

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

*Issues regarding single women,
documents and illegal exit*



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

DRU DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL

This report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) or the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

The report is a synthesis of information gathered from different sources, and it brings together condensed information in a relevant manner for the reader's COI needs and it organises information together thematically to form a coherent whole of the topic in question, instead of listing or quoting information source by source.

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Executive summary

The conservative attitude of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) society towards single women affects their situation in many ways. The prevalence and the consequence of the attitude depends on a number of factors, e.g. area, family, civil status, age, having children etc.

There are no major legal obstacles for single women in KRI with regard to freedom of movement, access to housing, healthcare, education and labour market.

In practice, however, single women face several challenges, e.g. verbal, sexual harassment, limited available jobs, the authorities' reluctance to allow single women to live on their own, and difficulties in obtaining civil documents.

Concerning access to protection against violence, women in KRI have experienced improvements during the last 20 years. Examples of this improvement include the adoption of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law of 2011, the establishment of the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW), the establishment of offices throughout KRI that provide protection to women who are subject to domestic violence and the taking over shelters by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Women's access to protection are nonetheless negatively affected by several factors, including a lack of financial support and negative social attitudes towards women subjected to domestic violence, women shelters and women NGOs. The physical conditions at some shelters are poor and there are no exit strategies for the residents. As a result, many women choose to stay in a violent relationship, give up filing a case against their perpetrator, or they choose to leave the shelter and go back to their families. Domestic violence against women still occurs in KRI and the perpetrators are either not prosecuted or receive lenient punishments.

Forged documents and manipulated genuine documents obtained through bribe are limited in KRI. This is due to a number of factors such as the digitalisation of civil documents in recent years, requirement of authenticity proofs for official documents and access to central databases in Federal Iraq.

It is very difficult to exit illegally through Erbil International Airport (EIA) due to thorough security measures by the security forces of KRI. And very few people, mainly from Iraq's neighbouring countries, try to leave the country illegally via EIA.

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Introduction and methodology

The report at hand is the product of a joint mission conducted by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS), the Country of Origin Information Division, and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Asylum Department Copenhagen, to Erbil in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) from 29 October to 9 November 2022.

The purpose of the mission was to collect information on three issues recurring in cases regarding Iraqi asylum seekers in Denmark:

- a) Situation of single women in KRI
- b) Documents in KRI
- c) Exit via Erbil International Airport (EIA)

The report focuses on the general situation of single women, including their access to protection. The report also deals with the prevalence of forged documents. Finally, security checks at EIA and possibility to leave KRI via EIA by paying bribe is a third subject for the report.

The terms of reference (ToR) for the mission were drawn up jointly by DIS and DRC, in consultation with the Danish Refugee Appeals Board as well as an advisory group on COI ('Referencegruppen').¹ ToR is included at the end of the report (Appendix 2).

The report is written in accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology² and is based on a synthesis of the information obtained from oral and written sources.

As regards the oral sources, the delegation consulted 10 interlocutors, comprising women NGOs, lawyers, a legal expert, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), KRG's Directorate of Combating Violence against Women (DCVAW) and a medical doctor. The sources interviewed were selected by the delegation based on the expertise, merit and role of each source relevant to the mission. All sources were consulted either in person in Erbil or via WhatsApp. The sources were asked how reference might be made to them in the report. One source requested anonymity for the sake of discretion and upholding tolerable working conditions. All sources are referenced in the report according to their own request.

All consulted sources have been selected by virtue of their expertise on the topics of this report. The sources were informed about the purpose of the mission and that their statements would be included in a public report. The minutes from the meetings with the sources were forwarded to them for approval, giving them a chance to amend, comment or correct their statements to ensure that the minutes reflect the shared information most accurately. All sources have approved their statements, which can be found in Annex 1.

In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The individual sources should not be held accountable for the content of the report.

¹ The group consists of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Amnesty International in Denmark, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives of a Christian organisation (Danish European Mission) and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

² EUAA, *Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology*, June 2023, [url](#)

For the sake of transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

The report does not include all details and nuances provided by the sources. During the interviews, sources sometimes highlighted issues that are not addressed in ToR. Since these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in Appendix 1, but they are not addressed in the report itself. For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The intention hereby is to make it easier to find the exact place of a statement in the meeting minutes.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 15 February 2023.

The report can be accessed from the website of DIS, www.us.dk, and DRC, www.asyl.drc.ngo. It is available to all stakeholders working within the field of refugee status determination as well as to the general public.

Abbreviations

DCVAW	Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EIA	Erbil International Airport
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GSIO	Gender Studies and Information Organization
ISIS/ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham/Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
MOLSA	Minister of Labour and Social Affairs
Mukhtar	Head of local administration
PMF/PMU	Popular Mobilization Forces/Units
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
ToR	Terms of Reference
WEO	Women Empowerment Organization
WOLA	Women's Legal Assistance Organization

1. Situation of single women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

1.1. General conditions

Iraqi laws regulating family matters, religion, labour, inheritance and criminal procedure are discriminatory against women. Women are subject to discrimination in areas such as employment, education, housing, judicial procedure, marriage, divorce, child custody, owning and managing properties or businesses.³

Gender equality in KRI is considered to be relatively higher than in Federal Iraq, particularly in legal terms.⁴ According to Women Empowerment Organization (WEO), the situation of single women is generally better in KRI than in the rest of Iraq. In some areas of Federal Iraq, including Baghdad, even hotels do not accept single women as guests.⁵ Despite the improvement of legal protection for women in KRI, however, women are still subject to discrimination⁶ and violence.⁷

1.1.1. Attitudes towards single women

In general, the KRI society has a conservative attitude towards single women.⁸ Because of this attitude and the traditional norms, it is difficult for a woman in KRI to live on her own.⁹ The society always questions the reason why a single woman is alone and/or lives alone.¹⁰ Many families perceive a single woman as an economic burden for the family.¹¹ Due to social norms, the society in KRI generally expects that a person (especially women) get married when they reach a certain age.¹²

The social attitude towards single women varies depending on a number of factors, including civil status, the age, the area and the family:

- a) Civil status: The social attitude towards divorced women is more negative than the attitude towards unmarried women or widows.¹³ The society tends to blame divorced women and accuse them of being the reason for the divorce. This also applies to the woman's own family.¹⁴ The number of divorces has been rising in the whole KRI,¹⁵ however, official statistics on divorce rate across the country cannot be verified.¹⁶ After a divorce, many families tend to not want to take the woman back to live with them. The General Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW) meets a lot of such cases in their work.¹⁷ However, divorced women and widows usually

³ USDOS, *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴ Kaya, Z. N., *Gender equality in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan*, LSE's Middle East Centre Blog, 5 January 2018, [url](#)

⁵ WEO: 5

⁶ USDOS, *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

⁷ Inside Arabia, *Alarming Increase in "Honor Killing" of Kurdish and Iraqi Women*, 1 January 2021, [url](#)

⁸ GSIO: 1; WOLA: 4; Dr. Dilshad: 12; Hama: 8, 19; WEO: 12

⁹ GSIO: 6; WEO: 1; HAMA: 9, Legal expert 4

¹⁰ WOLA: 2; ASUDA: 1

¹¹ WOLA: 3; DCVAW: 1

¹² WOLA: 3; DCVAW: 1

¹³ GSIO: 1; WOLA: 5; Legal expert: 5

¹⁴ GSIO: 1

¹⁵ DCVAW: 2; EUAA, *Iraq – Targeting of individuals 2022*, January 2022, [url](#), p. 82

¹⁶ EUAA, *Iraq – Targeting of individuals 2022*, January 2022, [url](#), p. 82

¹⁷ DCVAW: 2

return to live with their own family.¹⁸ Divorced women and widows face huge challenges in the Iraqi society with regard to social control; they are extremely vulnerable, especially if they are not economically independent.¹⁹

- b) Family: According to Women’s Legal Assistance Organization (WOLA) if the family of a single woman is educated and culturally open, they may accept that she lives alone above a certain age, for instance 30 years.²⁰
- c) Area: The attitude towards single women also varies to some extent from area to area.²¹ For instance, the society in Sulaymaniyah is relatively more progressive and open in its attitude towards single women than Dohuk and Erbil, which are more closed and conservative in this regard.²² In addition, single women and girls face more severe issues (e.g. early marriages) in rural areas than women living in the cities.²³
- d) Age: Single women over 40 years of age are considered “old girls” by the society, and they tend to be subjected to verbal harassment. Their families may take advantage of their physical labour, and they tend to be forced to get married (often to their cousins) by their families.²⁴
- e) Having children: It is more difficult for a divorced woman to live alone than if she lived with a child due to social norms and security, according to WOLA.²⁵

DCVAW deals with cases of single women who have problems with different forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. There has been an increasing number of such cases on the social media in recent years.²⁶

According to WOLA, due to the social norms and the obstacles it entails for single women, many women choose to remain in an unhappy marriage with their husbands rather than getting divorced and going back to their families or facing the challenges of living alone as single women.²⁷

1.1.2. Freedom of movement

There are no legal obstacles for a single woman to travel alone inside KRI.²⁸ She can travel alone and buy a ticket herself.²⁹ According to social norms, however, she needs permission from her parents to travel from one city to another, regardless of whether she is under or above 18.³⁰

¹⁸ Legal expert: 5; WOLA: 7

¹⁹ Legal expert: 5

²⁰ WOLA: 2

²¹ HAMA: 9; WOLA: 4; GSIO: 8

²² WOLA: 4; GSIO: 8

²³ WOLA: 4; DIS, *Women and men in honour-related conflicts*, November 2018, [url](#), p. 13

²⁴ DCVAW: 1; WOLA: 3

²⁵ WOLA: 7

²⁶ DCVAW: 3

²⁷ WOLA: 7; Dr. Dilshad: 10

²⁸ Legal expert: 1; WOLA: 8

²⁹ GSIO: 4

³⁰ WOLA: 8

In general, women in KRI enjoy more freedom of movement today than 20 years ago.³¹ Women’s freedom of movement is generally better in KRI than in Federal Iraq.³²

Several factors have an impact on whether a woman needs permission from her male family members in order to move around Iraq. This includes her family’s cultural norms and values, her area of origin, her age and her marital status. Conservative families tend to impose larger movement restrictions on their female members than families that are more liberal. Women in rural areas face more restrictions on their movement than women in the cities. And there are more restrictions on the freedom of movement of young women compared to older women³³

A single woman travelling alone is likely to get questions about her destination and place of residence at checkpoints, especially if it is late at night.³⁴ She risks being subjected to verbal harassment by the security forces at checkpoints, taxi drivers and others, especially if she is young. The harassment is often limited to verbal harassment,³⁵ but there have been cases of sexual harassment and molestation.³⁶

According to a legal expert, there are no legal or social barriers for a divorced woman to travel abroad alone with her children. And she does not need the permission of the children’s father to take them with her as long as she is the guardian of the children (usually until the children turns 15).³⁷ However, a divorced woman needs the consent of the children’s father to get a passport for the children even if she is the guardian.³⁸ A married woman needs the permission of her husband to travel abroad with the children.³⁹

1.1.3. Access to housing

Single women have the right to rent and buy property and there is no law that prohibits women from buying and renting their own place.⁴⁰

However, according to almost all sources consulted on this issue, it is very difficult in practice for single women to obtain permission from the authorities to rent or buy a house to live on their own. When a person wants to rent or buy a property, he or she must obtain a permission from the local internal security forces (*Asayish*)⁴¹ to be able to rent or buy that property. When it comes to single women, the local *Asayish* tend not to grant the permission necessary to conduct the lease or the purchase.⁴² Only one source mentioned that a single woman from KRI does not need an approval from the *Asayish* to rent or buy a property and to move from one area to another in KRI.⁴³ Another source stated that the approval from the *Asayish* is only needed if a person wants to rent a place, and not if he or she wants to buy a property.⁴⁴

³¹ Legal expert: 2

³² GSIO: 3

³³ GSIO: 2

³⁴ WOLA: 9

³⁵ GSIO: 4; WOLA 10

³⁶ WOLA: 10

³⁷ Legal expert: 3

³⁸ WOLA: 15; HAMA: 4

³⁹ Legal expert: 3

⁴⁰ GSIO: 5

⁴¹ The *Asayish* are the internal security forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), responsible for domestic security throughout the region. EUAA, *Iraq, Targeting of individuals*, January 2022, [url](#)

⁴² GSIO: 6; WEO: 1, 2; WOLA: 6; ASUDA: 1; Hama: 6, 8; DCVAW: 2

⁴³ Legal expert: 4

⁴⁴ WEO: 3

Sources explained that the Asayish's reluctance to approve single women's lease or purchase of a house is primarily due to the fact that the society does not accept that single women live alone without their family.⁴⁵

House owners do not dare to allow a person to stay in a property without the Asayish's approval. Even public services like electricity are not provided without the Asayish's approval.⁴⁶ An unmarried woman who desperately needs to rent a place to live on her own must either take her parents to the Asayish office to express their consent with her living alone or make her parents rent the place in their names and then she lives there instead of them.⁴⁷

The authorities' tendency not to approve that a single woman can rent a house to live on her own puts pressure on women to get married.⁴⁸

However, sources mentioned different factors that may have an impact on the Asayish's decision on whether to approve or reject an application from a single woman to rent or buy a house:

- a) Social position: According to Gender Studies and Information Organization (GSIO), a woman's social position affects her ability to live on her own. If a woman is a doctor or a public employee, her source of income is known and consequently, she would most likely obtain an approval to rent an apartment on her own. It is particularly single women from the working class who have difficulties in obtaining the Asayish's approval.⁴⁹
- b) Civil status: The society is more receptive and respectful towards widows than towards single, unmarried women or divorced women, according to the women organisation ASUDA. The authorities and the society are less willing to assist these two groups and the Asayish tend not to give them the approval.⁵⁰ According to another source, it is particularly difficult to obtain such approval for unmarried, single women if they have a family they can live with.⁵¹ Widows are sometimes allowed to stay in the same house where they lived with their husband.⁵²

Divorced women are legally allowed to live alone if they can present a Housing Card⁵³ provided that they are the head of the family. However, divorced women are expected to go back to their own family and live with them.⁵⁴ A single woman with children can push the authorities through legal ways to register her as the head of the family and thereby obtain the Housing Card, which makes it possible for her to live alone. However, it is a difficult process, which may take long time, and the authorities may deliberately extend the bureaucratic process to put pressure on the woman to change her mind and live with her extended family.⁵⁵

⁴⁵ GSIO: 6; WOLA: 6, 7; ASUDA: 1; Hama: 8; Legal expert: 4

⁴⁶ GSIO: 6

⁴⁷ Hama: 7

⁴⁸ DCVAW: 2

⁴⁹ GSIO: 6, 9

⁵⁰ ASUDA: 1

⁵¹ Hama: 6

⁵² MOLSA: 1

⁵³ For more information on the Housing Card, see section 1.1.7

⁵⁴ WOLA: 7

⁵⁵ Hama: 8

- c) Having children: According to GSIO, a divorced mother will be allowed to live on her own with her children, while it is almost impossible for a single, unmarried woman without children to get an approval.⁵⁶
- d) Coming from outside or inside Iraq: GSIO assessed that it is easier for a single woman who comes from outside Iraq (either a foreigner or an Iraqi expat) to obtain an approval to live on her own compared to single women already living in the country.⁵⁷ WOLA found that it is more difficult to get a permission from the Asayish if the woman is from Federal Iraq or from a neighbouring country compared to a woman coming from KRI.⁵⁸
- e) Age: It is specially women between the age of 18 and 50 who face difficulties in obtaining the approval from the Asayish. It is easier for women over 50 to obtain such permission.⁵⁹
- f) Area: The strictness of the authorities regarding whether to permit single women to live on their own may vary from area to area depending on a number of factors, e.g. the person who is head of the Asayish in the area and the socio-cultural features of the area. The authorities are less strict with women in urban areas than in the rural areas. In rural areas, one finds more families who do not want a single, female family member to live on her own than in the cities.⁶⁰ Moreover, it is easier for single women to get the Asayish permission in certain areas such as the Christian area in Erbil, Ain Kawa,⁶¹ or in new residential compounds in Sulaymaniyah.⁶² According to GSIO, Sulaymaniyah is generally considered to be a more open and liberal city with regard to the attitude towards single women than Erbil and Duhok. Therefore, it is more accepted that single women live on their own in Sulaymaniyah than in other areas in KRI.⁶³
- g) Lack of alternatives: According to the consulted lawyer Hama, it is possible for a single woman to obtain the Asayish's approval if she can prove that she has no choice but to live on her own. For instance, if a woman in Sulaymaniyah gets a job in Erbil and she has no family or relatives in Erbil to stay with, the Asayish would give the approval. However, even in such situations, it is not easy to obtain the approval, and the Asayish will ask the woman many questions about her need to live alone before permitting her to rent a place.⁶⁴ In addition, if a girl or woman does not have a family or does not have males among her closest family members, she will be allowed to rent a house.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ GSIO: 6, 7

