeravani Brigades and the PUK's Sulaymaniyah Defense and Emergency Forces.⁴¹

Women's Roles

In several interviews, CIVIC asked civilians, "Have you ever seen a female officer [in your area]?" The near-unanimous response was "no, never."⁴² Iraqi officials who spoke with CIVIC agreed that the visibility of women in the police forces and military units is very low and that women most often perform administrative or medical duties. Indeed, our research found that women working within the militaries of both Federal Iraq and the KRI, regardless of their rank, work mostly in administrative positions and that they rarely are given operational and/or decision-making roles.⁴³

Federal Iraq

The lack of women in the security sector appears to be more acute in Federal Iraq. One government official from the MOI told CIVIC that there are 10,086 women working in the Ministry out of 600,000 total employees, meaning that women make up less than 2 percent of the total staff employed by the MOI. However, while the interviewee initially indicated that these 10,086 women were police officers, the official later clarified that only approximately 500 of those reported are commissioned female police officers. Roughly 4,000 are civilian government employees working in administrative positions within the Ministry's departments, and the remainder are civilian women hired on a



April 3, 2016: Female Zaravani officers practice tactical movement as part of infantry skills training.

contractual basis to perform other work.⁴⁴ Officials from international organizations that partner with the security forces note that estimates fail to differentiate between women working as civilian government employees in ministry offices and those who are ranked female police and military officers.⁴⁵ As an SSR stakeholder noted, “At the moment, the role of women in the MOD and the Iraqi Armed Forces is minimal and limited to support functions, in particular medicine, dentistry, and administration.”⁴⁶ Even at the training level, women are absent from the military colleges, and there are no commissioned female officers serving as trainers.⁴⁷

While there continues to be disagreement on whether female officers in the Iraqi army participated in military operations against ISIS through non-combat support roles, most interviewees told CIVIC that female army officers had not participated in these operations in any capacity.⁴⁸ Indeed, while conducting research on the military operations against ISIS in Mosul and Hawija, CIVIC did not find any records of ISF female personnel deployed in operations against ISIS, even in non-combat roles.⁴⁹ A female medic from the Iraqi Army told CIVIC, “They did not allow us to take part in the military operations [against ISIS]. Neither in the front line nor in the rear. ... Some female officers did not care because they preferred to stay home, but I wanted to carry my duties and help during the war.”⁵⁰

Within the police force in Federal Iraq, women represent a small number of commissioned officers and often serve in roles that are incommensurate with their levels of education and training. Many of the commissioned female officers are assigned to work at the Female Training Institute (FTI) in Baghdad, for example, rather than in field offices.⁵¹ Women’s participation in the Iraqi police is mostly limited to administrative roles and performing body scans of civilian women.⁵² Over a period of several years, CIVIC found that one of the only operational activities in which female officers engaged was accompanying male police officers seeking to arrest female suspects. Female officers

did not appear to conduct any other duty typical of police work, such as filing civilian complaints, conducting police investigations, and carrying out arrests.⁵³ A female police officer from Nineveh told CIVIC, “If they [the male police officers] need to arrest an ISIS woman in a house, because of tradition [cultural norms], they will call a female police officer to come with them to do the arrest and search the woman.” The officer said, however, that female officers’ participation ends after an arrest is made; investigations are only conducted by the male police officers.⁵⁴ Most of CIVIC’s interviews with women serving as police officers in Nineveh and Kirkuk corroborated that only male police officers collect testimony and conduct interrogations.⁵⁵

Even in the governorate-level FPUs, CIVIC found that women appear to represent a small portion of the total staff and are not employed in high-level, decision-making, or investigative roles.⁵⁶ “Most times the role of civil employees or female police officers at the FPU is limited to taking the victims to a medical center if they have serious injuries,” an interviewee told CIVIC. “More often than not, these female officers are junior officers who don’t get to record the victims’ complaints or to take part in the investigation.”⁵⁷ CIVIC was informed that few women are promoted to officer ranks that would allow them to play a more substantive role or lead on cases. When they are promoted, they are normally relocated to administrative roles at the directorates or at regular police stations rather than at the governorate-level FPUs.⁵⁸

