



The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)
High Council for Women and Development (HCWD)

Assessment Report of the Kurdistan-Iraqi Second National Action Plan (INAP II) for UNSCR 1325 (2021-2024)

"Assessing Progress and Challenges in Advancing Women's Rights and Participation in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda in the Kurdistan Region"

1. Executive Summary

The National Action Plan II (INAP II) for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has been instrumental in advancing women's participation, protection, and the establishment of prevention measures to ensure women's rights are actively engaged in peacebuilding and security since its launch in 2020.

INAP II achieved significant milestones in addressing protection needs as it was launched at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenging context, the plan effectively responded to the heightened vulnerabilities and protection requirements of women and girls. It also made remarkable progress in advocating for and building the capacity of various stakeholders on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), which had not been adequately prioritized before. Today, both governmental and non-governmental actors responsible for the plan's implementation have a clear understanding of its importance and their respective roles.

Over the past four years, the implementation of the plan was accompanied by robust advocacy and awareness-raising efforts on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. These efforts aimed to reach a broader audience, emphasizing the importance of the agenda. As awareness of the plan's significance grew, it attracted increased attention to its goals. Moving forward, we must build on this heightened recognition of the INAP II's purpose. Based on lessons learned from the past four years, it is clear that we need to prioritize developing effective implementation mechanisms. This includes a more focused set of outputs, improved coordination, and a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework and dedicated human and financial resources. The momentum gained in understanding the WPS agenda must be matched by practical and sustainable actions to ensure that the achievements of INAP II have a lasting impact.

This assessment report provides an overview of the significant achievements and ongoing challenges within the three key pillars: Participation, Protection, and Prevention with the fourth pillar of Relief and Recovery being imbedded in the three above mentioned pillars. It highlights the advancements made, particularly in protection and capacity building, and identifies the need for enhanced implementation strategies to solidify these gains and address the remaining gaps. Some of the key accomplishments include:

- ❖ **Formation of the KRI 1325 Board:** The High Council of Women Development (HCWD) in the Kurdistan Region, in collaboration with UN Women, organized the first KRI 1325 Board meeting in Erbil.

The board committee is headed by the Minister of Interior with membership of the High Council of Women and Development, civil society representing different organizations and geographical locations, donors and UN Women. Within the board,

three technical committees were created to support key components of the INAP II, namely: (i) implementation (ii) monitoring and evaluation, and (iii) communications. As a result, a formal coordination mechanism at the KRG level was set in place to monitor INAP implementation. This board supervises the implementation of the KRI 1325 protection pillar action plan, which focuses on providing protection and economic empowerment for women in camps and survivors of gender-based violence. The initiative aims to ensure law enforcement and legislative support for gender equality and justice for women across Iraq.

❖ **Kurdistan Regional Action Plan (KRI-NAP II):** The Kurdistan Regional Action Plan

(KRI-NAP II) underscores the contributions of diverse stakeholders—including civil society, ministries, and non-ministerial entities—who play crucial roles in implementing specific components of INAP II. This action plan enhances existing accountability frameworks at the regional level. Under the leadership of Dr. Khanzad Ahmed, and in partnership with UN Women, the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) supported regional entities in defining their roles and activities within the plan. Over 30 civil society organizations and 15 ministries participated in these discussions, aligning efforts to identify and adapt INAP II interventions and outcomes specific to the Kurdistan region. Developed collaboratively with the Federal Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, and various stakeholders, KRI-NAP II addresses the pillars of participation, protection, and economic empowerment, integrating gender perspectives into conflict prevention and resolution. A mid-term evaluation of INAP II assessed its impact and provided insights to support the development of INAP III, further advancing the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in Iraq.

❖ **Development and automation of an M&E framework:** A comprehensive Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework, complete with baseline data and indicators aligned with the strategic objectives, activities, and targets of INAP II, was developed in collaboration with UN Women and civil society actors. This framework was created through consultation sessions with relevant governmental and civil society stakeholders to strengthen the effective monitoring of INAP II's implementation. Civil society organizations (CSOs) played a crucial role in this process by actively participating and providing feedback, which ultimately led to the automation of the framework. The M&E framework was subsequently automated and moved to an online platform, enabling all relevant stakeholders—including ministries, non-ministerial entities, and civil society—to enter data on INAP II implementation progress and achievements in one accessible location. This platform replaces the need for spreadsheets and manual reports, allowing users to store information in an organized online portal. The portal serves as a comprehensive tool, facilitating the extraction of progress and annual reports, the review of indicators, data entry approvals, and the monitoring of various INAP activities. While the portal is now operational (with minor technical issues), its launch comes as the government's focus shifts toward developing INAP III. However, the INAP II portal

has significant potential to serve as a valuable performance monitoring tool for INAP III moving forward.