⁵⁷ GSIO: 7

⁵⁸ WOLA 6

⁵⁹ WEO: 2

⁶⁰ Hama: 9

⁶¹ WEO: 2

⁶² WOLA: 6

⁶³ GSIO: 8

⁶⁴ Hama: 7

⁶⁵ WEO: 2

1.1.4. Access to healthcare

According to the Sulaymaniyah-based medical doctor Zino Dilshad,⁶⁶ public healthcare in KRI is free or very cheap.⁶⁷ In KRI, there are many public hospitals; however, the quality of services at these hospitals are low. Private hospitals with good and high quality services are available but expensive. People who do not have a good income, including single women who usually face difficulties finding a job, will not be able to afford the services at the private hospitals and clinics.⁶⁸

Emergency hospitals are free, but when it comes to non-emergency consultations like influenza or a minor infection, one must pay a small amount to see the doctor (between 50 cents and 1 USD).⁶⁹

It is not necessary to show ID to receive treatment at hospitals. Doctors at public hospitals do not ask the patients to identify themselves or to inform the doctors about their address or place of origin. No one is denied treatment at hospitals. A single woman does not need to be accompanied by a male guardian to receive treatment at hospitals.⁷⁰

Single women in need of medical treatment due to domestic violence

At least once every one or two months, Dr. Dilshad sees female patients who need treatment due to violence and abuse by their father, brother or other family members. While half of the patients in such cases want Dr. Dilshad to fill out a medical report to be used against the perpetrator in court, the other half only ask for medical treatment and deny that their injuries were caused by violence committed by family members even though this was the case.⁷¹

According to Dr. Dilshad, women who want a medical report to be used as evidence in court must go to the police first to get a paper, which the doctor will then fill out. Therefore, women usually come to the hospital together with a police officer. When the doctor has filled out the medical paper, it is handed over to the woman herself or the police officer following her.⁷²

When Dr. Dilshad receives a woman who requests a medical report, she will make an examination of the woman's body and describe the different wounds and bruises objectively in the medical report. The medical report, which the doctor writes, must be filled in within 24 hours after the woman has received the wounds. The doctor does not mention the cause of the wounds but describes solely the bruises, their numbers and locations on the body and whether they were caused by an external or internal factor. Dr. Dilshad believes that in the event the bruises are more than 24 hours old, it would be possible for the woman to go to a specialised doctor to get a medical report to be used in court.⁷³

The public hospitals do not keep records of patients' previous consultations, diagnosis and examinations, and there is no central registration database of the patients and their visits. Therefore, if a woman visits for

⁶⁶ The source now works as resident doctor at a hospital in Chamchamal, which is a city between Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. She graduated from University of Medicine in 2019. She has previously worked as a doctor for UNHCR in Syrian refugee camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and for different NGOs, e.g. Kurdistan Save the Children. This section is almost entirely based on information from this source.

⁶⁷ Dr. Dilshad: 1

⁶⁸ Dr. Dilshad: 2

⁶⁹ Dr. Dilshad: 3

⁷⁰ Dr. Dilshad: 4; Hama: 10

⁷¹ Dr. Dilshad: 5. For more information on the prevalence of violence, see section 1.2 'Prevalence of Violence'

⁷² Dr. Dilshad: 6

⁷³ Dr. Dilshad: 7

instance a hospital for the fourth time, it is not possible for the doctor to see the records from the three previous visits.⁷⁴ Private hospitals keep records of all the patients, their medications and diagnosis in a central system.⁷⁵

Dr. Dilshad has seen cases of female victims of domestic violence who had attempted suicide, after they had kept silent about the violence for a long time.⁷⁶

The conservative culture and the traditional norms and values of the KRI society cause more problems for women than men. An example of this is out-of-wedlock pregnancy, which is a major issue in KRI. Abortion is illegal in KRI unless the mother is in risk of dying due to pregnancy. There are still cases of women being disowned or in rare situations murdered by their families because they get pregnant outside of marriage. Most of these women do not know what to do and end up having illegal abortions and face a lot of medical issues.⁷⁷

Consent for surgery

According to WOLA, in order for a child to undergo a surgery, the consent of the father of the child is required. In the event the father is not present, or not willing to give the consent, or if the mother has the custody, other family members can give the consent to the surgery.⁷⁸

Dr. Dilshad mentioned that if a child of a single mother needs to undergo a surgery, the required consent to undertake the operation could be given by any adult first degree family member (i.e. a brother, a sister, the mother or the father).⁷⁹ The relationship between the patient and the relative must be documented.⁸⁰

In the event a caesarean section is needed in a childbirth, there must be a consent from a male relative. In case the woman does not have a husband, the consent could be given by the woman's father, brother, or another male relative.⁸¹

1.1.5. Access to education

A girl or a woman will be allowed by her family to attend school depending on the area of origin of her family and her family's social class. Families from cities will allow their daughters to go to school more often than families from the countryside, who have a more conservative mind-set. Families from the cities who are poor and cannot afford to send all their children to school tend to send their sons to finish their studies instead of their daughters. There are families now, however, where girls and boys are given the same chance to continue their studies.⁸²

Enrolment of one's children in schools

Generally, a single woman who wants to get an education herself or to register her children at a school will not need a male family member's consent unless she is under the age of 18.⁸³

⁷⁴ Dr. Dilshad: 8

⁷⁵ Dr. Dilshad: 9

⁷⁶ Dr. Dilshad: 11

⁷⁷ Dr. Dilshad: 12

⁷⁸ WOLA: 16

⁷⁹ Dr. Dilshad: 13

⁸⁰ Hama: 10

⁸¹ Dr. Dilshad: 14

⁸² GSIO: 11

⁸³ GSIO: 10

A consulted lawyer stated that it is possible for single women to enrol their children in school if they present certain certificates: widows should present the death certificate of their late husband; and divorced women should submit the divorce document in order to enrol their children in school. As regards divorced women, if the father is the guardian of the child after the divorce, he is required to be present in order to enrol the child in school. If it is the mother who is the guardian, she only needs to provide a document called ‘proof of guardianship’ issued by the court upon the divorce, which proves that she is the guardian of the child. ‘Proof of guardianship’ can be used in any legal matter regarding the children, and it makes it unnecessary for the mother to submit copies of the father’s documents or for the father to be present in such situations.⁸⁴

If the children are not registered in the public records and do not have documents such as ID cards it will be difficult to register them in schools.⁸⁵

1.1.6. Access to labour market

Iraq has one of the highest female unemployment rate in the world where 9 out of 10 women are unemployed.⁸⁶ Single women face difficulties in finding jobs in KRI.⁸⁷

According to GSIO, many single women in KRI, especially young women, are trying to establish their own businesses and market their products online.⁸⁸ The deteriorating economic situation in KRI has made it more acceptable for families that the female members of the family work in places like shopping centres. In addition, the field of nursing has become more attractive for women to work within compared to before.⁸⁹ Women prefer to work as teachers because of long holiday possibilities. One also finds women occupying low-ranking administrative positions as well as working as lawyers, doctors etc.⁹⁰

According to a Danish Refugee Council (DRC) report from September 2022, the income-generating opportunities open to women in Iraq are limited by gender norms, which cause many female-headed households to rely on their late husband’s pension or the public welfare system for income.⁹¹

Employment in the public sector

There are no legal obstacles for single women to apply for a job in the public sector.⁹² The World Bank reported in 2019 that almost 80% of employed women in KRI were occupied in the public sector, whilst only 1 out of 10 women worked in the private sector.⁹³ Nevertheless, only 30 % of employees in the public sector are women.⁹⁴

Usually, families prefer that their female family members are employed in the public sector, even though the salaries are lower than in the private sector. Nevertheless, as KRG has not been paying the full salaries

⁸⁴ Hama: 1

⁸⁵ GSIO: 12

⁸⁶ Middle East Research Institute (MERI), *9 out of 10 Iraqi women stay out of the job market*, [url](#)

⁸⁷ ASUDA: 2

⁸⁸ GSIO: 17

⁸⁹ GSIO: 18

⁹⁰ GSIO: 19

⁹¹ DRC, *Life in the margins*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 21

⁹² MOLSA: 2

⁹³ The World Bank, *Helping women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to find jobs*, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁴ MOLSA: 2; MERI, *9 out of 10 Iraqi women stay out of the job market*, [url](#)

to their employees for a long time, people, including women, have increasingly been seeking jobs in the private sector.⁹⁵

Families nowadays are encouraging their daughters to join the security forces, the armed forces as well as the law-enforcement forces in KRI. It is possible for women to get jobs there and there are some privileges and benefits given to employees in these forces. There are many women working for the Asayish at Erbil International Airport.⁹⁶

In the public sector, women receive the same salary as men if they do the same work. In the private sector, the salary depends on the individual employee's education.⁹⁷

Challenges regarding access to labour market

There are a number of factors affecting the situation of single women in the labour market in KRI, including social and cultural norms,⁹⁸ socioeconomic conditions, types of available jobs, the area, the woman's social position, age etc.⁹⁹

In general, there are few job opportunities in KRI even for people with high educational degrees. However, most available jobs suit males better than females. Many jobs require night shifts or hard physical work, and it is socially not acceptable that women get these types of jobs.¹⁰⁰

The social position of a woman has an impact on her possibility to get a job. It will be much easier for a woman with connections to get a job than a woman from lower social classes. In general, regardless of educational degree, the better connections a man or a woman has, the better possibilities will he or she have to get a job.¹⁰¹

The older a single woman is, the more difficult it is for her to get a job.¹⁰²

Single women living alone face challenges, for instance when it comes to travelling alone or having jobs that require working long and late hours.¹⁰³

DCVAW mentioned that a problem for many working, single women is that their parents or brothers confiscate their income.¹⁰⁴

Sexual harassment and exploitation in the labour market

Sources mentioned sexual harassment¹⁰⁵ and exploitation¹⁰⁶ as problems that single women are facing in the labour market. Examples of exploitation include not receiving salaries or working without contracts. ASUDA mentioned that a major issue for women, not only in KRI but all over Iraq, is that the educational system does not prepare them for the labour market's realities. In general, women lack knowledge and

⁹⁵ GSIO: 17

⁹⁶ GSIO: 20

⁹⁷ GSIO: 21

⁹⁸ GSIO: 13; MOLSA: 2; MERI, *9 out of 10 Iraqi women stay out of the job market*, [url](#)

⁹⁹ GSIO: 13

¹⁰⁰ GSIO: 14; MERI, *9 out of 10 Iraqi women stay out of the job market*, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ GSIO: 15

¹⁰² GSIO: 16

¹⁰³ WOLA: 2

¹⁰⁴ DCVAW: 3

¹⁰⁵ ASUDA: 2, 3; GSIO: 14; WEO: 4; MOLSA: 3

¹⁰⁶ ASUDA: 2, 3

confidence to protect themselves against exploitation in the labour market. The risk of harassment and exploitation in the working place is the reason why many families prefer that their daughters, wives and other female family members work in women organisations like ASUDA where the majority of the employees are females.¹⁰⁷

Women are not protected against sexual harassment at their workplace. Even if a woman files a complaint of sexual harassment at a workplace, she will be the one who loses her job and reputation. This stops many women from filing complaints of sexual harassment at their workplace.¹⁰⁸ Currently, there is a draft labour law in the parliament in KRI. According to the Kurdistan Regional Government's Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), the draft law stipulates that women's rights at work must be respected; and sexual assault and harassment at work will lead to severe punishment of the perpetrator. The labour law also covers the rights for the 16-18 year-old working teenagers. MOLSA expected the law¹⁰⁹ to be passed by the end of 2022.¹¹⁰ At the time of drafting this report (February 2023), the law seems not to have been passed yet.

1.1.7. Access to civil documents

Access to documents for women under 18

If a single woman is under the age of 18, she will need her father's approval and presence when applying for different types of official documents,¹¹¹ especially when applying for a passport.¹¹² If the minor's mother is the guardian of the child, the father's approval is still needed in order to get at least a passport.¹¹³

Access to documents for women over 18

According to a consulted lawyer, a single woman above 18 has usually at least a National ID card, either the old paper version of the card or the new digital one.¹¹⁴ The new electronic and biometric National ID Card called the (Unified) National ID Card (*al-Bitaqa al-Wataniya al-Muwahhada*) replaces the old ID card (*Hawiyat al-Ahwal (al-Madaniya)*) and Citizenship Certificate (*Shahadat al-Jinsiya al-Iraqiya*); an individual will thus only have one ID card.¹¹⁵ The ID Card is required for access to employment, education, and a number of social services.¹¹⁶ According to a consulted lawyer, around 85-90% of all people in KRI have obtained the new National ID Card.¹¹⁷

Housing Card

A single woman over 18 needs the Housing Card of her family or at least a copy of it to apply for and obtain official documents such as a passport.¹¹⁸ The Housing Card is the most essential card required in connection

¹⁰⁷ ASUDA: 2, 3

¹⁰⁸ WEO: 4

¹⁰⁹ Al-Jazeera, *مكافحة البطالة وضمان حقوق العمال... هل يحقق قانون العمل المرتقب بكردستان العراق أهدافه؟* [Fighting unemployment and guaranteeing workers' rights. Will the expected labour law in Iraqi Kurdistan achieve its goals?], 13 January 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ MOLSA: 4

¹¹¹ Bilbas: 1; WOLA: 12

¹¹² WOLA: 12

¹¹³ WOLA: 15; Hama: 4

¹¹⁴ Hama: 2

¹¹⁵ Landinfo, *Irak: Reisedokumenter og andre ID-dokumenter*, 11 April 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹¹⁶ USDOS, *2021 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Bilbas: 14

¹¹⁸ GSIO: 22; Bilbas: 1; Hama: 6

with any paper work involving the authorities¹¹⁹ including issuance of documents such as passports.¹²⁰ According to Landinfo report from 2018, the new digital National ID Card was also meant to replace the Housing Card; however, at the time of publishing of Landinfo report (April 2018), this had not happened yet and it was unclear when such replacement would take place.¹²¹ And at the time of drafting this report (February 2023), there is no indication that this has happened.