One initiative that has seen higher numbers of women involved in the security sector is the community policing initiative, which the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been supporting Federal Iraqi forces within the MOI to implement since 2012. Community policing is a method of law enforcement seeking to strengthen relations between police and community and to promote trust-building between the state and its citizens. It aims to make citizens participants in crime prevention and response initiatives. According to the UN’s definition, it is “a strategy for encouraging the public to act as partners with the police in preventing and managing crime as well as other aspects of security and order based on the needs of the community.”⁵⁹ Women are able to participate more readily in this branch of law enforcement because it does not require them to be away from their families and does not require the off-site training or education levels that the traditional MOI forces do.

When CIVIC spoke with female participants in the community policing initiative, they reported interacting with female civilians and utilizing tools gained through IOM trainings to settle domestic issues. One member of the community police force specifically indicated that issues of “reputation” were not suitable matters for local police and that female community members were often in a better position to handle these issues.⁶⁰

THE KRI

The KRG has progressively included more women in its police and military forces in the last decade. In interviews with CIVIC, KRG officials repeatedly expressed their commitment to improving women’s access to high-ranking positions and career opportunities within the different security forces. Although they declined to provide any precise figures, they insisted that the integration of women in the security forces was “very good.”⁶¹ Through our research and long-term engagement with KRG security forces, however, CIVIC estimates that the percentage of females in the Peshmerga, Zeravani, and Sulaymaniyah Defense and Emergency Units is low. More broadly, government officials, members of the security forces, and international stakeholders agreed that women still represent a small percentage compared with the total number of officers within KRI security forces.⁶²

In general, CIVIC found that women in the police and military forces in the KRI have been promoted to higher ranks than those in Federal Iraq, with some female Peshmerga officers reaching the rank



February 24, 2020, Dohuk, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Female Peshmerga officer facilitates a protection of civilians training for Peshmerga officers at the Dohuk training academy. No female officers participated in the training.

of brigadier general.⁶³ However, some interviewees criticized the KRI for failing to promote women beyond this rank, as well as for failing to include them in decision-making or operational positions.⁶⁴ Indeed, while international media drew much attention to female members of the Peshmerga participating in anti-ISIS operations along the front lines, there is some debate about the roles these women actually filled. In interviews, MOP officials presented different perspectives on whether female officers took part in active hostilities and what bases they were stationed at. One officer explained that women may have been present at “less dangerous” bases that would have been positioned as “front-line, but not the most directly.”⁶⁵ Another official, however, offered a guarantee that female Peshmerga officers fought directly against the terrorist group.⁶⁶

While female police officers are also reportedly present in higher numbers in the KRI than in Federal Iraq, stakeholders raised similar concerns with CIVIC about their roles. They reported that female officers are being relegated to administrative jobs at the KMOI, within its delegations, and at police stations—positions with little or no engagement in receiving complaints or conducting investigations.⁶⁷

The establishment of the DCVAW and the subsequent creation of DCVAW police stations across the KRI does have the potential to set a precedent, as it means employing greater numbers of female police officers, social workers, psychologists, and legal officers to assist victims of domestic violence.⁶⁸ However, a negative consequence of this staffing and hiring approach is that most female police officers have been assigned to DCVAW offices, leaving normal police stations with little to no presence of female police officers.⁶⁹

VI. CHALLENGES TO WOMEN IN THE SECURITY FORCES

While there are no formal legal barriers to the full and active participation of women in the security forces in Federal Iraq and the KRI, CIVIC identified several formal and informal challenges that deter their recruitment, meaningful participation, and promotion. In interviews with CIVIC, civilians, members of the forces, and individuals within Iraqi government ministries have all expressed a desire to reverse this trend and see a large-scale increase in the number of female officers and women in leadership positions. Despite this aspiration for change in Iraqi culture, however, limitations from within the security forces and a lack of political will create a difficult environment for women seeking to enter the security forces and achieve successful, long-lasting careers.