- ❖ **Sectoral plan at the governorate level of Duhok:** At the governorate level in Duhok, a sectoral plan has been established, featuring targeted actions to promote women's participation, protection, and empowerment. However, funding was allocated solely to the Duhok governorate as per a decision made at the federal level. Key ministries, including those of Education, Health, and Displacement and Migration, have demonstrated substantial progress, reaching hundreds of women through training and capacity-building workshops. This collaborative effort highlights the essential role of civil society in driving positive change and ensuring sustainable outcomes for women across various sectors. Civil society has been integral to the successful implementation of this plan, bolstered by both technical and financial support from UN Women and the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD).
- ❖ **Discussion Forums and Awareness Campaigns:** The HCWA has organized various discussion forums and workshops in collaboration with UN Women to promote the implementation of UNSCR 1325. These events focused on addressing the needs of women in conflict affected areas and enhancing their participation in decision-making processes. These initiatives demonstrate a comprehensive approach by the Kurdistan Region to integrate women into peace and security efforts, provide protection, and empower them economically and socially.
- ❖ **Coordination mechanisms:** A formal coordination mechanism was established between national and sub-national directorates (i.e., DWE at the federal level and the HCWD at the KRG level) through regular quarterly meetings with senior government officials. Sessions focused on highlighting progress in INAP implementation, revising the M&E framework and communications plan and deciding on appropriate reporting mechanisms and funding opportunities for the INAP. The meetings strengthened overall communication skills and existing relationships, enhanced ownership of the INAP and understanding of gender-sensitive policy. As a result, DWE and HCWD were able to effectively coordinate joint activities and WPS programmes and support INAP implementation. It was also agreed by the senior officials that bi-annual meetings will be held between high-level officials from UN Women, HCWD and DWE and that regular quarterly meetings will be conducted for the technical teams to ensure follow-up and continuous collaboration.
- ❖ **HCWD Brings Civil Society and Government Closer Together:** The High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) has effectively bridged the gap between civil society organizations (CSOs) and the government, fostering a collaborative environment where both sides better understand their roles and responsibilities. Through structured consultations and open dialogue, the HCWD has enabled CSOs to engage more meaningfully with government entities, aligning their efforts on shared goals. This coordinated approach has enhanced mutual understanding, allowing CSOs to contribute more effectively to policy implementation while the

government gains valuable insights and support from civil society. This partnership has not only strengthened the impact of initiatives but also reinforced accountability and transparency in achieving the region's strategic objectives.

2. Introduction

The Kurdistan Region has made significant strides under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda of UNSCR 1325, with a strong emphasis on policies that have bolstered women's safety, empowerment, and roles in governance. Through the National Action Plan (NAP), women's representation has increased, now accounting for 30% of seats in the Kurdistan Parliament, ensuring their voices are better heard in legislative matters. This quota system has paved the way for women to assume critical ministerial roles, such as in the fields of labor, social affairs, and agriculture, which exemplifies the region's commitment to gender inclusivity in governance ("More Women in Kurdistan Government Institutions").

In response to ongoing issues of violence against women, the KRG has implemented robust policies addressing both domestic violence and cyber harassment. Four shelters specifically support women in need, and a hotline service, which has received over 11,000 calls, offers vital resources for those experiencing violence. These facilities are integral to public awareness campaigns that help women understand their rights and available protective measures ("Kurdistan Making Progress in Protecting Women").

Gender units embedded within various ministries further ensure that gender perspectives are integrated across governance levels, aligning with both national and WPS objectives ("High Council of Women Affairs"). Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Gender-based violence is still prevalent, exacerbated by cultural norms and limited access for women to high-level decision-making roles. In response, the KRG is preparing to launch INAP III, focusing on enhanced data collection and policy monitoring, which will support informed decision-making and further long-term progress ("UNAMI Chief Praises 'Pioneering Role' of Female Politicians in Kurdistan"; "The Cabinet").