The Housing Card¹²² has existed in KRI since the 1990s¹²³ and is issued by the governorates in KRI.¹²⁴ The Housing Card contains the person's three-folded name, i.e. the person's own name, his/her father's name, the grandfather's name as well as the person's place of residence.¹²⁵

Within a household or a family, there is only one Housing Card, and it is issued in the name of the head of the household, i.e. often the father.¹²⁶ Usually, single men or women remain included in their father's Housing Card until they get married. When they marry, men can obtain their own Housing Card whilst women will be included in their husband's Housing Card. If a single man or woman live independently in their own property, which they own, they can obtain a Housing Card in their name.¹²⁷

Single men or women will, thus, generally not be able to obtain a new Housing Card and live on their own¹²⁸ unless they become head of the household, for instance by being widowed or divorced¹²⁹ or by owning a property.¹³⁰ A single, unmarried woman who does not live with her family cannot in any way obtain a Housing Card for herself.¹³¹

Some government offices do accept copies of the Housing Card, while others, including the passport office, insist that the original version of the Housing Card is presented. The passport office needs to scan the information on the Housing Card for authenticity reasons.¹³²

The Housing Card is also required if a person wants to buy a car or a house. The card is not required for receiving healthcare services.¹³³ A single woman who is over 18 is not required to have a male relative present while presenting the Housing Card.¹³⁴

¹¹⁹ Hama 3; Bilbas: 1

¹²⁰ Hama: 3

¹²¹ Landinfo, *Irak, Irak: Reisedokumenter og andre ID-dokumenter*, 11 April 2018, [url](#), p. 18

¹²² For more detailed information about the Housing Card, see: UNHCR, *Relevant Country of Origin Information to Assist with the Application of UNHCR's Country Guidance on Iraq: Ability of Iraqis to Legally Access and Settle Durably in Proposed Areas of Internal Relocation*, November 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹²³ GSIO: 22

¹²⁴ Bilbas 2

¹²⁵ Hama: 3

¹²⁶ Hama: 3; UNHCR, *Relevant Country of Origin Information to Assist with the Application of UNHCR's Country Guidance on Iraq: Ability of Iraqis to Legally Access and Settle Durably in Proposed Areas of Internal Relocation*, November 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁷ UNHCR, *Relevant Country of Origin Information to Assist with the Application of UNHCR's Country Guidance on Iraq: Ability of Iraqis to Legally Access and Settle Durably in Proposed Areas of Internal Relocation*, November 2022, [url](#), p. 7

¹²⁸ UNHCR, *Relevant Country of Origin Information to Assist with the Application of UNHCR's Country Guidance on Iraq: Ability of Iraqis to Legally Access and Settle Durably in Proposed Areas of Internal Relocation*, November 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹²⁹ Hama: 3; For more information on the process, see *b) Civil status* on page 10

¹³⁰ UNHCR, *Relevant Country of Origin Information to Assist with the Application of UNHCR's Country Guidance on Iraq: Ability of Iraqis to Legally Access and Settle Durably in Proposed Areas of Internal Relocation*, November 2022, [url](#), p. 7-10

¹³¹ Hama: 3

¹³² Bilbas: 3

¹³³ GSIO: 22

¹³⁴ Bilbas: 4

Lack of the Housing Card due to conflict with one's family

A single woman who is not the head of a household and thus does not have a Housing Card on her own will face difficulties in obtaining official documents if she is in conflict with her family.¹³⁵ WOLA mentioned a case of a single woman over 18 who had difficulties in obtaining a passport due to a conflict with her father.¹³⁶

A consulted lawyer, Hama, stated that if an unmarried woman over 18 is in conflict with her family and the family does not want to give her the family's Housing Card, it will be almost impossible for her to do anything that requires a Housing Card, including applying for official documents. It is only if the conflict with the family is brought before a court and the woman wins the case that she can use the document from the court showing that she has won the case to manage all paperwork without the Housing Card of the family.¹³⁷

According to another consulted lawyer, Bilbas, if a single woman over 18 does not have the Housing Card of her family, she can present an 'approval letter' from the Mukhtar of the area (*ta'yeed Mukhtar*) proving that she belongs to the household that is registered under her family's Housing Card. The process of obtaining the approval letter from the Mukhtar is that she must first go to the local Asayish office and ask for a paper showing that she is registered under her family's Housing Card. The local Asayish office has all data about the people living in the neighbourhood and thereby knows which persons are registered under which Housing Card. With that note from the Asayish, she can go to the Mukhtar and obtain the approval letter, which she can then use as a substitute for the family's Housing Card. Each approval letter can only be used once; i.e. every time the woman needs the family's Housing Card, she has to obtain a new approval letter from the Mukhtar. An approval letter from the Mukhtar is valid for 15 days. The woman can obtain the approval letter alone and she does not need legal help for that purpose. It is usually not difficult to obtain the approval letter from the Mukhtar.¹³⁸

According to the consulted lawyer, Bilbas, people, including single women, usually do not know about the possibility of using an 'approval letter' from the Mukhtar as a substitute for the Housing Card. However, when a person who does not have a Housing Card, e.g. a single woman, goes to a public institution for paper work, which requires presenting the Housing Card, the authorities always inform him/her about the possibility of using an approval letter and how to obtain it.¹³⁹

The approval letter is used in practice, also by single women. It is very rare, though, that people, including single women, need an approval letter because they can often provide a Housing Card, which is either their own or that of their family. The Housing Card and the approval letter is used for all kinds of paper work, for instance when a person applies for a new ID card or passport. There is no concern, fear or risk keeping single women from applying for an approval letter or using it. In very rare cases, single women from very conservative families may refrain from applying for documents or other paper work because they are afraid that it would cause negative reactions from their families.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ GSIO: 22, 23; Hama: 3

¹³⁶ WOLA: 11

¹³⁷ Hama: 5

¹³⁸ Bilbas: 1

¹³⁹ Bilbas: 1

¹⁴⁰ Bilbas: 1

In the previously mentioned DRC report from 2022, a women’s rights organisation stated that some of the women that the organisation worked with felt unable to initiate and pursue the processes of applying for documents. This was due to household power dynamics with their father, husband or other male relatives, according to the report.¹⁴¹

Passport

As regards single women above 18 who want to apply for a passport, they are required to submit not only the original Housing Card of their father, but also the original National ID document of their father that shows that he is an Iraqi citizen.¹⁴²

Marriage certificate

Regarding marriage certificates, a woman can go to the court to get her marriage certificate without any document or approval from her family if she is above 18 years old.¹⁴³

Documents for children

Divorced women with children have the guardianship over the children up until they are 18 years old. However, when the child is under 18, the consent of the father is always requested in connection with issuance of birth certificates and other documents, particularly a passport.¹⁴⁴

A divorced woman needs the consent of the children’s father to apply for a passport for her children under 18, even if she has the guardianship and the father does not have any contact with her or the children.¹⁴⁵

1.2. Access to protection by the authorities

The authorities in KRI have taken steps to improve women’s access to protection during the last 20 years, both in regard to the law and in regard to establishing formal mechanisms in the field of protecting women.¹⁴⁶

The adoption of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8 of 2011 resulted in, among other things: the creation of the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW) as well as several DCVAW offices throughout KRI; the establishment of specialised domestic violence courts in each governorate in KRI; and the establishment of shelters, which are administered and protected by the KRG, for women who are threatened by their families.¹⁴⁷

The US State Department reported in 2022 that domestic violence is criminalized by the law in KRI. This includes physical and psychological abuse, threats of violence, and spousal rape. The provisions of the law has been implemented by the KRG authorities and a special police force responsible for investigating cases of gender-based violence and a family reconciliation committee has been established within the judicial system.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ DRC, *Life in the margins*, September 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁴² Hama: 4

¹⁴³ WOLA: 13

¹⁴⁴ WOLA: 15

¹⁴⁵ Hama: 4

¹⁴⁶ WEO: 6; Legal expert: 8

¹⁴⁷ WEO: 6; Legal expert: 9

¹⁴⁸ USDOS, *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 13 April 2022, [url](#)

The taking over the shelters by the KRG after the adoption of Law no. 8 was an important step with regard to protection of women.¹⁴⁹ According to Women Empowerment Organization (WEO), the shelters were previously not run in a professional way, and there had been examples of abuse and violence against the women and the employees in these shelters. Now the Ministry of Social Affairs of KRG runs these shelters while the security forces under the Ministry of Interior protect them.¹⁵⁰

On 17 December 2021, the KRG Ministry of Interior, DCVAW and United Nations Population Fund launched an application called SafeYou. The application can help girls and women in KRI to protect themselves against violence by connecting them to local professionals, the trained police and others who could help them in emergency situation or if they need any other kind of support.¹⁵¹

However, women continue to face obstacles and challenges in regard to receiving the necessary protection from the authorities in KRI. These obstacles include:

- a) Strong conservative cultural norms in the KRI society make it difficult to implement the laws that are enacted to protect women.¹⁵² Moreover, the society generally does not sympathise with women who have been threatened or abused by their male relatives.¹⁵³
- b) There is a lack of awareness among the survivors of domestic violence about the protection possibilities that are provided by NGOs or official entities like the DCVAW.¹⁵⁴
- c) Survivors of domestic violence can be afraid of filing reports against the perpetrators because they fear retaliation by either their own family members or the families of the offenders.¹⁵⁵ In the majority of cases reported to DCVAW, the person at first wants to file a complaint. It is only a minority, however, who wish and insist on their case being brought before the court; and women who file a report often regret it and go back to live with the perpetrators.¹⁵⁶ Bringing a case before the court causes major changes for the woman, e.g. she gets divorced, comes to a shelter etc. Some women are reluctant to bring their case before the court due to the long process at the court. And some women worry that bringing the case before the court will affect their whole family in a negative way rather than just punish the perpetrator.¹⁵⁷
- d) There is a pressure against punishment of perpetrators in domestic violence cases.¹⁵⁸ Some judges still consider women's testimony in court to be worth only half that of men.¹⁵⁹ The perpetrators usually receive lenient sentences.¹⁶⁰ One source pointed out that usually, sentences range between two and six years for killing a woman.¹⁶¹ In the event a crime against a woman is committed by her

¹⁴⁹ WEO: 7, Hama: 11

¹⁵⁰ WEO: 7

¹⁵¹ United Nations Iraq, UNFPA, MOI KRI launch SafeYou App, helping women and girls in Kurdistan be protected from gender-based violence, 17 December 2021, [url](#)

¹⁵² WEO: 12; Fikra Forum, *Addressing violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁵³ ASUDA: 6

¹⁵⁴ ASUDA: 5

¹⁵⁵ ASUDA: 5, 7; DCVAW: 10

¹⁵⁶ ASUDA: 5; DCVAW: 9

¹⁵⁷ DCVAW: 10

¹⁵⁸ Hama: 22

¹⁵⁹ WEO: 12

¹⁶⁰ Hama 22; ASUDA: 8; WEO: 15

¹⁶¹ ASUDA: 8

family, it is difficult to proceed with the case as no one from the family would file a case; and the case would often be closed due to lack of evidence or confession.¹⁶² Perpetrators of violence against women are often released before time.¹⁶³ Many people express their support to the perpetrators in cases of honour killings when such cases are reported via news platforms.¹⁶⁴

- e) Lack of funding for projects that mitigate domestic violence because international donors since 2014 have prioritised humanitarian aid.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the Iraqi government stopped paying or reduced the salaries paid to public employees in KRI and this too has resulted in lack of financial support for projects combating domestic violence.¹⁶⁶

Prevalence of violence

There is a lack of official national statistics on different forms of violence against women in Iraq as well as a lack of systematic collection of data on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Sexual violence, domestic violence and honour crimes are among the major forms of SGBV across the country.¹⁶⁷

Based on DCVAW statistics and other sources, the Norwegian Landinfo reported in 2022 that the number of women killed in KRI since 2016 has been around 50 per year. However, the number has varied drastically in some years. For instance, while the number increased to 120 in 2019, it was 24 in 2021.¹⁶⁸

Despite the aforementioned efforts by civil society organisations and KRG authorities, domestic violence still occurs in KRI.¹⁶⁹ Since the adoption of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8 in 2011, there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of violence against women in KRI.¹⁷⁰ According to WOLA, this can be due to easier access to the court system and easier procedures to file complaints about violence, but it can also be because there is an actual increase in the number of cases of domestic violence. The source believes that in general, the violence is increasing.¹⁷¹ Based on her experience, the medical doctor Dilshad assessed that there are still many women who keep silent and stay in a violent relationship for the sake of their children.¹⁷² Fikra Forum, which is an initiative of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, reported in March 2022 that the number of reported honour killings were less than the actual number, particularly in rural areas. It is the source's assessment that the number of reported cases of violence against women has been increasing in KRI, which according to the source is caused by, among other reasons, hate speeches against women.¹⁷³

The consulted sources provided slightly different numbers in regard to how many women in KRI have been killed as a result of domestic violence. According to WOLA, 25 women were killed between January and October 2022, and no one have been convicted for these killings.¹⁷⁴ A legal expert put the number of

¹⁶² WOLA: 20, 21, 22; ASUDA: 7

¹⁶³ ASUDA: 8; HAMA: 22; WEO: 15

¹⁶⁴ Fikra Forum, *Addressing violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ WEO: 6

¹⁶⁶ WEO: 9

¹⁶⁷ EUAA, *Iraq, Targeting of individuals*, January 2022, [url](#), p. 78

¹⁶⁸ Landinfo, *Irak, Ære og æresrelatert vold*, 10 March 2022, [url](#), p.22

¹⁶⁹ EUAA, *Iraq, Targeting of individuals*, January 2022, [url](#), p. 80

¹⁷⁰ WOLA: 17; Dr. Dilshad: 10

¹⁷¹ WOLA: 17

¹⁷² Dr. Dilshad: 10

¹⁷³ Fikra Forum, *Addressing violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 28 March 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ WOLA: 19

women killed as a result of honour/family-related and external/random crime at 27 cases in the first half of 2022. The source did not have any official statistics, but assumed that in only a fourth of the cases, the killer was found.¹⁷⁵ WEO estimated that the real number of honour crimes is much higher than what the official statistics shows.¹⁷⁶

The 2011 law also prohibits sexual violence and rape by a spouse; however, according to a legal expert, no such crime has been reported the last 11 years.¹⁷⁷

1.2.1. The process of reporting threats and domestic violence

If people (male or female) are subjected to domestic violence or death threats from up to fourth degree relatives (e.g. cousins), they can contact one of DCVAW's 26 offices, which are available all over KRI.¹⁷⁸ They can also use the special hotline for survivors of domestic violence (number 119) and ask for help. The hotline was established in 2019 and is operated by experienced and trained staff. It received around 8,000 calls during the first year. This number increased to 14,000 calls in 2021.¹⁷⁹ The caller can choose to be anonymous, and all calls to the hotline are recorded. According to DCVAW, if a person is subjected to serious and immediate death threats, the hotline staff will immediately contact the emergency police and ask them to remove the person from her place of residence and accommodate her at a shelter.¹⁸⁰ According to a legal expert, the hotlines are not always an efficient measure, as those answering the calls sometimes do not take immediate action upon receiving a call.¹⁸¹

If victims of domestic violence and threats cannot call the hotline, they can contact the nearest police station or call the police at number 104.¹⁸²

Survivors of domestic violence and threats can choose to file a complaint against the perpetrators, in which case the DCVAW will assist them.¹⁸³ Domestic violence and death threats against women are taken seriously by the DCVAW staff, according to a consulted lawyer.¹⁸⁴ Immediately after a case is reported to one of the DCVAW offices, the staff register the complaint, look into the case and forward it to the domestic violence specialised judge who is responsible for such cases in each governorate in KRI.¹⁸⁵ Any woman, regardless of age, civil or social status, who face any threat to her life can ask to be relocated to one of the DCVAW shelters and be protected.¹⁸⁶

The DCVAW office needs the person's consent to ask the court to start a case.¹⁸⁷ Only the specialised judge can refer a woman to a shelter.¹⁸⁸ A woman cannot go to the shelter herself and be accommodated.¹⁸⁹

¹⁷⁵ Legal expert: 12

¹⁷⁶ WEO: 15

¹⁷⁷ Legal expert: 14

¹⁷⁸ Legal expert: 10; DCVAW 4.

¹⁷⁹ DCVAW: 15

¹⁸⁰ DCVAW: 5

¹⁸¹ Legal expert: 10

¹⁸² Legal expert: 10

¹⁸³ DCVAW: 5

¹⁸⁴ Hama: 12, 13

¹⁸⁵ Hama: 12; DCVAW: 12; Legal expert: 11

¹⁸⁶ Hama: 12; DCVAW: 11

¹⁸⁷ DCVAW: 6

¹⁸⁸ Hama: 13; DCVAW: 6; WOLA: 23; WEO: 11; ASUDA: 12

¹⁸⁹ WOLA: 23

DCVAW offices encourage women not to go to the shelters unless they are subjected to serious threats;¹⁹⁰ and their frequent practice is to mediate between the women and their families so that the women return to their home.¹⁹¹ If a woman is subjected to serious threats, she will usually be referred to a shelter by the court.¹⁹² DCVAW offices have staff working in shifts who accommodate the woman in a shelter while the court/judge is looking into the case. The woman is thus not left to fend for herself and she is protected during the court process.¹⁹³ One source mentioned that if a woman needs protection outside the court's working hours, she will have no access to the shelters.¹⁹⁴

While the court is looking into the woman's case, the staff at the DCVAW office suggest a number of alternatives to the woman depending on the case, as the shelter is not meant to be a permanent solution., however, the source did not specify these alternatives. The woman might be suggested to enter into a legally founded reconciliation agreement with the family/the perpetrator in which the perpetrator legally obligate him- or herself not to pose threats to the woman anymore.¹⁹⁵

The filed complaints comprise a variety of issues. They include among others sexual harassment against single women, domestic violence and complaints from working, single women whose salary is confiscated by their parents. A complaint can be filed over any type of violence: physical, economic, verbal or emotional.¹⁹⁶

The judge responsible for handling cases referred by DCVAW can decide to send the case to a reconciliation committee.¹⁹⁷ It is up to the woman to decide whether she wants to be reconciled with the perpetrator and the court cannot impose an agreement on her.¹⁹⁸

If the threats continue, and in the event a perpetrator is to be prosecuted in a case of violence, the DCVAW-appointed investigative judge, who is specialised in domestic violence cases, will forward the case to a criminal court. The prosecution will take place based on the evidence collected by the investigating Domestic Violence Court.¹⁹⁹

A consulted lawyer considered it improbable that perpetrating persons or families can affect the procedure of a complaint filed by a woman by for instance paying bribes or using good connections. This is because there are many actors and institutions involved in the process (the court, the police, the shelter etc.) and they all function according to clear and well-established procedures. The possibility of influencing this process by external actors is thus either non-existent or very limited.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁰ DCVAW: 9

¹⁹¹ EUAA, *Iraq, Targeting of individuals*, January 2022, [url](#), p. 80

¹⁹² DCVAW: 11

¹⁹³ Hama: 13

¹⁹⁴ WEO: 11

¹⁹⁵ Hama: 14

¹⁹⁶ DCVAW: 13

¹⁹⁷ Legal expert: 11

¹⁹⁸ Hama: 14, 20

¹⁹⁹ Legal expert: 13; Hama: 14

²⁰⁰ Hama: 16

Reconciliation committees

While the case is being processed at court, a reconciliation committee tries to find a solution. These committees work on finding a solution before a verdict is issued by the court.²⁰¹

Members of these committees are legal experts, social researchers, religious experts and/or psychologists.²⁰² The idea of reconciling the conflicting parties before the final verdict is not new and has existed within different fields in Iraqi and KRI law for a long time. There are always some institutions that are mandated to find a solution to a conflict before the final verdict.²⁰³ Minor issues, which make up the majority of cases,²⁰⁴ are usually resolved by the reconciliation committee and the person returns to his or her family.²⁰⁵ According to DCVAW, sometimes, the woman is in a shelter while the reconciliation committee still works on reconciling the woman with her family.²⁰⁶

Concerns and challenges regarding the reconciliation committees

There are a number of concerns and points of criticism about the reconciliation committees and their work:

- a) Members of these committees work on voluntary basis and are not paid for their work.²⁰⁷ The concern is that these members may not spend the necessary time to solve these issues properly.²⁰⁸ In addition, they are ordinary citizens who are not professional with regard to the issue of protecting women.²⁰⁹
- b) Members of these committees may be affected by the conservative cultural values of the society and this might affect their judgment.²¹⁰ They may have a tendency to blame the woman for the situation she is in and thereby put pressure on her to go back to her family.²¹¹
- c) There are no standards or procedures for reconciling conflicting parties in such cases.²¹²
- d) Since the members of the reconciliation committees work voluntarily and the same experts do not consistently attend the committee meetings, the conflicting parties may meet different experts from one meeting to another and have to explain about their cases again from scratch to new experts. This creates an inconsistency in the reconciliation process.²¹³
- e) The outcome of the work of the reconciliation committees tends not to be in favour of women.²¹⁴

DCVAW is working on amending the law no. 8 of 2011 to have the reconciliation committees start the reconciliation process before the case is brought before the court.²¹⁵

²⁰¹ Hama: 18

²⁰² Hama: 19; DCVAW: 7; Legal expert: 11

²⁰³ Hama: 18

²⁰⁴ Hama: 21; DCVAW: 7

²⁰⁵ DCVAW: 7

²⁰⁶ DCVAW: 7, 8

²⁰⁷ Hama: 19; DCVAW: 7; WEO: 12

²⁰⁸ Hama: 19

²⁰⁹ WEO: 12

²¹⁰ Hama: 19; WEO: 12

²¹¹ WEO: 12

²¹² Hama: 19

²¹³ Hama: 20

²¹⁴ WEO: 12

²¹⁵ DCVAW: 7

If the conflict between the woman and her family is not resolved by the reconciliation committee, she can get divorced through the court. Other times, the woman remains in the shelter while the reconciliation committee is working on reconciling her with her family.²¹⁶ In general, many women prefer not to divorce due to lack of income and because they have nowhere else to go.²¹⁷

1.2.2. Regional differences with regard to violence and access to protection

According to ASUDA, there is a higher level of awareness on the issue of domestic violence in Sulaymaniyah compared to Erbil and Dohuk, despite the fact that there is no difference in the prevalence of violence against women among KRI's three governorates. The issue of domestic violence is something that is being debated and highlighted in Sulaymaniyah because of the many NGOs in this governorate that highlight women's issues.²¹⁸

Women in the countryside face a higher risk of being subjected to violence than women in the cities in KRI.²¹⁹ This is among other things due to the easier access to police stations, NGOs and other stakeholders in the cities that can provide protection and raise awareness against violence. Women in rural areas lack knowledge about such issues, and there are not many institutions that work with combating violence against women in these areas.²²⁰

1.2.3. Shelters

There are four women shelters in KRI; Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah has one shelter each.²²¹ There is also a 72-hour basic shelter in Garmiyan where a woman in an emergency situation is allowed to stay for a maximum of 72 hours before she is referred to and accommodated at one of the three other shelters.²²² The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) has lately been granted the authority and approval to establish another 72-hour shelter in Raparin, similar to the one in Garmiyan.²²³ According to a 2019 report from United Nation Population Fund (UNPF), the shelters in Erbil, Dohuk, Sulaymaniyah and Garmiyan have the capacity of accommodating up to 20, 40, 40 and 20 women respectively.²²⁴

The existing four shelters receive financial support from the KRG, NGOs and UN Women. In addition to providing protection for women, the shelters undertake awareness-raising activities and provide training.²²⁵

It is only the judge who can decide whether a woman can be accommodated at a shelter. Neither the police nor the DCVAW offices can refer a woman to a shelter. The referral from the judge is primarily based on the individual assessment of the judge and the written, general recommendations from the MOLSA rather than hard law.²²⁶

Shelters are protected by the KRG authorities. The shelters in Erbil and Dohuk are guarded by armed, male police officers. The shelter in Sulaymaniyah is guarded by female Peshmerga (Military forces of KRI). The

²¹⁶ DCVAW: 8

²¹⁷ WEO: 10

²¹⁸ ASUDA: 18

²¹⁹ ASUDA: 17

²²⁰ ASUDA: 17; DCVAW: 20

²²¹ MOLSA: 5; ASUDA: 9; DCVAW: 16

²²² DCVAW: 16; MOLSA: 5

²²³ MOLSA: 5

²²⁴ UNFPA, *UNFPA-Supported Women Shelters - Offering Women a Second Chance*. Bagdad, 2019, [url](#)

²²⁵ MOLSA: 6

²²⁶ Legal expert: 15

location of these shelters is supposed to be unknown to the public, but over time, people have become aware of their location.²²⁷ According to WOLA, despite having the legal right, private organisations cannot open shelters, as they cannot provide the guards needed for protection against the physical threats against shelters.²²⁸

No direct family visits are allowed at the shelters, and even if a family visit is approved, the woman will be transferred to another place for the meeting.²²⁹

Due to lack of resources and staff, the KRG relies increasingly on NGOs to provide different services at the shelters, including legal and psychological aid.²³⁰ When a woman enters a shelter, an NGO will take her case and help her both in the shelter and eventually in court.²³¹

Challenges with regard to shelters

The consulted sources mentioned several challenges that the shelters are facing:²³²

- a) Lack of funding: MOLSA is not allocated sufficient funds by the KRG to run, expand and develop the shelters. For instance, while shelters in Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah are large and have a high capacity,²³³ the shelter in Erbil is old, small and it looks like a detention centre or a prison.²³⁴
- b) Lack of personnel: The shelters in all governorates are understaffed and in need of more employees.²³⁵ There is a problem with recruitment of shelter staff, which is mainly caused by two factors: lack of security for staff; and the general, negative social attitude towards shelters and people working with protection of women.²³⁶
- c) Negative social attitude: NGOs working within the field of protection of women constantly receive direct and indirect threats from people who are against these organisations' activities and have a hostile attitude towards them.²³⁷ A majority in the KRI society share the conservative idea that a woman does not have the right to complain about her husband or family, which is the reason behind the dominating hostile attitude towards organisations working in this field.²³⁸ This hostile attitude is supported and promoted by religious leaders, groups and media who take advantage of people's lack of knowledge about shelters and women's need for protection and use their influence to turn people against organisations such as WOLA.²³⁹
- d) Negative social attitude towards women in shelters: It is not acceptable in KRI society that women live in shelters. The conservative societal norms and family pressure will in many cases result in the woman not being taken back by her family after returning from a shelter.²⁴⁰ In January 2023, the

²²⁷ MOLSA: 8; WOLA: 29; DCVAW: 17; Legal expert: 16

²²⁸ WOLA: 30

²²⁹ WOLA: 29

²³⁰ WOLA: 27; USDOS, *2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Iraq*, 13 April 2022, [url](#); WEO: 9

²³¹ ASUDA: 13

²³² MOLSA: 7; WEO: 8, 9, 10; DCVAW: 9, 18; WOLA: 24, 25, 27, 31, 33; ASUDA: 11, 15; Legal expert: 16; Hama: 15

²³³ MOLSA: 7; DCVAW: 18; WEO: 9; ASUDA: 11

²³⁴ MOLSA: 7; DCVAW: 18; WOLA: 25

²³⁵ DCVAW: 18; WOLA: 27; ASUDA: 11

²³⁶ WOLA: 31

²³⁷ WOLA: 33

²³⁸ WOLA: 33; WEO: 12

²³⁹ WOLA: 33

²⁴⁰ DCVAW: 9, 20

KRG decided to provide residential units for women who are no longer housed in shelters because their cases have been resolved, but are not able to be reintegrated with their families.²⁴¹

- e) Threats and attacks: The shelters risk being subjected to physical threats and attacks by relatives to women residing in the shelter. There were for instance two cases of families and relatives to women residing in the shelter in Erbil opening fire at the shelter.²⁴² Two similar incidents took place in Sulaymaniyah in 2018 and 2021. In the first incident in 2018, the office of DCVAW in Sulaymaniyah was attacked.²⁴³ In the incident in 2021, a person who was subject to a complaint clashed with police units from Sulaymaniyah’s DCVAW, which resulted in the death of a police officer and three others being injured.²⁴⁴ The Director of the shelter in Erbil has also received threats from families to women in the shelter.²⁴⁵ In late summer 2022 in Sulaymaniyah, an official working at one of the offices was killed by the family of a woman on the way to court.²⁴⁶
- f) Shelters used for other purposes: The residents of these shelters comprise different profiles dealing with and suffering from different issues. In addition to women, who reside in shelters due to threats from their families, there are also women suffering from mental issues, homeless women as well as women who have been subjected to rape.²⁴⁷ In KRI, there are no psychiatric hospitals or places where psychiatric patients can live. Hence, women with serious mental illnesses are sometimes sent to shelters or to a nursing home for the elderly. These women pose a physical threat to other women in the shelters and cause violent episodes.²⁴⁸ The local media outlet RUDAW reported in April 2022, however, that the KRG was planning to open three specialised hospitals to treat women with “chronic”, mental health issues in the three governorates of KRI.²⁴⁹ At the time of drafting this report (February 2023), no information is found about the implementation of the plan.
- g) Long residence, isolation and mental pressure: In all three governorates of KRI, there are cases where the issue between the woman and her family cannot be solved, and the woman thus has to stay in the shelter for a long time, in some cases even up to five years without a solution.²⁵⁰ There are around five women in each of the three shelters in KRI who have stayed in the shelters for longer periods. Women who remain in the shelters for a long time face psychological hardships,²⁵¹ and for them, it feels like being in a detention centre.²⁵² In a number of these cases, the only option for the woman has been to be resettled in another country.²⁵³ However, it is difficult and time-consuming to arrange resettlement, and it requires the assistance of NGOs who can help with documentation etc. to make resettlement possible. There are cases in both Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah where the issue between a woman and her family has been solved, but the family

²⁴¹ Kurdistan24, *PM Barzani provides housing to domestic violence victims and orphans*, 4 January 2023, [url](#)

²⁴² MOLSA: 7

²⁴³ WOLA: 32; EKURD Daily, *Gunmen attack office of violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan*, 29 November 2018, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ WOLA: 32; RUDAW, *Sulaimani police officers shot, one killed in line of duty*, 5 December 2021, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ MOLSA: 7

²⁴⁶ Legal expert: 16

²⁴⁷ WOLA: 24

²⁴⁸ MOLSA: 7; WOLA: 24; ASUDA: 10

²⁴⁹ RUDAW, *KRG open hospitals for women with ‘chronic’ mental health issues*, 19 April 2022, [url](#)

²⁵⁰ MOLSA: 7; ASUDA 12, 15; WEO: 10; Hama: 15

²⁵¹ ASUDA: 15

²⁵² MOLSA: 7; WEO: 10

²⁵³ MOLSA: 7; Hama: 15; ASUDA: 14

refuses to have her back due to social and cultural norms.²⁵⁴ In some other cases, women prefer to return back to their violent spouse rather than staying in the shelter.²⁵⁵

Women cannot leave the shelter, and they have limited access to phone or internet. Consequently, the shelter is felt like a detention centre for the women. This combined with the fact that women have to live with other women suffering from completely different issues (e.g. mental diseases) put women under high mental pressure, which is why many wish to leave the shelter as soon as possible.²⁵⁶

- h) Lack of exit programme: There is no exit programme for women in shelters. The women who are being sent to shelters have no prospects for education, jobs or psychological support there.²⁵⁷
- i) Lack of knowledge of the judge: If a woman wants to leave the shelter, it has to be approved by the judge. It is a time-consuming and difficult process. If a woman wants to leave the shelter, the court needs to be sure that she will be safe, and sometimes, the judge does not consider it safe for her to leave the shelter. The judge's decision is often based on his or her lack of knowledge about the situation in the shelters and the mental pressure on women due to the dire conditions.²⁵⁸
- j) Diminishing role of women NGOs: The role of NGOs in the process of protecting women has decreased because the donors insist on having the KRG take over the role of NGOs. This affects among other things the services provided by NGOs to women at the shelters²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ MOLSA: 7

²⁵⁵ WEO: 10

²⁵⁶ WOLA: 25; DCVAW: 19

²⁵⁷ WEO: 10; WOLA: 27; ASUDA: 12

²⁵⁸ WOLA: 26

²⁵⁹ WEO: 9

2. Forged documents in KRI

2.1. Prevalence of forged documents

According to three sources consulted for this report, forgery of documents in KRI is very limited.²⁶⁰ This is due to several measures taken by the KRG authorities. A process of digitalisation of documents has been taking place in KRI in the recent years, which has limited the prevalence of forged documents.²⁶¹ KRG has three offices that work with digitalisation of documents. The offices are a part of the KRG's Ministry of Interior, and they issue visas, residency cards for non-Iraqis and passports.²⁶²

According to a consulted lawyer, Bilbas, around 85-90% of people in KRI have now obtained the new electronic, biometrical version of the Iraqi national ID-card. The old paper version of the ID-card can still be used. The new biometrical ID card is required for some official work, however, for instance when applying for a new passport.²⁶³

Another measure to combat forged documents taken by the KRG authorities is the creation of the Special Office for Combating Forgery under the Department of Organised Crime within the Asayish. KRG has also established an office in Baghdad in order to authenticate any document that has been issued in Federal Iraq and is intended to be used in KRI and vice versa. This step limits forgery but is time-consuming.²⁶⁴

According to the consulted lawyer Bilbas, it is mostly people from neighbouring countries who use forged documents to travel to other countries from KRI.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, the source assessed that the severe punishment for using forged documents deter most people in KRI from forgery.²⁶⁶

Another measure used by the KRG to combat forged documents is demanding 'authenticity proofs' for any official document that is presented to the authorities. It is only trusted employees in each public office issuing official documents who can issue the authenticity proofs.²⁶⁷

An example of how difficult it is to forge documents in KRI is a marriage certificate intended to be used outside of Iraq. Such certificate needs to be authenticated in four steps:

- a. Officially translated and approved by the Notary Office
- b. Stamped by KRG's Ministry of Justice
- c. Approved by the Department of Foreign Relations (KRG's Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in KRI
- d. Approved by Iraq's Authentication Office, which has a branch in Erbil²⁶⁸

Digitalisation of documents in KRI is far from being completed. KRI is still using hard copies of different documents, including documents of real estate and registration of property. The courts also use hard

²⁶⁰ Legal expert: 18; Bilbas: 5; WOLA: 35

²⁶¹ Legal expert: 18; WOLA: 35

²⁶² Bilbas: 13

²⁶³ Bilbas: 14

²⁶⁴ Bilbas: 11

²⁶⁵ Bilbas: 5

²⁶⁶ Bilbas: 5

²⁶⁷ Bilbas: 10

²⁶⁸ Bilbas: 12

copies and keep files of cases for seven years after which only verdicts of cases are archived and all other documents related to the cases are destroyed.²⁶⁹

A legal expert mentioned that in summer 2022, the Asayish arrested members of a criminal gang who forged documents, particularly powers of attorney and driving licenses.²⁷⁰

2.2. Possibility to obtain documents by bribe

It is very difficult to obtain official documents with manipulated data in KRI.²⁷¹