Inclusion Challenges: Culture, Education, and Patriarchy

Culture

According to interviews and focus group discussions, the number one barrier to women's inclusion in the security forces is, simply, Iraqi culture. More broadly, individuals cited “tribal mentalities,” “traditional views,” “stigma and shame,” and “patriarchy” as pervasive norms embedded within communities, security forces, training departments, and the Federal Iraqi and Kurdish governments at large.⁷⁰ There is a mindset that women in offices may face harassment from male colleagues or clients and therefore bring shame to their families. Several civilians noted that families can face negative behavior from community members if they allow their women to pursue higher education or jobs outside of the home.⁷¹

The security sector poses an intensified threat regarding the defamation of women's characters due to the close working conditions and long shift times. Officers are often deployed to stations far from their homes and may be called on to serve overnight duty. Iraqi culture dictates that women should not be alone with men outside their family group, which prevents would-be female security officers from working in male-dominated offices, performing investigations or interrogations of male suspects, or enrolling in trainings conducted by and attended by male trainers and students.⁷² For many women in Iraqi society, these requirements are impossible to meet, or they may be met only with the recognition that one's reputation, and the reputation of one's family, will be damaged. A civilian in Kirkuk related a story in which a member of her extended family—a woman—applied for the police college. Once her intention was discovered by her tribe and family, her father became very angry and declared, “I will cut off her head.”⁷³

These conservative norms are, in general, more pervasive in Federal Iraq than in the KRI, and there appears to be a link between general education levels and the willingness of families and individual women to pursue security sector careers in the face of community stigma.⁷⁴

Education

There continues to be a gap in achievement between Iraqi men and women in terms of education.⁷⁵ As noted in the discussion on security force hierarchy, members of the KMOI, MOD, MOI, and MOP are required to have advanced degrees to become commissioned officers and ascend to higher ranks and leadership positions. CIVIC found that community mindsets around education continue to

deprioritize girls' and women's achievements in the academic sphere and place greater emphasis on household and domestic responsibilities.⁷⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this phenomenon, with children requiring additional supervision due to the suspension of in-person learning and school attendance. In addition, internally displaced persons (IDPs) experience extreme difficulty in accessing formal education while in impermanent housing or camps.⁷⁷

Patriarchy

A sense of male supremacy is heavily embedded in Iraqi culture, and men dominate power structures in public and private spheres. Division of household labor is highly unequal, and women are expected to bear the burden of domestic and familial tasks. This cultural mindset is a significant hurdle for women who wish to pursue higher education, as well as those who wish to pursue employment outside the home. Within this context, communities also attribute labor within the security sector to men and may question women who seek to become members of the security forces, undergo training, or pursue positions with higher levels of authority and/or community visibility.⁷⁸

In the professional sphere, patriarchal notions inhibit women's achievement potential and create an unfriendly atmosphere for women who seek to advance in their careers. As one female non-governmental organization (NGO) employee in Mosul noted, "I am in charge and they [male colleagues] hate it."⁷⁹ There are also negative perceptions about women's physical abilities and their ability to perform.⁸⁰

Inclusion Challenges from Within Forces: Harassment, Infrastructure, Policies, and Trainings

While culture serves as a barrier to women's inclusion in the security forces, there are also challenges from within the forces themselves. A lack of accountability and an overall perception that men may exhibit "bad behavior" toward women have garnered the security forces a generally negative reputation. Indeed, there are several issues, including harassment, infrastructure, policies, and trainings, that all contribute to the lack of women within the forces.