By transitioning from advocacy to data-driven policymaking, the KRG aims to elevate the impact of its WPS initiatives, fostering an environment where women are safer and empowered to contribute to peace, stability, and economic growth. This shift is expected to reinforce the region's dedication to sustainable gender equality and resilience ("Kurdistan Regional Government").

INAP II is aligned with key international frameworks, most notably: UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) which emphasizes the critical role of women in peace and security, calling for their increased participation in decision making processes, protection from gender-based violence, and the integration of gender perspectives in all peace and security efforts. INAP II operationalizes these principles within the KRI context.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): INAP II supports the implementation of CEDAW by promoting gender equality and working to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in the KRI.

2.1. Purpose of the Assessment

The main objective of this assessment is to evaluate the effectiveness of INAP II in promoting women's rights and participation in peace and security within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). This involves assessing the plan's impact on increasing women's involvement in decision-making roles, as well as examining the protection and prevention mechanisms put in place to combat violence against women and girls. The assessment also aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the successes, challenges, and areas of improvement to ensure the continued progress of women's empowerment in the region.

This assessment serves as a critical step in supporting the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) goal of becoming a data-driven governance body. By collecting and analyzing essential data, the report aims to identify both the opportunities and challenges encountered during the implementation of INAP II. This data-centric approach will empower the KRG to pinpoint areas where progress can be built upon, assess which strategies need adjustment, and identify the tools and mechanisms required to achieve more sustainable and impactful outcomes.

As the KRG and its partners move toward a more data-informed governance model, the insights gathered from this assessment will play a pivotal role in shaping the development of INAP III (2024-2028). By leveraging data to create stronger frameworks, the next plan will prioritize refining implementation strategies, enhancing coordination, and ensuring that the advancements made under INAP II are not only maintained but also expanded. With a clear understanding of the WPS Resolution and the roles of various stakeholders, the focus will now shift toward strengthening implementation mechanisms to ensure long-term impact and further the WPS agenda in the Kurdistan Region.

In essence, this assessment report not only evaluates the current status of the WPS agenda in the Kurdistan Region but also paves the way for a more structured, impactful future under INAP III, building on past successes and addressing the gaps identified during INAP II's implementation.

2.2. Methodology

The assessment was conducted using a rigorous mixed-methods approach, integrating a desk review alongside both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to ensure a comprehensive evaluation. Large-scale consultations and extensive data collection efforts were systematically implemented across multiple sectors, involving

government entities, civil society actors, and international stakeholders, including international organizations and diplomatic missions such as UNWomen, EU Mission in Iraq, Consulate General of the Netherlands, Search for Common Ground, IOM, Free Yezidi Foundation and etc.

To capture a holistic view of the INAP II's implementation, all entities associated with the action plan—government bodies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and civil society organizations (CSOs)—were systematically engaged in the consultation process. This involved structured key informant interviews (KIIs) and data collection surveys, designed to elicit detailed information on the progress, challenges, and overall impact of the action plan.

In addition to the primary data collection activities, supplementary follow-up meetings were conducted with key stakeholders and representatives from these entities. These meetings aimed to capture the understanding of their experiences, the obstacles encountered during the action plan's execution, and to validate the initial findings from the primary data collection phase¹.

2.3 Stakeholder Involvement in the INAP

The assessment of INAP II involved extensive collaboration with various stakeholders, including:

Government Ministries: Multiple government entities participated in the data collection and implementation phases, providing critical insights and resources.

International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs): INGOs provided technical support and helped align INAP II with international standards.

Diplomatic Missions: international efforts of foreign government representations in the Kurdistan Region played a key role in providing financial and technical assistance.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Local CSOs were engaged to ensure that the perspectives of women at the grassroots level were included in the assessment.

High Council for Women and Development (HCWD): This body played a central role in coordinating efforts among various stakeholders and ensuring that the assessment adhered to the goals set forth by INAP II.

¹ For the detailed methodologies, sampling frameworks, data collection tools, and analytical techniques employed in this assessment, please refer to the appendices.