Women's Legal Assistance Organization (WOLA) had previously heard of cases of people in KRI getting documents with manipulated information regarding name, date, place of birth and place of issuance. However, the source had not heard of such cases in KRI in recent years.²⁷² The consulted lawyer, Bilbas, had not seen cases of manipulated official documents obtained by means of bribe in the seven years he had been working on legal issues in KRI. Due to coordination between the registration offices in KRI and the Iraqi National ID-Directorate in Baghdad, the source found it almost impossible to bribe public officials in KRI to change the data in official documents; for instance, while the national ID-cards in KRI are issued locally, all data in these cards come from central databases in Baghdad.²⁷³

²⁶⁹ Bilbas: 13

²⁷⁰ Legal expert: 19

²⁷¹ Bilbas

²⁷² WOLA: 37

²⁷³ Bilbas: 6

3. Exit via Erbil International Airport (EIA)

3.1. Security and document check at EIA

According to the Erbil-based consulted lawyer, Bilbas,²⁷⁴ who has represented foreigners being caught at KRI airports while trying to leave KRI for other countries, the security measures at Erbil International Airport (EIA) are very strict. There are four steps or checks that passengers have to go through before they can board the plane. In the first two steps, the passport, tickets and bags are checked by the Asayish. In the third step, which is the most important control, passengers' passport, visa and residence permit are checked thoroughly by the passport police. In the last step, the Asayish check the person and his/her luggage. This step includes taking off every piece of metal that the person is wearing.²⁷⁵

All cases of persons caught with forged documents that the consulted lawyer has worked on the last seven years have exclusively been about foreigners such as Jordanians, Lebanese or Syrians who were trying to leave Iraq illegally. Foreigners who do not have residency in KRI will be deported back to their country of origin. Foreigners with residency in KRI who are caught with forged documents at EIA will be detained for three months and then prosecuted in KRI. The punishment is usually a fine or another three months in jail.²⁷⁶

3.1.1. Exit ban

All airports in Iraq are connected to the database of the Iraqi security services, which contains a list of persons banned from exiting Iraq. If an exit ban has been issued on a person, he or she cannot leave via any of the Iraqi airports (including the airports in KRI) because his or her name will pop up at the airport.²⁷⁷

Exit bans can be issued by the Passport and Residency Office and will be implemented immediately. The civil court can also issue a ban, but it takes around one month before it is implemented. During that month, the wanted person will be able to leave the country without being caught at the airport. If it is an evident case with severe crime, the exit ban will be issued immediately.²⁷⁸

In addition to the airport, the authorities at land borders all over Iraq and at checkpoints between KRI and Federal Iraq have access to the exit ban list.²⁷⁹

There are many cases of people being denied travelling between KRI and Federal Iraq due to similarity of their names to the names of persons wanted for terror-related issues. These cases are usually sorted out, but it takes a lot of time.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁴ The information presented in this section exclusively stems from the meeting with this source. Bilbas was the only source identified by the delegation who had relevant, updated knowledge about the topics addressed in this section.

²⁷⁵ Bilbas: 16

²⁷⁶ Bilbas: 17

²⁷⁷ Bilbas: 20

²⁷⁸ Bilbas: 21

²⁷⁹ Bilbas: 22

²⁸⁰ Bilbas: 23

3.2. Possibility to leave Iraq via EIA by bribe

The lawyer Bilbas considered it impossible for a person to go through the controls at EIA by paying a bribe, as he or she will not only be dealing with one person but with many individuals from different authorities. In addition, it is not the same persons from the Asayish or the passport police who are at the airport all the time, which makes it impossible to identify someone to bribe.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Bilbas: 19

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Legal expert

Shokhan Ahmed, President of Women's Legal Assistance Organization (WOLA)

Soma Yaseen Hama, lawyer

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

Meeting with Gender Studies and Information Organization (GSIO), Erbil, 31 October 2022

GSIO works in the field of human rights in general and women's rights in particular, especially gender balance in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Federal Iraq. GSIO also works with refugees, IDPs, minority women and children. In addition, GSIO works for the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, building civil society, through the implementation of programs and projects. The organization has a license in both KRI and Federal Iraq. Pakhshan Zangana who was the first head of Kurdistan's High Women Council founded GSIO in 2005. Since 2010, Ramzia Zana has been the General Director of GSIO. It has various partnerships, for instance with UNESCO, USAID, UNICEF, UNFPA, FHI 360, UNWOMEN, UNDP. UNOPS, EU, MLI, WADI, ICSP, ICNL, RI etc. The organisation has worked with foreign consulates and covered the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). GSIO had projects in Baghdad, Diyala, Kerkuk, Sulaymaniyah, and Duhok. GSIO is a member of the Minority Network, the Shams Election group, Kurdistan Women's Alliance, Disability Network in Iraq and leading the Woman's Voice for Women campaign across Iraq.

Attitudes towards single women

1. In general, the KRI society has a conservative attitude towards single women. However, the social attitude towards divorced women is more negative compared to unmarried women or widows. The society tends to blame divorced women and accuse them of being the reason for divorce. This also applies to the woman's own family. The family's attitude towards a single woman depends on the family's background.

Freedom of movement

2. Several factors have an impact on whether a woman need permission from her male family members in order to move around in Iraq. This includes her family's cultural norms and values, her area of origin, her age and her marital status. The more conservative a woman's family is, the more restrictions of movement she will face. A woman from an area in the countryside will face more difficulties in moving around than a woman from the city. There are more restrictions on the freedom of movement for young women compared to older women.
3. Women's freedom of movement in KRI is better than in the rest of Iraq. Baghdad is also relatively open. The situation in the rest of Iraq was better before 2003 when the rise of Islamist political parties worsened women's rights.
4. Single women can travel alone and buy a ticket themselves. Single women may be subjected to verbal harassment by the security forces at the checkpoints, especially if they are young, but nothing physical.

Access to housing, healthcare and education

5. Single women have the right to rent and buy property and there is no law that prohibits women from buying and renting their own places.

6. However, in practice the society does not accept that single women live alone without her family. Anyone who wants to live in a rented or bought accommodation needs to obtain an approval of the Mukhtar and the Asayish. House owners do not dare to allow a person to stay in a property without the Asayish's approval. Even public services like electricity are not provided without the Asayish's approval. Although a single man may also face difficulties in obtaining an approval to live in a property by himself, it is most difficult for single women to obtain such approval, particularly women from the working class. The source assesses that it is almost impossible for a single unmarried woman without children to get the approval from the Asayish.
7. It is the source's assessment that it is easier for a single woman who come from outside Iraq (either foreigner or Iraqi expat), to obtain an approval to live on her own compared to single women already living in the country. The source further assesses that a divorced mother will also be allowed to live on her own with her children.
8. In general, for women, Sulaymaniyah is considered to be a more open and liberal city than Erbil and Duhok. Therefore, it is more accepted that single women live on their own in Sulaymaniyah compared to other areas in KRI.
9. A woman's social position affects her ability to live on her own. If a woman is a doctor or a public employee, then her source of income is known and consequently she would most likely obtain an approval to rent an apartment on her own.
10. Generally, a single woman who wants to get an education or to register her children for education will not need a male family member's consent unless she is under the age of 18.
11. A girl/woman will be allowed to attend school depending on the area from which her family originates and her family's social class. Families from cities will allow their daughters to go to school more than families from the countryside, who have a more conservative mindset. Families from the cities, who are poor and cannot afford to send all their children to school, would prefer to send their sons to finish their studies instead of their daughters. However, there are now some families, where both girls and boys are given the same chance to continue their studies.
12. The only obstacle for a woman to register her children for education is if the children are not registered and do not have documents such as ID cards. Then it would be difficult to register them in schools.

Access to labour market

13. There are a number of factors impacting the situation of single women in the labour market in KRI, including socioeconomic conditions, types of available jobs, social norms, woman's social position, age, area etc.
14. In general, there are few job opportunities in KRI even for people with high educational degrees. However, the types of most available jobs suits males more than females. Many jobs require night shifts or physical work, and it is socially not acceptable that women get this type of jobs. In addition, women are subjected to harassment in the labour market.

15. The social position of a woman has an impact on her possibility to get a job. It will be much easier for a woman with connections to get a job than a woman from lower social classes. In general, regardless of educational degrees, the better connections a man or a woman has, the better possibilities they will have to get a job.
16. The older a single woman becomes, the more difficult it is for her to get a job.
17. Usually, families prefer their female family member to be employed in the public sector, even though the salaries are lower than in the private sector. Nevertheless, as Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has not been paying the full salaries to their employers for years, people, including women, have increasingly been seeking jobs in the private sector. Many single women in KRI, especially young women, are trying to establish their own businesses and market their products online.
18. The deteriorating economic situation in KRI has made it more acceptable for families that the female members of the family work in places like shopping centres. In addition, the field of nursing has become more attractive for women to work within compared to before.
19. Women prefer to work as teachers because of long holiday possibilities. One also finds women occupying low-ranking administrative positions as well as working as lawyers, doctors etc.
20. Families nowadays are encouraging their daughters to join the security forces, the armed forces as well as the law-enforcement forces in KRI. It is possible for women to get jobs there and there are some privileges and benefits given to employees in these forces. There are many women working for the Asayish at Erbil International Airport.
21. In the public sector, women receive the same salary as men if they do the same work. In the private sector, the salary depends on the individual employees' education.

Access to civil documents

22. In both KRI and Federal Iraq, a person, including a single woman, should be over the age of 18 and have the Housing Card of her family (or at least a copy of it) to be able to apply for and obtain documents like passport or National ID card. Housing Card is also required if a person wants to buy a car or a house. The card is not required for receiving healthcare services. The Housing Card has existed since the 1990's.
23. A Housing Card (or Residence Card as it is called in Federal Iraq) is a document that is issued to each family in Iraq. It is usually the head of the family, who keeps this card. This makes it quite difficult for a single woman, who is in conflict with her family, to obtain documents as the family would most likely not give her the family's Housing Card.

Meeting with Aware Ramadan Bilbas, lawyer, Erbil, 6. November 2022

Aware Ramadan has been a practicing lawyer in Erbil for seven years. He represents non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and he works with establishing companies and representing them. He has also represented Iraqis residing abroad in cases concerning issuance of official documents, including national ID

cards and passports, as well as exit from Iraq. Moreover, he has represented foreigners who have been caught at Kurdistan Region of Iraq's (KRI) airports using forged documents while trying to leave KRI to other countries.

Single women's access to the Housing Card

1. If a single woman is under the age of 18, she will need her father's approval and presence when applying for different types of documents. If she is over 18, she needs to present the Housing Card of her family. Most official paper work require presenting the Housing Card. If a single woman over 18 does not have the Housing Card of her family, she can present an 'approval letter' from the Mukhtar of the area (*ta'yeed Mukhtar*) proving that she belongs to the household who are registered under her family's Housing Card. The process of obtaining the approval letter from Mukhtar is that she must first go to the local Asayish office and ask for a paper showing that she is registered under her family's Housing Card. The local Asayish office has all data about the people living in the neighbourhood and thereby knows which persons are registered under which Housing Card. With that note from the Asayish, she can go to the Mukhtar and obtain the approval letter, which she then can use as a substitute for the family's Housing Card. Each approval letter can only be used once, i.e. every time the woman needs the family's Housing Card, she has to obtain a new approval letter from the Mukhtar. An approval letter from the Mukhtar is valid for 15 days. The woman can obtain the approval letter alone and she does not need legal help for that purpose. It is usually not difficult to obtain the approval letter from the Mukhtar. Usually, people, including single women, do not know about the possibility of using an "approval letter" from Mukhtar as a substitute for the Housing Card. However, when a person, e.g. a single woman, who does not have a Housing Card, goes to a public institutions for a paper work which requires presenting the Housing Card, the authorities always inform him/her about the possibility of using "approval letter" and about how to obtain it. The approval letter is used in practice, also by single women. It is though very rarely that people, including single women, need an "approval letter" because they often can provide a Housing Card, which is either their own or their families. The Housing Card and the "approval letter" is used for all kinds of paper work, for instance when a person applies for the new ID Cards or passports. There is no concern, fear or risk keeping single women from applying and using an "approval letter". In very rare cases, single woman from very conservative families may refrain from applying for documents or other paper work alone due to the family's negative attitude.
2. People, including single women, do not need legal help with regard to obtaining an approval letter.
3. The Housing Card is issued by the governorates in KRI, which are Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk.
4. Some offices do accept copies of the Housing Card while others, including the passport office, insist on presenting the original version of the Housing Card. The passport office needs to scan the information card for authenticity reasons.
5. A single woman who is over the age of 18 is not required to have a male relative present while presenting the Housing Card.

Prevalence of forged documents or genuine documents obtained by using bribe

6. Forgery of documents in KRI is very limited and the punishment is severe for anyone who tries to use forged documents. It is mostly people from neighbouring countries who try to use forged documents in order to travel to other countries.
7. In the seven years the source has been working on legal issues in KRI, the source has not witnessed cases of bribery where data have been manipulated in official documents. It is almost impossible to bribe public officials in order to change the data in official documents because the registration offices in KRI coordinate with the Iraqi National ID-Directorate in Baghdad in order to get the correct data in such documents. As an example, the national ID-cards in KRI are issued locally, however all data in the cards come from the databases in Baghdad.
8. Yet there can be some exceptions where people, who know someone working at the National ID-Directorate in Baghdad, can get such documents with forged data by paying a bribe. However, such documents will easily be checked and revealed because the real data is stored in central databases in Baghdad.
9. In general, the implementation of law is less effective and less strict in Federal Iraq than in KRI, and it is probably more common to use forged documents there compared to KRI. There are external factors that make it more difficult to combat forgery and bribery in Iraq. Political parties and the Shiite militias (i.e. Popular Mobilizations Forces, PMF) can interfere in the legal processes, including issuance of documents, and facilitate forgery in official documents.
10. The source has not heard of people in KRI seeking to obtain forged documents in Kirkuk or Khanaqin. However, some Kurds go to these areas in order to marry a second wife because the law regarding polygamy is more restrictive in KRI compared to Federal Iraq.

Counter corruption measures

11. One of the tools that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq use to combat forged documents in all paper work is “authenticity proofs”. Whenever a person present a document to the authorities, they demand an authenticity proof from the office that has issued the presented document. These authenticity proofs are issued by trusted employees in each public office that is responsible for issuing official documents.
12. Another tool for combating forged documents in KRI is the Special Office for Combating Forgery under the department of organized crime within the Asayish. KRG has also established an office in Baghdad in order to authenticate any document that has been issued in Federal Iraq and is intended to be used in KRI and vice versa. This step limits forgery however it is a very time-consuming process.
13. Any document that has been issued in KRI to be used outside Iraq, as for example a marriage certificate, needs to be authenticated in four steps:
 - a) Officially translated and approved by the Notary Office
 - b) Stamped by KRG’s Ministry of Justice
 - c) Approved by the Department of Foreign Relations (KRG’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in KRI

- d) Approved by Iraq’s Authentication Office that has a branch in Erbil
14. KRI has three offices that work with digitalization of documents. The offices are a part of the KRG’s Ministry of Interior and issue visas, residency cards for non-Iraqis and passport. Nevertheless, digitalization of documents are still far from being completed. KRI is still using hard copies of different documents, including documents of real estate and registration of property. The courts also use hard copies and keep files of cases for seven years after which only verdicts of cases are archived and all other documents, related to the case, are destroyed.
 15. 85-90% of people in KRI have now obtained the new electronic, biometrical version of the Iraqi national ID-cards. The old paper version of the ID-cards can still be used. However, the new biometrical ID card is required for some official work like when applying for passport.
 16. Iraqis who live abroad have to travel to Iraq in order to obtain the new version of the national ID because they need to give their biometric measurements. This process cannot take place at the Iraqi embassies abroad.

Exit via Erbil International Airport

17. The security measures at Erbil airport are very strict. There are four steps or checks which passengers have to go through before they can board the plane. In the first two steps, the passport, tickets and bags are checked by the Asayish. In the third step, which is the most important control, passengers’ passports, visas and residency are checked thoroughly by the passport police. In the last step, the Asayish check the person and his/her luggage. This step includes taking off every piece of metal that the person is wearing.
18. All cases of persons caught with forged document that the source has worked on during the last seven years have exclusively been about foreigners such as Jordanians, Lebanese or Syrians who were trying to leave Iraq illegally. Foreigners, who don’t have residency in KRI will be deported back to their country of origin. Foreigners, who have residency in KRI who are caught with forged documents at Erbil airport, will be detained for three months and then prosecuted in KRI. The punishment is usually a fine or another three months in jail.
19. All foreigners who arrive in KRI receive a visa on arrival for 30 days. When this period expires, they can either apply for residency or extend their visa with one month.
20. The source considers it impossible for a person to go through the controls at the airport illegally by paying bribe because he or she is not only dealing with one person, but many individuals from different authorities. In addition, it is not the same persons from the Asayish or the passport police who are at the airport all the time, which makes it impossible to identify someone to bribe.
21. All airports in Iraq are connected to the database of the Iraqi security service containing the list of persons banned from exiting Iraq. If an exit ban has been issued on a person, he/she cannot leave via any Iraqi airport (including the airports in KRI) because his/her name will pop up at the airport. The source knows a case where an Iraqi member of parliament in Baghdad managed to remove a person’s name from the exit ban list even though the court issued a travel ban on that person because he had been involved in some financial issues.