Harassment

As noted above, any perceived male harassment of a woman can bring shame upon her family. Especially in predominantly male settings, this threat is omnipresent. Several members of the security forces admitted that harassment of women employed in the security sector does occur, but they denied any first-hand knowledge of such events.⁸¹ Furthermore, officers told CIVIC that in instances of harassment, women will often request a transfer to a new department in order to avoid a continuation of the conflict.⁸² While there are formal complaint mechanisms for reporting harassment, these mechanisms often involve speaking directly to a (male) superior about behavior deemed inappropriate. For many women, this process is inaccessible due to cultural and personal beliefs.⁸³

Infrastructure

Women face significant infrastructural difficulties when seeking to join or maintain employment within the security sector. Notably, the presence of appropriate facilities for female Peshmerga trainees was highlighted by several female officers as a positive part of their overall experience in the MOP.⁸⁴ However, CIVIC found that within Federal Iraq, training facilities lack separate dormitories, restrooms, and trainers for women. Without these accommodations, female officers and new recruits cannot undertake the necessary studies to become commissioned members of the security forces.⁸⁵ The lack of gender-sensitive facilities is also present at checkpoints throughout the country, which

prevents women from being able to participate in overnight shifts and from conducting searches and interrogations at the same rate as their male colleagues.⁸⁶ Another concern within both Federal Iraqi and KRI forces is the lack of appropriately sized and tailored uniforms for women.⁸⁷ In one instance, for example, a female Peshmerga officer revealed that the sizing for regulation boots began at a 39.⁸⁸

Policies

A lack of gender-sensitive recruitment, retention, and promotion policies put women at a disadvantage within Iraq's security sector. There are age restrictions for officer recruitment that often coincide with child-bearing years, and eligibility for promotions may require women to extend their working hours in ways that conflict with their domestic responsibilities. One female officer within the MOP explained that while she was eligible and encouraged to pursue promotions, she was unable to do so because of her household duties.⁸⁹ Officers and stakeholders also indicated to CIVIC that women suffer from discrimination in the promotion process, noting that they are not promoted as quickly as men despite having the same education and years of experience.⁹⁰

Trainings

Access to trainings was cited by security officials, female civilians, and subject-matter experts as an issue of importance for women's inclusion in the security forces. As noted above, Federal Iraqi forces lack basic infrastructure to facilitate women's participation, but problems extend beyond physical classroom space. Trainings for officers occur in centralized locations and require students to be away from their families and domestic duties for days or weeks at a time. For many women, this is not possible due to family responsibilities or restrictions.⁹¹ Female officers also reported being passed over for trainings despite eligibility, with training spots being awarded to male colleagues instead.⁹² Without advanced and continuous training, female officers miss out on promotions.

With a few notable exceptions, such as the Female Training Institute in Baghdad and training facilities in Sulaymaniyah, there is also a dearth of female trainers to conduct women-only trainings. This is due to the lack of women in high-powered positions, and it contributes to some women's decisions not to pursue training because of cultural beliefs. One officer in Baghdad noted that there are women on staff at the military college, but they are employed as civilians. They teach courses or supervise PhD students in areas such as political science and legal studies.⁹³

Inclusion Challenges from Within Government: Budget, Legislation, and Political Will

The governments of Federal Iraq and the KRI have a significant impact on the number of women employed in the country's security forces and their potential for achievement. The governments oversee budgets for hiring, trainings, and infrastructure, and they have the potential to craft legislation that promotes women's overall advancement in Iraqi society and within key ministries like the MOI and MOP.

Budget

In conversations with CIVIC, officials from the MOI and MOP, as well as civilians and international non-governmental organization (INGO) representatives, all suggested that the primary government impediment to women's full and active participation in the security forces is the lack of budget for hiring new officers. Since the defeat of ISIS in 2017 and the subsequent economic downturn in Iraq, little to no hiring has been authorized for key security positions.⁹⁴ Several members of the police in Federal Iraq noted that no hiring had occurred due to a budget freeze and that the only way new officers could join the police force was in the case of an existing officer's death or retirement.

In such cases, the replacement officers have always been men. In Kirkuk governorate, the budget issue is further exacerbated by an ethnic struggle to maintain control of the governorate. Kirkuk was wrested from Kurdish control during the anti-ISIS operations, and some Kurdish civilians now fear an 'Arabization' campaign is ongoing. The central government in Baghdad has deployed primarily Arab forces to manage security within the area.⁹⁵

Legislation and Political Will

In addition to budget concerns, there is a lack of legislation and a perceived lack of political will from Baghdad and Erbil. As one interviewee stated, "they [MPs] are just there to serve their financial/political interests!"⁹⁶ Indeed, efforts aimed at women's integration into security forces, such as the MOP gender unit and elements of the second NAP, have yet to be fully implemented or given financial resources to achieve their goals. Without political will to support women's inclusion, there will be no movement on key issues like hiring freezes and creating suitable facilities for women to receive training.