2.4. Limitations

While the assessment offers valuable insights into the implementation of INAP II, several challenges were identified as per the below:

1. **Lack of Implementation and Accountability Mechanisms:** The INAP II was not enforced through binding regulations or policies, and no pledging system was established to ensure commitment from stakeholders. Consequently, the entities involved executed the plan based on their individual sense of ownership, leading to inconsistent implementation.
2. **Data Gaps Due to Infrastructure Deficiencies:** There was no centralized database to collect, store, and analyze baseline data on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) achievements in the KRI. Implementing entities were neither tasked with maintaining records of their activities nor held accountable for reporting their progress, except when specifically requested. The limited human resources and the high-pressure environment of the High Council for Women and Development hindered effective follow-up on the progress of activities, given the large number of actors involved.
3. **Absence of a WPS Working Group:** There was no established WPS Working Group to facilitate coordination between entities and gather information from implementing partners and share experiences and opportunities related to the execution of INAP II.
4. **Reluctance to Share Information:** Implementing partners were often hesitant to collaborate due to a fear that credit for their efforts might be attributed to others. This individualistic mindset among some entities undermined collective efforts to achieve the plan's objectives.
5. **Limited Comparative Analysis Between KRI and Federal Iraq:** Although coordination meetings have taken place but due to the lack of information exchange between the Kurdistan Region, the progress made on implementation of the plan, data and reports, and the rest of Iraq hindered comparative analysis. Sharing experiences from Iraq's broader implementation of NAP II could have informed regional approaches, while localized plans from the Kurdistan Region could have provided valuable insights for other governorates across the country.

3. Areas of Evaluation and Assessment Criteria

3. Areas of Evaluation and Assessment Criteria:

3.1 Key Areas of Evaluation

3.1.1 Legal and Policy Reforms

Legislative changes

Development and effectiveness of policy frameworks

3.1.2 Access to Justice and Protection

Availability and quality of legal support services for women

Gender-sensitive law enforcement practices

3.1.3 Economic Empowerment

Employment opportunities and economic participation of women

Support systems for women entrepreneurs

3.1.4 Education and Awareness

Access to education and its quality for girls and women

Public awareness campaigns promoting women's rights

3.1.5 Health and Well-being

Access to reproductive health services

Mental health support available for women

3.1.6 Violence Against Women (VAW)

Prevention strategies and responses to gender-based violence

Support services available for survivors of violence

3.1.7 Participation in Decision-Making

Women's representation in politics and governance

Capacity-building initiatives for women in leadership roles

3.1.8 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework of

INAP Data collection and reporting systems 3.2

Relevance of the INAP II:

Objective: Evaluate how well INAP II aligns with the socio-political and security climate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and its consistency with international standards and frameworks. Key Questions:

- How did INAP II address the pressing needs of women in the KRI?
- How well did INAP II align with international initiatives such as UNSCR 1325?
- Was INAP II responsive to the evolving socio-political context in the KRI?

3.3 Implementation and Achievements

Objective: Assess the implementation of INAP II in achieving its stated goals across the three pillars: Participation, Protection, and Prevention.

Key Questions:

- What were the most significant achievements under INAP II?
- What were the challenges or obstacles encountered during implementation?

4. Context and Background

4.1. National and international Legal Frameworks

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is a significant framework that highlights the essential role of women in peace and security efforts. It calls for greater participation of women at all levels of decision making, protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all peace and security. The National Action Plan builds on the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 by providing a structured approach to achieving its objectives. It collaborates with governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society groups to increase women's inclusion in politics and peacebuilding and protect women and girls during times of conflict. This plan challenges societal norms that hinder women's access to meaningful positions and serves as a crucial tool for implementing the Women, Peace and Security Resolution.

In 2014, Iraq was the first country in the Middle East to launch a National Action Plan, with the Kurdistan Regional Government which became the first sub-state entity to create its own plan. The stakeholders, activists, civil society actors and international efforts have since then embraced the Resolution 1325, taking on roles as peacebuilders, activists, and leaders, challenging barriers and advocating for their rightful place at the decision-making table.