22. Exit bans can be issued by the Passport and Residency Office and will be implemented immediately. The civil court can also issue a ban, but it takes around one month before it is implemented. During that month, the wanted person will be able to leave the country without being caught at the airport. If it is an evident case with severe crime, the exit ban will be issued immediately.
23. In addition to airport, authorities at land borders all over Iraq and at checkpoints between KRI and Federal Iraq have access to the exit ban list.
24. There are many cases of people being denied travelling between KRI and Federal Iraq due to similarity of their names to the names of persons wanted for terror-related issues. These cases are usually sorted out, although it takes a lot of time.

Access to housing for single women

25. When a person, including a single woman, wants to rent or buy a house in an area in KRI in order to move there, he or she needs a permission from the local Asayish office in that area for signing the lease or the purchase contract.

Meeting with Suzan Aref, the director and founder of Women Empowerment Organization (WEO), Erbil, November 1, 2022

Suzan Aref is the director and founder of Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) that is a non-governmental organization (NGO) that works for empowerment of women in Iraq. The organization also works for improvement of women's lives with regard to living in safe and secure environments and having access to adequate food, water, housing, education and health care.

Access to housing and labour market

1. Single women whether unmarried, divorced or widowed, face challenges with regard to live on their own. They face barriers and difficulties with for instance finding housing to live on their own.
2. The Asayish and the Mukhtar of the area tend not to give single women the necessary permission in order to rent a place to live on their own. This especially applies to women between 18 and 50. It is easier for women over 50 to obtain such permission and live alone. However, if a girl or a woman does not have a family or does not have males among her closest family members, then it is possible for her to be allowed to rent a house. It is easier for single women to get the permission to live on their own in areas like Ain Kawa, which is a Christian area in Erbil.
3. The permission from the Asayish is only needed when a person, including a single woman, wants to rent a house. As regards buying a house, the person must inform the local Asayish office about the purchase, but he or she does not need an Asayish permission in order to conduct the purchase.
4. Women are not protected against sexual harassment at their workplace. Even if a woman files a complaint concerning sexual harassment at a workplace, she will be the one who loses her job and reputation. This issue stops many women from filing complaints concerning sexual harassment in their workplaces.

5. In general, the situation for single women in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is better than the rest of Iraq. In some areas in Federal Iraq, including Baghdad, even hotels would not accept single women as guests.

Access to protection and shelters

6. There have been improvements with regard to formal protection mechanisms by which the authorities provide protection to women. This includes creating the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women, and the shelters that are available in each governorate in KRI. Also establishing the courts and the specialised judges, who look into cases of violence against women, has been a step in that direction. The biggest progress in women's right in KRI took place between 2000 and 2014. Some of that progress has however been revoked since 2014, when the Islamic State emerged. This happened because international donors stopped the necessary financing of the projects supporting combating violence against women and instead diverted the finances to humanitarian aid.
7. Taking over the shelters by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was an important step with regard to protection of women because previously the Union of Women in Kurdistan ran these women shelters. Their approach was not professional and there were examples of abuse and violence against the women and the employees in these shelters. Now the Ministry of Social Affairs of KRG (MOLSA) runs these shelters while the security forces under the Ministry of Interior protect them.
8. There are a number of issues and obstacles to protection of women at shelters.
9. The first issue is the lack of financial support. When women are referred to shelters, they also receive psychological, social and legal help by NGOs like the WEO. However, the role of NGOs in the process of protecting women has decreased because the donors are insisting on having the KRG to take over the NGO's. Adding to that, the Iraqi government has stopped paying or cut in the salaries of the public employees in KRI since 2014. This has affected the financing of the shelters and the efforts to combatting violence against women.
10. Another obstacle is that there is no exit program for women in shelters. The women who are being sent to shelters have no prospects for education, jobs or psychological support there. Due to isolation and lack of contact with the outside world, being in shelters is felt like being in a prison. This situation has resulted in women having to stay in the shelters until they are tired of the situation and want to leave. The source gave an example of a young women who escaped a violent husband and wanted protection at a shelter. However, when she was referred to a shelter she could not stay there for more than a couple of days. She preferred to return to her violent husband than staying under the bad conditions of the shelter. In general, many women prefer not to divorce due to lack of income and because they have nowhere else to go.
11. In addition, there are some practical issues with regard to access to shelters. For instance, it is judges, who decide whether a woman can get protection at a shelter. However, if a woman needs protection outside the courts' working hours then she will have no access to the shelters.

12. A big obstacle for women who need protection is the conservative cultural norms that are still strong in the KRI society, and that create barriers for implementing the laws that protect women. It is for instance the source's experience that the outcome of the work of the reconciliation committees tends not to be in favour of women. This is mainly because the members of these committees are not professionals; they are ordinary citizens who work on voluntary basis, and they may have a tendency to blame the woman for the situation she is in and thereby put a pressure on her to go back to her family. Another example is that for a long time, the NGOs have pressured the KRG to recognize women's witness statements as equal to the men's statements. Yet even after changing the law, some judges still consider the women's witness statements in the court as being worth only half of the men's statements.
13. The source assesses that there is still a long way to go in terms of the authorities' protection of women who are subjected to violence and threats, and there are many situations where these women do not receive the necessary protection.
14. In the source's experience, women's condition in violent marriages improves in cases where the authorities intervene. She gave an example of a violent husband who was warned by the authorities not to beat his wife again. The wife never reported any abuse from the husband after that.
15. The source does not have the number of convicted perpetrators in honour crimes against women. However, the source assumes that the real number of honour crimes is much higher than what the official statistics shows. Even when the perpetrators are convicted in such crimes, their penalties are not that harsh and they are routinely released from prison before finishing serving their terms.
16. It is the source's experience that the social background has no impact on the prevalence of violence against women as she has seen cases of highly educated women being abused and even killed by their husbands.

WhatsApp meeting with Dr. Zino Dilshad, 3 November 2022

Dr. Zino Dilshad graduated from University of Medicine in 2019. The source has been working as a junior resident doctor both in Sulaymaniyah City and in the rural areas around Sulaymaniyah. The source now works as resident doctor at a hospital in Chamchamal, which is a city between Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk. The source has previously worked as a doctor for UNHCR in Syrian refugee camps in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and for different NGOs, e.g. Kurdistan Save the Children. She has also worked as a facilitator and translator in KRI for an Italian photojournalist.

Access to health care for single women

1. In general, public health care in KRI is free or very cheap.
2. The services in the rural areas are limited in terms of sonography, laboratory tests and different medications. In KRI, there are a lot of public hospitals, however the quality of services at these hospitals is low. Private hospitals with good and high quality services are available, however they are quite expensive. People who do not have a good income, including single women who usually face

difficulties in finding a job, will not be able to afford the good services at the private hospitals and clinics.

3. Emergency hospitals are free, but when it comes to non-emergencies consultation like influenza or a minor infection, one must pay a little amount to see the doctor (between 50 cents to 1 USD).
4. It is not necessary to show id-documents to receive treatment at hospitals. Doctors at public hospitals do not ask the patients to identify themselves or to inform about their address or place of origin. No one is denied access to treatment at hospitals. A single woman does not need to be accompanied by a male guardian to receive treatment at hospitals.

Single women in need of medical treatment due to domestic violence

5. At her job, Dr. Zino Dilshad meets women who need treatment due to violence and abuse from their father, brother or other family members. She has at least one of these cases every one or two months. Whilst half of the patients in such cases want the source to fill out a medical report to be used against the perpetrator in the court, the other half only ask for medical treatment and deny that their injuries are caused by violence committed by family members – even though the opposite is the case.
6. Women who want a medical report to be used as evidence in the court, must go to the police first to get a paper which the doctor will then fill out. Therefore, usually the women come to the hospital together with a police officer. When the doctor has filled out the medical paper, it is handed over to the woman herself or the police officer following her.
7. When the source is visited by a woman, who request a medical report, she will make an examination of the woman's body and will objectively describe the different wounds and bruises in the medical report. The medical report that resident doctor writes, must be filled in within 24 hours after the woman has received the wounds. The doctor does not mention the reason behind the wounds, but just describes the bruises, their numbers and locations on the body and if they are caused by an external or internal factor. The source believes that in the event the bruises are more than 24 hours old, it is possible for the woman to go to a specialised doctor to get a medical report to be used in the court.
8. The public hospitals do not keep records of patients' previous consultations, diagnosis and examinations, and there is no central registration of the patients and their visits. Therefore, if a woman visits for instance a hospital for the fourth time, it is not possible for the doctor to see the records from the three previous visits.
9. Private hospitals keep record of all the patients, their medications and diagnosis in a central system.
10. The source is not aware of official statistics regarding the number of women who keep silent about the domestic violence. In her experience, although the number of women filing complaints about cases of violence has increased in recent years, there are still so many women who keep silent and stay in the violent and toxic relationship for the sake of their children etc.
11. The source has previously worked as a facilitator and translator for an Italian photojournalist, who followed a group of women in KRI who had tried to commit suicide by setting fire to themselves.

Most of the women survived the suicide attempt and the photojournalist and the source had direct contact with them and interviewed these women at the hospital. All women were victims of domestic violence and the reason for them to commit suicide was that they had kept silent about it for a long time and eventually tried to commit suicide.

12. The conservative culture and the traditional norms and values of the KRI society cause more problems for women than men. An example is out-of-wedlock pregnancy, which is a huge issue in KRI. Abortion is illegal in KRI unless the mother risk dying due to pregnancy. There are still cases of women being disowned or in rare situations murdered by their families because they get pregnant outside of marriage. When these women contact medical clinics to have abortion, they often meet a negative attitude from the medical staff, who are reluctant to carry out the abortion. Most of these women do not know what to do and end up having illegal abortions and face a lot of medical issues.

Children from divorced or single women in need of surgery

13. If a child of a single mother needs to undergo a surgery, the required consent to undertake the operation could be given by any adult first degree family member (i.e. a brother, a sister, the mother or the father).
14. In case of childbirth where caesarean section is needed, there must be a consent from a male relative. In case the woman does not have a husband, the consent could be given by the woman's father, brother, or another male relative.

Meeting with Shokhan Ahmed, President of Women's Legal Assistance Organization (WOLA), Erbil, 2 November 2022

Shokhan Ahmed is a lawyer and has worked within the field of women's rights for 17 years.

WOLA is a non-political and independent NGO, which was established in 2008. Their head office is in Sulaymaniyah and they have sub offices in Halabja and Kalar. They have projects and activities across Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). A year ago, they were registered in Federal Iraq, Baghdad.

WOLA works to raise awareness on the legal aspects of women's protection issues in KRI, both in the cities and the countryside. They run campaigns to increase the involvement of women in politics, leadership, economics and business. They work with protection of women, including legal representation and consultations to women in shelters and detention centres. They advocate for and push for improved legislation on women's rights in KRI. In 2011, they were a part of a legal effort to have the bill on the 2011 Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8 ratified, and they have since then been monitoring the implementation of the law.

WOLA also cooperate with asylum authorities in some European countries. With the consent of asylum applicants, they check up on court cases and answer general questions on the situation of women needing protection in KRI.

Attitudes towards single women

1. The attitude towards single women in the KRI society depends on a number of factors, including the type of family she comes from and the area she lives in.
2. If the family is educated and culturally open, they may accept a single woman above a certain age, for instance, 30 years, living alone. But in general, the society always question the reason why a single woman is alone and/or lives alone. Single women living alone face challenges, for instance when it comes to travelling alone or having jobs that requires long and late working hours.
3. Another issue is that many families perceive a single woman an economic burden for the family, and it would be easier for them if she was married. It is a general social norm that when a person reaches a certain age, she or he must marry, and such expectation applies even more to women.
4. Although the mentioned conservative attitude towards single women applies to the whole society of KRI, it varies to some extent from area to area. For instance, the society in Sulaymaniyah is relatively more progressive and open in its attitude towards single women, whilst Dohuk and Erbil are more closed and conservative in this regard. In addition, single women and girls face more severe issues (e.g. early marriages) in rural areas than women living in the cities and urban areas.
5. The KRI society has a more conservative attitude towards divorced women than single unmarried woman. It starts with the family talking down to her. The social attitude is also different depending on who asked for divorce. If it is the woman who has asked for divorce, she receives a better treatment than if it is the husband who wanted to divorce. If the woman has asked for divorce, the society will view it as an indication that there was something wrong with the husband.

Access to housing

6. Moving from one area to live in another in KRI requires permission from the Asayish. When a person wants to rent or buy a house or a business property, he or she needs a permission from the local Asayish office. Such permission is rarely given to single women due to the social attitude towards single women. For example, in Sulaymaniyah it is difficult for a single woman to move to and live alone in one of the city's neighbourhoods as the Asayish rarely gives the permission. Because of that, women tend to seek to live in one of the new residential compounds for which they would still need the permission from the Asayish, and the permission becomes even more difficult to get if the woman is not local, e.g., if she is from Federal Iraq or from one of the neighbouring countries such as Iran.
7. Divorced women should legally be allowed to live alone if they can provide the Housing Card (*Bitaqat al-Sakan* بطاقة السكن) which proves that she is the head of household. However, according to the societal and family norms, such women are expected to go back to her own family and live with them. With regard to social norms and security, it is more difficult to live alone compared to if she lived with a child. This leads to many women choosing to stay in an unhappy marriage with their husbands rather than getting divorced and going back to their families or facing challenges of living alone as single women.

Freedom of movement

8. Women under 18 should culturally have the accept of their families in order to travel. If a woman is above 18 years old and she has ID documents, then there are no legal obstacles for her to travel alone from one city to another, for instance from Sulaymaniyah to Erbil. However, the social norms requires permission from her parents to make such a trip.
9. A woman would probably be asked questions about her destination and her place of residence at checkpoints, especially if it is late at night.
10. Verbal harassment from taxi-drives etc. is common. There have also been cases of sexual harassment and molesting, however the harassment is often verbal.

Access to civil documents for single women and their children

11. At WOLA, they have a case with a woman over 18 who is in conflict with her father. She needs to obtain passport for which she needs the consent of her father. However, due to the conflict with the father, who is not willing to give his the consent, she has difficulties to obtain the passport.
12. Every girl or woman under 18 needs her father's consent in order to obtain official documents especially a passport.
13. Regarding marriage certificates, a woman can go to the court to get the certificate without needing any document or approval from her family if she is above 18 years old.
14. In religious marriages, the religious cleric conducting the marriage may require the presence of the woman's father in order to carry out the wedding ceremony. The source knew the case of a woman, whose mother was her guardian. However, when she wanted to get married religiously, the religious cleric refused to proceed with the ceremony, unless the father was present.
15. Divorced women with children have the guardianship over the children up until they are 18 years old. However, when the child is under 18 years old, the consent of the father is always requested in connection with issuance of birth certificates and other documents, particularly a passport.
16. In order for a child to undergo surgery, the consent of the father is required. In the event the father is not present, or not willing to give the consent, or if the mother has the custody, other family members can give the consent to the surgery.

Access to protection

17. Since the adoption of the 2011 Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8, the annual statistics show a general increase in the number of violent cases against women. This increase could partly be due to easier access to the court system and easier procedures to file complaints about violence, but it could also be that there is an actual increase in the number of cases of violence against women. The source believes that in general, the violence is increasing.
18. When it comes to the protection of women, the local authorities are supportive in words, however, there has been no tangible will to protect women in practice. The source considers this lack of will as a reason why killings of and threats against women still takes place in KRI.