Stakeholders raised concerns about the government's lack of will and concrete action for improving women's participation in the security forces despite statements and policies made by government officials in favor of more inclusion.⁹⁷ For instance, the KRG High Council of Women Affairs proposed creating Gender Units in each KRG ministry, including in the MOP, to promote women's inclusion in all KRG ministries, address gender discrimination, and tackle harassment. Despite a 2016 order signed by the KRI Prime Minister, however, the Gender Units have yet to be formed in several ministries, including the MOP.⁹⁸ Expressing frustration over this issue, a female Peshmerga officer said: "Whenever they send a letter or make a statement, they say that they welcome women integration in the [Peshmerga] force and that they encourage women to join, but in practice they don't implement the decisions to make this possible. If they favor so much gender equality, then why haven't they created and staffed yet the MOP gender unit?"⁹⁹

"...they say that they welcome women integration in the [Peshmerga] force... If they favor so much gender equality, then why haven't they created and staffed yet the MOP gender unit?"

- Ministry of Peshmerga Officer

VII. CONSEQUENCES OF WOMEN'S ABSENCE IN IRAQ'S SECURITY FORCES

The low number of women in Iraq's security forces and the limited roles available to female officers within both police and military institutions impacts the efficacy of security and intelligence operations and has adverse consequences for civilian protection, especially for female civilians. The same cultural norms that inhibit women's participation as officers and at higher levels within the security forces also dictate the ways in which civilian women do—or, more commonly, do not—interact with security forces for their own protection. As security forces increasingly interact with civilians in non-border patrol settings, it is imperative that well-trained female officers are stationed within the Federal Iraqi police, the KMOI, the MOI, and MOP groups throughout the country. Furthermore, because specific minority groups within Iraq, such as the Yazidis, faced targeted SGBV within their female populations from ISIS, the government must ensure that an adequate number of women are in the forces so that these women may file their claims and seek justice in a culturally sensitive and safe environment.¹⁰⁰

Tactical Challenges

In post-liberation Iraq, security forces are focused on myriad issues, including the pursuit of ISIS sleeper cells, drug trafficking, and other criminal activities.¹⁰¹ This work necessitates interaction with female civilians, which can take the form of interrogations, for example, or cordon and search operations. Without a robust cadre of female officers throughout the security sector, security forces across the country will continually face critical mission success challenges.

In discussions with officers based in Federal Iraq and the KRI, the issue of interacting with female civilians revealed gaps in policing and security.¹⁰² An officer engaged in anti-terror activities in Baghdad related a story about an operation to capture someone communicating with ISIS and aiding the group in guerilla-style attacks. The operation was conducted at a civilian home, and the force was ultimately unable to capture the suspect because it turned out she was a woman and the group had no female officers available to apprehend or interrogate her.¹⁰³ Similarly, the lack of female officers to conduct searches of female civilians at checkpoints is a weakness that exposes security forces and civilians to threats such as bombings.¹⁰⁴ One ISF officer related a story in which improper surveillance of female civilians resulted in casualties:

“[During the liberation of Hawija from ISIS], there was an ISIS woman who crossed our front lines disguised as a civilian with other women. She was wearing an abaya and *heimar* [face veil]. We welcomed them and gave them water and food. We were taking them to a safe place in a pickup truck, but this woman had a suicide vest and blew herself up surrounded by other women and children. Some of my soldiers died and some others were injured. Some civilian women were also injured.”¹⁰⁵

Experts suggest that diversity in any security force increases its overall effectiveness and its legitimacy among the population.¹⁰⁶ Interviewees agreed that incorporating women into decision-making and tactical roles would allow for a different gender perspective and additional knowledge, which could help security forces avoid civilian casualties and achieve security objectives.¹⁰⁷ Studies have also shown that the inclusion of women in ground security forces improves the forces' behavior in regards to civilian protection, especially in relation to the prevention of sexual violence and harassment.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, research indicates that women's participation in political

and security decision-making reduces the likelihood that armed conflict will occur, as women are, on average, less likely to support armed responses to conflict.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, women's participation in peacebuilding processes has similarly been found to increase the chances of de-escalation and support quicker transitions to peace, making it a vital part of the WPS agenda.¹¹⁰

Protection and Harm Mitigation

Women in Iraq face great difficulty when it comes to accessing security forces due to the cultural values and power structures within their communities. A 2020 IOM study conducted in Federal Iraq on community perceptions of security and police found that the majority of male and female respondents would not allow unaccompanied female family members to report problems to the police.¹¹¹ A high percentage of female respondents said they would not feel comfortable reporting a crime directly to the police on their own and that they would ask a male family member to report the problem to the police on their behalf. These findings align with CIVIC's conversations with civilians and security force officials. For example, a woman from Mosul declared, "there is no one protecting women."¹¹² A woman from Kirkuk stated, "If there is no woman in the police station, I cannot go—even if I am bleeding! I would bring shame to my family."¹¹³ Regarding cultural norms and stigma, a civilian in Hawija explained, "In this society, if a woman goes alone to the police station to file a complaint for whatever reason, their husbands would want to divorce them. There is a saying, 'you must wash your hands of this woman.'"¹¹⁴

The lack of access to security forces and the potential repercussions of attempting to access them impacts female civilians in several ways, from gathering required documentation to reporting harassment and abuse.¹¹⁵ Other factors, such as housing insecurity due to displacement, a lack of access to transportation in rural areas, and low literacy levels, can all compound the challenges women face. For example, female IDPs told CIVIC how male soldiers had asked for their phone numbers when they were crossing a checkpoint or exiting an IDP camp. This is not socially acceptable behavior, and women referred to these requests as attempts by the officers to flirt and engage in physical relations with them.¹¹⁶ Due to cultural and social sensitivities, such behavior can cause enormous stress for female civilians being stopped and interrogated by male officers. It also puts them at risk of stigmatization if their communities were to find out they had been under detention and interrogation by men.

Furthermore, despite efforts such as those represented by the FPU and DCVAW, domestic violence and GBV continue to greatly affect Iraqi girls and women.¹¹⁷ Within these agencies, the staff are predominantly male and ill-equipped to provide proper oversight or referrals for such sensitive cases. Of the cases that are reported to security forces, many are subjected to reconciliation activities.¹¹⁸ This reality has dangerous consequences. As a female civilian in Hawija stated, "For many women, they want to commit suicide because it is a really bad situation. We [women] don't have anywhere to go."¹¹⁹ Vulnerable populations such as IDPs and those in rural communities face heightened restrictions around accessing these dedicated departments and subsequent services and referral pathways. Simply put, without geographic scale and gender-sensitive staffing, there are inadequate protection mechanisms for female civilians.

As civilians, members of INGOs, and members of security forces in Federal Iraq and the KRI told us repeatedly, women do not feel comfortable sharing sensitive or complete details with male officers. Research in other countries has also shown that, more broadly, women often prefer sharing their experiences of domestic violence, GBV, and other forms of harm with female security officers rather than male officers.¹²⁰ In the case of Iraq, the above-mentioned IOM study showed that a significant number of women would report directly to the police if they had the option of reporting to a female police officer.¹²¹

VIII. STEPS FORWARD

The challenges CIVIC identified to women's meaningful and active participation in Iraq's security forces are difficult, but not insurmountable. At the community level, there needs to be more awareness-raising about the roles women can play in the military and police, as well as overall encouragement to improve the level of women's education. INGOs, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and the security forces themselves can all contribute to these efforts and work with religious, tribal, and local leaders to encourage behavior shifts.¹²² In many parts of the country, cultural norms around women's roles outside the home and as valuable security actors are already shifting, due in part to the mixing of conservative and more socially progressive communities that has resulted from widespread internal displacement post-ISIS and from visibility of women in the community policing program.¹²³ Officers and civilians who spoke with CIVIC expressed a hopeful mentality around this shift in attitudes. As one officer from Baghdad noted, "inshallah, in ten years we will get there."¹²⁴