19. According to official numbers, 25 women have been killed from January to October 2022, and no one has been convicted.
20. In the event a crime against a woman is committed by her family, it is difficult to proceed with the case as no one from the family would file a case and the case would often be closed due to lack of evidence or confession.
21. Shelters have reduced the problem of violence against women and saved some women to some extent. However, shelters have not been a solution in all cases, and sometimes they have just delayed the killing of a woman. There was one case with a woman staying at a shelter, who made an agreement with her family to come back. A couple of months after leaving the shelter, she was killed by her husband. In this case, there was no one to file a complaint about the killing since she was killed by the family. Therefore, the prosecutor's office had to start a case that was difficult to process since there was no contribution from the family with regard to providing evidence.
22. Another case was about two sisters staying at a shelter. Through a reconciliation, the father managed to take them back to the family. In less than two months, both sisters were killed. The father was arrested, but no one actually asked for a case to be filed. After some time, due to threats, the witnesses changed their testimonial, regarding whether it was the brother or the father who killed the sisters. Then the brother left the country. Eventually, due to lack of evidence and no confession, the case was closed without a decision.

Shelters

23. In order for a woman to be accommodated in a shelter, the approval of a judge is needed. A woman cannot by herself or immediately go to a shelter and ask to be accommodated.
24. The residents of shelters comprise different profiles and they are dealing with and suffering from different issues. In addition to women who reside in shelters due to threats from their families, one finds women suffering from mental issues, homeless women as well as women who have been subjected to rape.
25. The situation of women at shelters is not good. They cannot leave the shelter and they have limited access to phone or internet. Thus, for the women, the shelter is like a detention centre. This combined with the fact that women have to live with other women suffering from completely different issues (e.g. mental diseases) put women under a high mental pressure, which is why many wish to leave the shelter as soon as possible.
26. If a woman wants to leave the shelter, it has to be approved by the judge. It is a time-consuming and difficult process. If a woman wants to leave the shelter, the court needs to be sure that she will be safe, and sometimes the judge does not consider it safe for her to leave the shelter. The judge's decision is often based on his or her lack of knowledge about and understanding of the dire situation in the shelter and the fact that the mental pressure of the woman could be the main reason for her wanting to leave the shelter.
27. The shelter conditions in Sulaymaniyah are relatively better than the one in Erbil. There is no financial measure to make the shelter in Erbil bigger or better. In addition to lack of financial

resources, shelters have problems with recruiting staff. Due to lack of resources and staff, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) relies more on NGOs to raise awareness about the shelters and to provide different services at the shelters, such as training, handicrafts etc.

28. There is only one private shelter in KRI, which is under the Kurdistan Women Union. It is affiliated with Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). There is not much public information about who the residents of this shelter are.

Security issues regarding shelters and women NGO's

29. The location of the shelters is supposed to be secret. In general, people The location of these shelters is supposed to be unknown to the public, but over time, people have become aware of their location. No direct family visit is allowed at the shelters. If a family visit is approved, the woman will be transferred to another place for the meeting.
30. Despite having the legal right, private organizations cannot open shelters, since they will face a physical threat and they cannot provide the guards that are needed for protection.
31. The problem with recruitment of shelter staff is mainly caused by two factors: lack of security for staff and the general negative social attitude towards shelters and people working with protection of women.
32. In 2018, The Directorate of Combatting Violence against Woman (DCVAW) came on a visit to the shelter in Sulaymaniyah under fire attack by the family to a woman in the shelter. Also, in December 2021, a staff member from DCVAW was killed when he went to arrest a woman's father.
33. WOLA and other organizations working within the field of protection of women constantly receives direct and indirect threats from people who are against these organisations' activities and have a hostile attitude towards them. A majority in the KRI society share the conservative idea that a woman does not have the right to complain about her husband or family, which is the reason behind the dominating hostile attitude towards organisations working in this field. This hostile attitude is supported and promoted by religious leaders, groups and media who take advantage of people's lack of knowledge about shelters and women's need for protection, and use their influence to turn people against organisations such as WOLA.
34. A while ago there was a call for amendment of the 2011 Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8. This amendment call raised a lot of public noise about women's rights and organisations working with women.

Documents

35. In KRI, the prevalence of forged documents is now limited compared to 10 years ago. This is due to the amount of digitalization of documents that has taken place in recent years, and which makes it difficult to forge documents.
36. In Federal Iraq, the prevalence of forged documents appears to be worse than in KRI, as there has not been the same extent of digitalization taking place there. In general, KRG is stricter with prosecuting people involved in forgery of documents than the central government in Baghdad. In

KRI there is a special judge for handling cases of forged documents. There have been court cases and prosecution of people forging ID documents, marriage certificates and passports.

37. Through her work, the source previously heard of cases of people both in KRI and Federal Iraq getting authentic documents with forged information regarding name, date and place of birth and place of issuance. However, the source has not heard of such cases in KRI in recent years.

WhatsApp meeting with ASUDA, Erbil, 2 November 2022

ASUDA is a women organisation that was established in Sulaymaniyah in 2000 and is working with combating all forms of violence against women. The organisation has participated in hundreds of projects that serve women all over the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and Iraq.

Access to housing

1. It is very difficult for single women to acquire a place to live on their own. This is because if a person wants to buy or rent a place to live on his or her own, he or she has to obtain an approval from the Asayish. When it comes to single women, the Asayish would be reluctant to give such an approval. Even single men face difficulties to live on their own because neither the society in general nor the Asayish accept single people to live on their own. In general, the families suspect women who want to live on their own as attempting to live against the norms and traditions of the society. The society is more receptive and respectful towards widows, than to single unmarried or divorced women. The authorities and society are less willing to assist these two groups and the Asayish tend not to give their approval for these single women to live alone.

Access to labour market

2. Single women face difficulties in finding jobs and even if they find a job, they face exploitation and harassment, especially if these single women live on their own. Examples of exploitation are not receiving salaries or working without contracts. A major issue for women, not only in KRI but also all over Iraq, is that the educational system does not prepare them for the labour market's realities. In general, women lack knowledge and confidence to protect themselves against exploitation in the labour market.
3. The risk of harassment and exploitation in the working place is the reason why many families prefer that their daughters, wives and other female family members work in women organisations like ASUDA where the majority of the employees are females.

Attitudes towards single women

4. One of the urgent matters that ASUDA is currently working on is the issue of Yazidi women and girls who were enslaved and raped by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-members and have children as a result of rape. The families of these women were not willing to have them back unless the women left their children behind. These women and girls face difficulties in finding jobs and remarrying because of what happened to them. There are also cases of Turkmen and Christian girls

being subjected to enslavement and rape, however their numbers are much less than the Yezidis who comprise around 90% of such cases.

Access to protection

5. There are many challenges that are related to the issue of violence against single women. Most survivors of violence are afraid of filing reports against the perpetrators because they fear retaliation from either their own family members or the families of the offenders. There is also a lack of awareness among the survivors about the protection possibilities provided by women's rights organisations or official entities like the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women. Even when some women report violence against themselves, they often regret it and go back to live with the perpetrators.
6. The support provided by the authorities to women who have been subjected to violence is limited. At the same time, the society generally does not sympathise with women who have been threatened or abused by their male relatives, and the social attitude towards women organisations working with these issues is negative.
7. Organisations like ASUDA that work on the issue of combating domestic violence face a number of legal challenges, including people's unwillingness to file cases or witnessing against perpetrators of honour killings and violence against women.
8. In cases of killing of women, the perpetrators usually receive lenient sentences of two-six years, which is not proportionate with the severity of the crime. The offenders are often released before the end of their sentences because of general amnesties to prisoners.

Shelters

9. In order to protect women against violence the government has established one shelter in each governorate in KRI (three in all) beside one temporary shelter that can house survivors of violence and threats for up to 72 hours.
10. These shelters have now been turned into multi-purpose centres. Women with mental issues and homeless women are also being referred to these shelters.
11. Financing these shelters is also an issue because Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) lacks the financial resources in order to maintain such shelters. This might affect the sustainability of these shelters.
12. A reconciliation committee tries to find a solution for the conflict between the woman and her family while the court is processing the case. Ultimately, the judge decides whether the woman can remain in the shelter or not. There are examples of women who stay at the shelter for a long time without a proper solution for their situation.
13. When a woman enters a shelter, an NGO will take her case and help her both in the shelter and eventually at the court.

14. Girls under 18, who are in shelters, will be attempted to be resettled in another country if they face serious life threats from their families. ASUDA was working on resettling women who face threats on their lives while being at the shelters. However, this work has stalled now because other countries are considering KRI to be a safe place for women who face death threats by their families.
15. Women who remain in the shelters for a long time face psychological hardships. There are around five women in each of the shelters in KRI that have stayed in the shelters for longer periods.
16. From 2002 - 2011, ASUDA had a shelter for women, who faced death threats. The shelter was fired upon in 2008. No ASUDA employees were injured; only one of the shelter's residents that was targeted by the attack was injured, and she survived.

Prevalence of regional differences with regard to access to protection

17. Women in the countryside are at higher risk of being subjected to violence than women in the cities. Women in the cities have better access to police stations, NGOs and other stakeholders that can provide protection and awareness against violence. While women in rural areas lack knowledge about such issues, there are not many entities that work with combating violence against women in these areas.
18. There is no difference in the prevalence of violence against women among the governorates of KRI. However, there is a higher level of awareness on the issue of domestic violence in Sulaymaniyah compared to Erbil and Dohuk. The issue of domestic violence is something that is being debated and highlighted in Sulaymaniyah because of the many NGO's in this governorate that highlight women issues.

WhatsApp meeting with Soma Yaseen Hama, Lawyer based in Sulaymaniyah, 1 November 2022

The source has been working as lawyer for more than nine years. She has worked with women organisations for eight years. She voluntarily provides legal support to women who cannot afford the fees a lawyer requires. The source worked for Kurdistan Women Union (KWU), an NGO with the head office in Sulaymaniyah and offices in other areas of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which operated shelters in KRI before the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) (i.e. The Directorate to Combat Violence Against Women (DCVAW)) took them over from KWU. Today, the source also provides legal assistance to victims of violence who file complaints via the DCVAW offices in Sulaymaniyah province.

Single women's enrolment of their children in school

1. It is possible for single women to enrol their children in school if they present certain certificates; Widows should present the death certificate of their late husband, and divorced women should submit the divorce document in order to enrol their children in schools. Regarding divorced women, if the father is the guardian of the child after the divorce, he is required to be present in order to enrol the child in school. If it is the mother who is the guardian, she only needs to provide a document called 'proof of guardianship' (in Arabic *hojjat al-hadhana*) issued by the court upon the divorce, which proves that she is the guardian of the child. 'Proof of guardianship' can be used in any legal matter regarding the children, and it makes it unnecessary for the mother to submit copies of the father's documents or for the father to be present in such situations.

Possibility for single women to obtain documents

2. A single woman above 18 has usually at least a National ID document, either the old paper version of the card or the new digital one.
3. The Housing card is an official document, which contains the person's three-folded name, i.e. the person's own name, his/her father's names, the grandfather's name as well as the person's place of residence. Within a household or a family, there is only one Housing Card, and it is issued in the name of the head of the household, i.e. often the father. Single women living on their own can, thus, not obtain a Housing Card unless they become head of the household, for instance by being widowed or divorced. It is the most essential card required in any paper work or legal process at any government institution, including issuance of documents such as passports etc. A single unmarried woman, who does not live with her family, cannot in any way obtain a Housing Card for herself and she needs the Housing Card of the family to have her other documents such as passport issued.
4. In order to apply for a passport for her children under 18, a divorced woman needs the consent of the children's father even if the mother has the guardianship and the father does not have any contact with her or the children. As regards single women above 18 who wants to apply for a passport, she is required to submit not only the original Housing Card of her father, but also the original document of her father that shows that he is an Iraqi citizen.

5. If an unmarried woman over 18 is in conflict with her family, and the family does not want to give her the family's Housing Card, it will be almost impossible for her to do anything which requires the Housing Card, including applying for documents. It is only if the conflict with the family is brought before a court and the woman wins the case that she can use the document from the court showing that she has won the case to manage all paper work without the Housing Card of the family.

Access to housing

6. A single woman who wants to rent a place needs an approval from the local Asayish office (sometimes from the central office). It is extremely difficult for a single woman, particularly unmarried women, to obtain such approval if she has a family she can live with.
7. Unmarried women, who desperately need to rent a place to live on their own, either must take their parents to the Asayish office to express their consent with her living alone or make their parents to rent the place in their names and then she lives there instead of them. It is also possible for a single woman to obtain the authorities' approval for her to live alone if she can prove that she has no choice but to live on her own. For instance if a woman in Sulaymaniyah gets a job in Erbil and she has no family or relatives in Erbil to stay with. In such cases, the Asayish would give the approval. However, even in such situations, it is not easy to obtain the approval, and the Asayish asks the woman many questions about her need to live alone before permitting her to rent the place.
8. It is somehow different in cases of divorced women and widows. Although a widowed woman should be legally allowed to live alone with her children the authorities try to hinder it in practice. The procedure is the same, and the authorities may deliberately extend the bureaucratic process to put pressure on the women to change her mind and live with her extended family. Due to the conservative values and norms, the authorities in general tend not to accept that a single woman live alone. Through legal ways, a single woman with children can push the authorities to register her as the head of the family and thereby obtain the Housing Card, which makes it possible for her to live alone. However, it is a difficult process, which may take long time.
9. The strictness of the authorities with regard to permitting a single woman to rent a place and live on her own may vary from area to area depending on a number of factors, e.g. the person who is the head of the Asayish in the area, the socio-cultural feature of the area etc. It is less strict for women in urban areas to obtain the permission than in the rural areas. In the rural areas, it is not only the Asayish that is an obstacle, but also the women's families who do not want her to live on her own. The sources had some cases of divorced women from the rural areas who had legal guardianship over their children. However, the families made some legal obstacles for these women to live on their own and put pressure on the women either to go back to her extended family and live with them or move to a place in the same neighbourhood where her ex-husband lived in order for him to be able to keep an eye on her.

Access to healthcare services

10. In general, access to healthcare services at clinics and hospitals in KRI does not require any document or consent. However, if a person, man or woman, should undergo a surgery, the clinic or the hospital requires an adult relative of the patient to give his or her consent for the operation. The relative could be male or female. However, the relationship between the patient and the relative must be documented.

Access to protection

11. The source considers it a positive development that the KRG (i.e. DCVAW) has taken over shelters from NGO such as KWU, because it requires lots of work and resources to run and maintain the shelters such as provision of security, logistics and financial support, which only the government can provide.
12. The DCVAW authorities, the special appointed DCVAW-affiliated judges and the shelters staff take violence against women seriously. As soon as a case is reported to one of the DCVAW branch offices, they register the complaint and look into the case, and the case is immediately forwarded to the judge in the province responsible for such cases. Any woman, regardless of age, civil or social status, who face any threat to their lives, can ask to be relocated to one of the DCVAW shelters and be protected.
13. The judge is the one who issues the final verdict and he or she is the one who decides whether the woman should be referred to a shelter. An indication that the DCVAW offices take such cases seriously is that DCVAW offices have on-shift staff who accommodate the woman in a shelter while the court/judge is looking into the case. Thus, the woman is not left to fend for herself and she is protected while her case is being processed.
14. While the court is looking into the woman's case, the staff at the DCVAW office suggest a number of alternatives to the woman depending on the case as the shelter is not meant to be a permanent solution. The woman can be suggested a legally founded reconciliation agreement with the family/the perpetrator where the perpetrator legally obligate him- or herself not to pose threats to the woman anymore. Eventually, it is the woman who decides whether she wants to be reconciled with the perpetrator and the court cannot impose an agreement on her. If the threats continue, the court can take the case to a higher level, issue an order of crime, arrest the perpetrator and prosecute him or her.
15. There are, however, cases where the threats and the risk of being subjected to violence do not disappear over time, and the woman may stay in a shelter for a long time. The source knows a woman who has stayed in a shelter for more than seven years. The shelters isolate women from the outside world, and they are not supposed to be a long-term solution. The source knows cases of women who due to sustaining serious security threats have been resettled to other countries by the help of international NGOs.
16. The source does not consider it probable that perpetrating persons or families can affect the processing of a complaint filed by a woman by for instance paying bribes or using good connections. This is because there are many actors and institutions (the court, the police, the shelter etc.) that are involved in the process and they all function according to clear and well-

established procedures. The possibility of influencing this process by external actors is thus either non-existent or very limited.