Cultural changes alone will not increase women's participation in the security sector, however. As shown above, the lack of infrastructure and policies to support female officers through recruitment, training, and employment impinges on women's ability to join and maintain positions within the army and police. It also hampers their promotion to positions of authority and decision-making power. Furthermore, the omnipresent threat of harassment and the lack of accountability for transgressions create an undesirable atmosphere for women seeking to join the security forces. The MOD, MOI, MOP, and KMOI must ensure that women are supported throughout their security sector careers, from training to retirement. This includes focusing attention on the unique needs of female employees, including balancing domestic duties, safety from harassment, and proper equipment and training facilities. In addition, trainings should be revised to include an emphasis on POC issues with attention to the needs of women and girls.¹²⁵

The GOI and KRG can work to effectively increase the number of female officers employed in Iraq's military and police forces. While efforts such as the second NAP and the establishment of the FPU and DCVAWs are commendable, their impact is reduced without appropriate funding and political will. The governments must prioritize women's inclusion in Iraq's security forces and ensure that training facilities and ministries are appropriately funded to make necessary changes. The governments must also resume the hiring of officers and work with ministries to encourage the recruitment of women. The women CIVIC spoke with expressed a desire to join the security forces and/or see more female officers overall. As one woman from Hawija said, "I want to join the forces to protect myself and prove I am strong." The security officials CIVIC spoke with expressed a similar desire for more female officers and acknowledged the limitations imposed by the hiring freeze.¹²⁶ An officer from Baghdad noted, "If I opened applications for 100 female officers, I would have 5,000 applicants."¹²⁷

These efforts by stakeholders in Iraq can bring about changes to improve women's participation in security forces and improve overall protection outcomes for the Iraqi population. Not only do women have a vital role to play in increasing the security forces' operational efficacy, they are able to respond to the unique needs of female civilians both at a tactical level and a decision-making policy level.

IX. CONCLUSION

Iraq's security sector suffers from an acute lack of women in commissioned roles and in positions to command decision-making authority and influence policies that affect civilian protection. Of the few women occupying officer positions within the Iraqi army, the Federal Iraqi police, the Peshmerga, the KMOI forces, and other related security organizations, CIVIC found that they are most often performing in non-operational, non-combat administrative or medical roles. Several challenges contribute to women's inability to meaningfully participate in the security sector, including a conservative culture, infrastructure and policy issues within the forces, and a lack of political will from the governments in Baghdad and Erbil.

The gender imbalance in the Iraqi security forces has tangible and far-reaching consequences. Forces are prevented from reaching operational success due to the lack of female officers to interact with female civilians, and 49.4 percent of Iraq's population faces limitations in accessing security actors to address their protection concerns. Furthermore, Iraqi policies and practices suffer from a male bias perspective. They fail to incorporate the perspective of women, who are better equipped to consider the unique protection needs of girls and women.

As Iraq emerges from the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, legislators, community activities, and security force leaders should turn their attention to implementing the second NAP and mobilizing resources to achieve greater gender parity within the security sector. Progressive actions will contribute to improved security and stability for all Iraqis.

ENDNOTES

- 1 CIVIC interview with female non-commissioned police, #14, Mosul, March 2021.
- 2 Kristin Valasek, "Security Sector and Gender Reform," Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/publications/documents/tool_1.pdf; "Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan Development Toolkit," PeaceWomen, https://www.peacewomen.org/assets/file/national_action_plan_development_toolkit.pdf.
- 3 It is important to implement six additional resolutions on women, peace, and security that address sexual violence in conflict: UNSCR 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1960 (2010), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013) and 2242 (2015).
- 4 CIVIC interview with a staff member of an international organization supporting SSR in Iraq, conducted via Zoom, March 2021.
- 5 CIVIC interview with civilian, #39, Kirkuk Governorate, November 2021.
- 6 "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," World Economic Forum, March 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf. In addition, see the UN Human Development Index (2020), in which Iraq ranked 123rd out of 189 countries (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/latest-human-development-index-ranking>), as well as the UN Gender Inequality Index (2019), in which Iraq ranked 123rd out of 189 countries (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii>).
- 7 For the purposes of this report, "security forces" refers to the Federal Iraqi army, police in Federal Iraq, KRI military (Peshmerga and associated units), and forces under the KMOI (including the Zeravani and Sulaymaniyah Defense and Emergency Units). Together, these forces comprise the "security sector" to which the author refers throughout this report. "Protection outcomes" in this report refers to the results of actions taken based on tools, knowledge, best practices, and policies. by governments and security forces to improve protection and/or mitigate harm for civilians. They also include the results of actions taken by communities to act as effective agents of their own protection. These actions may lead to enhanced ability to report suspected terrorist activities, receive official signatures on necessary paperwork, and address domestic violence, among other activities.
- 8 See "Iraq's Constitution of 2005," Articles 14 and 16, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en.
- 9 As of December 2021, Iraq's population was estimated at 40,222,503 persons, with females comprising 49.4 percent of the total (see World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POPTOTL.FE.ZS?end=2020&locations=IQ&start=1960&view=chart>). On GBV in this context, see: Simona Foltyn, "Iraqi women struggle to escape abuse as domestic violence rises," *Al Jazeera*, February 12, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/2/12/iraqi-women-struggle-to-escape-abuse-as-domestic-violence-rises>; "At least 50 women killed themselves in Kirkuk in the first 6 months of 2021," *ANF News*, September 30, 2021, <https://anfenglish.com/rojava-syria/at-least-50-women-killed-themselves-in-kirkuk-in-the-first-6-months-of-2021-55216>.
- 10 "The Iraqi National Human Rights Plan Adopted by Council of Ministers," <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/NHRA/NAPIraq2011.pdf>.
- 11 "Iraq's Constitution of 2005," Articles 14 and 16, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iraq_2005.pdf?lang=en.
- 12 The CPA was established after the fall of the Baathist regime in order to govern Iraq through its transitional period. CPA orders remain in effect as of December 2021. Section 6.4 of CPA Order 22 reads: "Suitability for service in the New Iraqi Army will be determined on several criteria including, but not limited to: [...] (f) provided, however, no qualified person will be denied the opportunity to serve on the basis of race, ethnic or regional origin, religion, creed or tribal affiliation." See "Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 22: Creation of a New Iraqi Army," https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/cpa-iraq/regulations/20030818_CPAORD_22_Creation_of_a_New_Iraqi_Army.pdf.
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- 42 CIVIC interviews with civilians in Kirkuk governorate, #39–#44, November 2021; CIVIC interviews with civilians in Mosul, #45–#47, November 2021; CIVIC focus group with civilians in Mosul, November 2021. In one interview, a civilian from the Sinjar area indicated that they had observed the presence of female officers and clarified that this was due to the presence of 70 and 80 forces in the area.
- 43 CIVIC interview with member of international organization working on SSR, #1, Erbil, March 2021; CIVIC interview with member of international organization working on SSR, #3, Baghdad, March 2021; CIVIC interview with member of international organization working on SSR, #4, Erbil, March 2021. Notably, the 70 and 80 forces are not under direct command of the KRG and the MOP. They are under the control of the PUK and KDP, respectively. Following the 2014 ISIS takeover of vast parts of the country, international partners supporting the KRI security forces began pushing for the reform and depoliticization of the Peshmerga forces. Several brigades from each party were placed under the control of the MOP. Although this new force is meant to be independent and free from the influence of political parties, the parties still exercise considerable influence over the commanders. The force remains small in numbers compared with the 70s and 80s forces. Officials at the MOP told CIVIC that both the 70 and the 80 forces each had a women-only brigade.
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Mohammed Noruldeen/CIVIC Photo

April 10, 2021, Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Female Peshmerga officers participate in a CIVIC training on protection of civilians at the Erbil training center.

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