17. There have been cases of women taken back by their families through reconciliation agreements who eventually have been killed by the family.
18. The reconciliation committees come into effect while the case is being processed at the court. The committee's task is to find a solution before the verdict is issued by the court. The idea of reconciling the conflicting parties before the final verdict is nothing new and has existed within different fields in the Iraqi and KRI law for a long time. There are always some institutions that are mandated to find a solution to a conflict before the final verdict.
19. There have however been a number of concerns and critics of the reconciliation committees, which have been established in connection with DCVAW affiliated courts. One of the critics is that the experts making up a reconciliation committee (a legal expert, a social researcher with good knowledge of the society, a psychologist) work on a voluntary basis. Since they are not paid for their work, the concern is that they maybe do not spend the necessary time and pay the necessary attention to do the job properly. Another concern is that since these experts are part of the society, they may be affected by the dominant conservative cultural values of the society and their judgement could probably not be as objective as it should be. In addition, there is no standard or particular operation procedures for reconciling the conflicting parties, which may impact the work of the committees in a negative way.
20. In addition to the above-mentioned concerns about the work of the reconciliation committees, there is also a practical issue in this regard. Since the members of the reconciliation committees work voluntarily and the same experts do not consistently attend the committee meetings, the conflicting parties may meet different experts from one meeting to another and have to explain about their cases again from the scratch to new experts. This creates an inconsistency in the reconciliation process. However, the source underlines that regardless of the work of the committee, it is the woman who ultimately decides whether to accept the suggestion put forward by the committee and her consent is the outmost important requirement for any agreement to be signed.
21. The reconciliation committees deal with different types of cases, and not only cases of threats to life. There is a tendency that the reconciliation committees are active in cases with minor disputes and lower level of threats.
22. The source does not have statistics on the number of perpetrators being prosecuted and punished in cases of women being subjected to violence. A big obstacle with regard to the prosecution of perpetrators is the society's pressure for not punishing the perpetrators, for issuing a lenient sentence or for a reconciliation solution rather than punishment. There have been several examples of cases, where the perpetrator has received a lenient punishment or being released after a short prison sentence, and then returns to the family. However, it is the source's understanding that the KRG authorities have displayed an increasing firm willingness to prosecute and punish the perpetrators in these cases, despite the social pressure for the opposite.

Meeting with a legal expert, Erbil, 30 October 2022

The source is a legal expert based in Erbil who has more than 20 years of experience with law and the legal system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). For the last 4 years, the source has been active within the field of women's rights in KRI.

Freedom of movement

1. There are no legal obstacles for a single woman to travel alone inside KRI or Federal Iraq. The source has not heard of cases of single women being harassed at checkpoints. However, the source did not rule out that harassment could take place.
2. In general, there has been a progress for women in KRI, when it comes to moving around alone in the evening and for instance driving a car. One could not find women doing this 20 years ago.
3. There are no legal or social barriers for a divorced women to travel abroad alone with her children and she does not need the permission of her children's father to take them with her as long as she is the guardian of the children (usually until the child turns 15). A married woman needs the permission of her husband to travel abroad with the children.

Access to housing

4. Nothing in the law prevents a single woman from living alone or to rent/own a property for living or for business. A single woman from KRI does not need an approval from the Asayish to rent or buy a property and to move from one area to another in KRI. However, due to the social structures and the control exerted by the society, the family and the tribe, it is very rare that one finds a single woman living alone.
5. Divorced women and widows usually return to live with their own family. The extent of social control exercised over a divorced woman is even stricter than if she was an unmarried single. Divorced women and widows face huge challenges in the Iraqi society with regard to social control. Especially, if the woman is not economically independent, she is extremely vulnerable.

Access to civil documents

6. All documents in Iraq have their own law and regulation, thus it is not possible to say something general about single women's possibility to obtain civil documents. However, no law prohibits a woman over 18 years to have a document issued for herself or for her children. It should nevertheless be noted that due to social norms, one rarely finds women living alone.

Protection by the authorities against violence

7. Since 2000, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has tried to remove the paragraphs in the Penal Code, which is discriminating towards women. KRI was the first place in the Arab countries to adopt a law on protection of women, when in 2011, the Anti-Domestic Violence Law no. 8 was adopted by KRG. A similar law was also proposed in Federal Iraq, however it has not been adopted yet. In 2001, the KRG also removed art. 41 in the Penal Code, which allows a husband to punish his wife. The Federal Iraq has still not removed Penal code's article 41.

8. Despite the significant legal improvement regarding protection of women against violence within the last 20 years, there are still obstacles and challenges regarding the implementation of the adopted laws and measures.
9. As a result of the 2011 Anti-Domestic Violence Law, the Directorate of Combatting Violence Against Women (DCVAW) was established under the Ministry of Interior. DCVAW has several offices throughout KRI responsible for investigating physical violence as well as other forms of violations, for instance if a man hinders his wife from going to work ('economic violence'). The jurisdiction of DCVAW office is not limited to cases pertaining to female members of a family, but also men. For instance, a man who is thrown out of his family or subjected to violence by other family members can also file a case against the perpetrator at these offices. However, the number of cases of violence against women is much higher than those against men.
10. A woman subjected to violence must contact one of the DCVAW offices to seek protection. In the event she cannot go to one of the offices, she can contact the nearest police station in person, or she can call the police at no.104 or a special hotline (no. 199). The hotlines are not always an efficient measure as those answering calls sometimes do not take immediate actions upon calls.
11. The DCVAW offices will forward the recorded cases to a judge in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil or Dohuk. There is one judge in each of these provinces responsible for handling cases referred by DCVAW offices. The judge can decide to send the case to a reconciliation committee consisting of a Mukhtar, a social worker and a psychologist. If the police receives the inquiry instead of a DCVAW office, they should also forward the case to one of the special appointed judges. The law does not stipulate that the judges appointed by the DCVAW should be women. Whilst the judge in Erbil is a woman, the two other judges in Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk are men.
12. In the first half of 2022, 27 cases of women being killed (Both honour/family related and external/random) were reported to the authorities in the whole KRI. The source does not have any official statistic, but assumes that only in one-fourth of the cases the killer was found.
13. In the event a perpetrator in a case of violence is to be prosecuted, the DCVAW appointed investigative judge, who is specialised in domestic violence cases, will forward the case to a criminal court. The prosecution will take place on the basis of the evidence collected by the investigating Domestic Violence Court.
14. The 2011 law in KRI also prohibits sexual violence and rape by a spouse, however no such crime has been reported the last 11 years.

Access to shelter

15. It is only the judge who can decide if a woman can go to a shelter. Neither the police nor the offices under DCVAW can refer a woman to a shelter. The referral from the judge is primarily based on the individual assessment of the judge since it is based on written general recommendations from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) rather than hard law.
16. The shelters are protected by guards. The protection of the shelters is administered by Ministry of Interior. There have been cases where shelters or its staff were attacked by family members to a

woman in the shelter. A couple of months ago in Sulaymaniyah, an official working at one of the offices was killed by the family of the woman on the way to the court.

Documents

17. In Erbil, a certain directorate combatting the fraud of documents, including identity documents, has recently been established, which is an indicator of prevalence of forged and manipulated documents.
18. However, due to digitalization of civil documents in KRI, which has been going on in KRI in recent years, the prevalence of forged documents in KRI has become limited. It is more difficult now to have forged ID cards, passports and marriage certificates. To have a marriage certificate issued it requires that both parties must present id documents before a judge.
19. Three-four months ago, the Asayish arrested members of a criminal gang who forged documents, particularly power of attorneys and driving licenses.

Meeting with the Directorate General of the Directorate to Combat Violence Against Women (DCVAW), Erbil 31 October 2022

DCVAW is a multi-sector law enforcement unit under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Interior. It is mainly staffed by police officers.

Attitude towards single women

1. Single women over 40 years of age are considered old girls by the society, and they tend to be subjected to verbal violence where they are asked consistently: “Why are you not married? or “you are an economic burden”. Their families may take advantage of their physical labour, and they tend to be forced to get married (often to their cousins) by their families.
2. There is a cultural and societal pressure on many girls and women from their families to get married often at an early age. The number of divorces is rising in the whole of Kurdistan Region of Iraq KRI. After a divorce, many families tend not to want to take the woman back to live with them. DCVAW meet many of these different issues in their work. The authorities’ tendency not to approve that single women can rent a house to live on her own is an additional pressure on women to get married.
3. DCVAW meet single women who has problems with different forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. There has been an increasing number of such cases on social media in recent years. A problem for many working single women is that their income is confiscated by their parents or brothers.

Access to protection

4. DCVAW has 26 local offices throughout KRI. Persons, men or women, subjected to threats and violence can contact these offices and ask for help. They can report or file a complaint about threats or violence committed by their up to fourth degree family members, i.e. not only parents or siblings, but also cousins etc.
5. In addition, DCVAW has established a phone hotline (119) to which people can call and get help from experienced and trained staff responding to the calls. If the person who calls wants to file a complaint, he or she will be assisted by the hotline staff. The hotline was established in 2019. In 2021, the hotline received 14.000 calls, compared to 8.000 in 2019. It is not only females who call the hotlines, but also males who are subjected to threats and violence call the hotline. All incoming calls are recorded. The person who calls the hotline can be anonymous. In cases of persons subjected to serious and immediate threats to their life, the hotline staff immediately contact the emergency police asking them to remove the person from his or her place of residence and accommodate her at a shelter. There is no shelter for men and the capacity in the existing women shelters is limited.
6. The DCVAW office should have the person's consent to ask the court to start a case. It is the special appointed judge processing the case who decides if the woman should stay in a shelter.
7. The DCVAW is working on an amendment of law no. 8 of 2011 where it recommends that the reconciliation committee tries to reconcile the woman and the perpetrating person or family before the case is brought before the court. The reconciliation committee comprises three experts: a person with social science background, a psychologist and a person with knowledge about religious issues. All three experts work on a voluntary basis. If the conflict is not resolved through the reconciliation committee, then the case will be referred to the court. Minor issues, which make up the majority of cases, are usually resolved by the reconciliation committee and the person returns to his or her family.
8. Sometimes the conflict will not be resolved through the reconciliation committee so that the woman will get divorced through the court. Sometimes, the woman is in shelter while the reconciliation committee is still working on reconciling the woman and the family so that she can return to the family.
9. In the majority of cases reported to DCVAW, the person wants to file a complaint. However, it is only a minority who wish and insist on their cases being brought for the court, depending on the person. The DCVAW offices encourages women not to go to shelters unless they are subjected to serious threats. The conservative societal norms and family pressure will in many cases result in the woman not to be accepted back in the family if she has stayed at a shelter. Therefore, DCVAW has suggested a change of the procedure, so that the case starts at the reconciliation committee and if no solution is found, the case will then be transferred to the court.
10. To bring a case before the court causes a major change in the situation of the woman, e.g. she gets divorced, comes to a shelter etc. Some women are reluctant to bring their case before the court due to the long process at the court and some women are also worried that processing the case at the court will affect their whole family in a negative way rather than just punishing the perpetrator.
11. If a woman is subjected to serious threats, she will usually be referred to a shelter by the court.

12. There is one DCVAW affiliated judge in each of the three governorates, and all three judges are women.
13. The filed complaints comprise a variety of issues. They include among others sexual harassment against single women, sexual relationship between single men and women outside of marriage, domestic violence as well as complaints from working single women whose salary is confiscated by their parents. They are thus about any kind of violence: physical, economic, verbal, emotional etc.
14. The verdict of the court depends on the evidence provided. The court may, according to the law, stop processing a case and make a reconciliation between the conflict parties.
15. Victims of human trafficking are referred to shelters run by the NGOs, and not the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) shelters.

Shelters

16. There is one shelter in each of the KRI's three governorates. The shelters are open all the time everyday (i.e. 24/7). There is also a 72-hours-shelter in Gamiyan where women in urgent cases can stay for up to 72 hours before they are relocated to the main shelters in Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk. The source assessed that there should be more shelters than one in each governorate.
17. Due to serious security threats, it is necessary that the location of shelters is unknown to the public.
18. The shelter in Erbil lacks the necessary capacity and it is understaffed. There are better conditions in the shelters in Sulaymaniyah and Dohuk, however they are also understaffed. MOLSA is working on improvement of management of shelters. All shelters need more employees.
19. The mental pressure women are subjected to at the shelter sometimes forces women to leave the shelter and return to her family.
20. It is not acceptable for the KRI society that women live in shelters. However, the perception of the measures adopted to protect women against violence varies from area to area. On the country, people are more reluctant to accept such measures compared to the cities. In the cities, people for instance tend to accept the result of the court's work and the verdicts issued more than what is the case in the rural areas. And there is also difference among different provinces. Comparing the three KRI governorates with regard to the cultural values and the approach towards protection of women compared to the two other provinces, Sulaymaniyah is the least and Dohuk the most conservative provinces. Erbil is somewhere between Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah.

Meeting with the KRG Minister of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), Kwestan Mohamad Abdulla, Erbil, 2 November 2022

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) is responsible for regulating the labour market in the Kurdistan Region, providing social services for citizens on low incomes and those with special needs. MOLSA is also responsible for the shelters run by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Living alone

1. In Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), it is very difficult for a single unmarried woman to live alone and away from her family, regardless of whether the woman has problems with her family or not. The situation is different for divorced women and widows with children to live alone. Widows are sometimes allowed to stay in the same house where they lived with their husband.

Access to labour market

2. There are no legal obstacles for single women to apply for a job in the public sector. However, social and cultural norms limit women in their access to the labour market. Only 30 % of employees in the public sector are women.
3. Harassment and sexual exploitation of women at work does take place in the labour market in KRI.
4. Currently, there is a draft labour law at the Parliament. The draft law stipulates that women's rights at work must be respected, and sexual assault and harassment at work will lead to severe punishment of the perpetrator. The labour law also covers the rights for the 16-18 years old working teenagers. The Minister expects the law to be passed by the end of 2022.

Shelters

5. There are four shelters in KRI. Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah has one shelter each. There is also a 72-hour basic shelter in Garmiyan, where a woman in an emergency situation is allowed to stay for max. 72 hours before she is referred to and accommodated at one of the three other shelters. MOLSA has lately received the authority and approval to establish another 72-hour shelter in Raparin, similar to the one in Garmiyan.
6. The existing four shelters receive financial support from the KRG, NGO's and UN Women. They also provide awareness and training.
7. MOLSA faces a range of challenges with the shelters;
 - a. The ministry is not allocated funds enough by the Council of Ministers to run and develop the shelters. For instance, whilst shelters in Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah are large and nice with high capacity, the shelter in Erbil is old, small and it looks like a detention center. When MOLSA asked the Council of Ministers to build a new, bigger and nicer shelter in Erbil, the Council refused due to lack of resources. MOLSA also suggested the Council of Ministers to build a new building in Sulaymaniyah, where they could establish shops on the ground floor so that women could live on the first floor and work in the shops. However, due to the financial situation and lack of resources, the council rejected this suggestion.
 - b. The shelters risk being subjected to physical threats and attacks by relatives to women residing in the shelter. There have for instance been two cases of families and relatives to women residing in the shelter in Erbil opening fire to the shelter. The Director of the shelter in Erbil has also received threats from families to women in the shelter.

- c. In Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah there are cases where the issue between the woman and her family cannot be solved, and the woman has thus had to stay in shelters for a long time, in some cases even up to five years without a solution. By staying in a shelter for such a long time, for the woman it feels like being in a detention centre. In a number of these cases the only option for the woman has been to be resettled to another country. However, it is difficult and time-consuming to arrange resettlement, and it requires the assistance of NGOs who can assist with documentation etc. to make resettlement possible. There are cases in both Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah, where the issue between the woman and the family has been solved, however the family refuse to have the woman back due to social and cultural norms.
 - d. In KRI, there are no psychiatric hospitals or places where psychiatric patients can live. Women with serious mental illnesses are therefore sometimes sent to shelters or to a nursing home for the elderly. These women pose a physical threat to other women in shelters and cause violent episodes.
8. Shelters are protected by the authorities. The shelters in Erbil and Dohuk are guarded by armed male guards from the police. The shelter in Sulaymaniyah is guarded by female peshmergas. The location of the shelters is supposed to be unknown to the public, but over time people know where the shelters are.

Terms of Reference

1. Situation of single women in KRI

1.1. General conditions

- 1.1.1. Freedom of movement
- 1.1.2. Access to housing, healthcare and education
- 1.1.3. Access to labour market
- 1.1.4. Access to civil documents
- 1.1.5. Attitudes towards single women

1.2. Access to protection

- 1.2.1. Protection by the authorities against violence
- 1.2.2. Shelters
- 1.2.3. Prevalence of regional differences with regard to access to protection

2. Documents in KRI

2.1. Prevalence of bribery in connection with different types of documents (passports, ID-cards, birth certificates, marriage certificates, court documents)

- 2.1.1. Prevalence of forged documents
- 2.1.2. Possibility to obtain genuine documents by using bribe

2.2. Counter corruption measures

3. Exit via Erbil International Airport (EIA)

3.1. Security and document check at EIA

3.2. Possibility to leave Iraq via EIA by paying bribe