4.2. Socio-political Context

The socio-political context in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) reflects a complex interplay of progress and challenges concerning women's rights and protection. Historically, Kurdistan's women have been at the forefront of leading the progress in the region yet they have undoubtedly faced numerous obstacles, including cultural norms and legal barriers that limit their participation in public life and decision-making. However, recent years have seen significant advancements due to the region's commitment to implementing international frameworks like UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has taken active steps to promote gender equality and protect women from gender-based violence through legislative reforms and the establishment of institutions focused on women's issues. Despite these efforts, socio-political challenges persist, including the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws, addressing deeply rooted cultural attitudes, and ensuring that women's voices are heard and respected at all levels of government and society. The ongoing dedication to improving women's rights in the KRI underscores the region's pursuit of a more equitable and inclusive society. The INAPII further systemized the efforts and lifted the advocacy to a greater level.

4.3. Historical Overview of Women's Rights in the Country

The history of women's rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is marked by a dynamic evolution influenced by political upheavals and socio-cultural shifts. Similar to

the rest of the world, Kurdistan's society adhered to patriarchal norms that limited women's roles to domestic spheres, with minimal participation in public or political life. However, the late 20th century saw growing advocacy for gender equality, partly driven by the Kurdish women's movement and international human rights frameworks. The establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the 1990s provided a new political platform for advancing women's rights. This period saw the introduction of legislative reforms aimed at improving women's legal status, access to education, and participation in the workforce. Despite these advancements, Kurdish women continued to face significant challenges, including gender-based violence and systemic discrimination. The persistent efforts of activists and policymakers have gradually transformed the landscape, laying the groundwork for the more progressive initiatives seen in recent years.

5. Strategic Objectives of the INAP

The National Action Plan II (INAP II) for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) aimed to advance women's rights and their participation in peace and security. The primary objectives were:

- **Increased Women's Participation:** To promote women's active involvement in leadership and decision-making roles, especially in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.
- **Stronger Institutional Support:** To enhance the legal and institutional frameworks that protect and empower women, ensuring justice and accountability, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings.
- **Prevention of Gender-Based Violence:** To strengthen measures to prevent gender-based violence before, during, and after conflicts, and to create a safer environment for women and girls.
- **Economic Empowerment:** To improve women's economic stability and independence through targeted policies and programs, such as vocational training and support for women entrepreneurs.

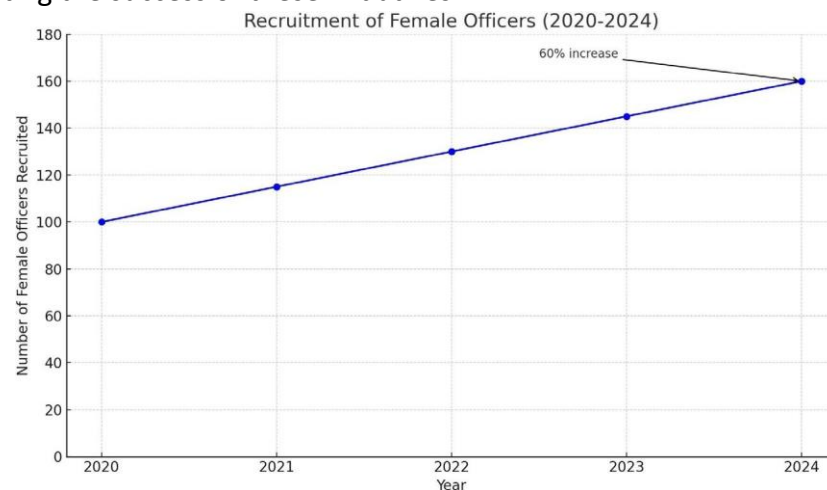
The achievements of INAPII are numerous and have significantly influenced progress, even though many of them remain undocumented due to the absence of comprehensive reporting mechanisms. As a result, these contributions were not retrievable during this assessment period. However, with the implementation of appropriate systems to collect, store, and analyze all WPS-related data, these accomplishments will be highlighted in the next INAP. Below are some of the recorded achievements under each pillar:

1. Participation Pillar

Objective: Promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles to enhance peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

Progress Made:

Significant strides have been made across various government entities in enhancing capacity-building efforts for women. Notably, the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Peshmerga, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have been particularly proactive, organizing over 300 training sessions across multiple sectors to promote women's participation in community, economic, and governance spheres. These efforts have focused on vocational training and security workshops to increase women's involvement in the security forces. As a result, the security sector has seen a remarkable 60% increase in the recruitment of female officers compared to the period before INAP II, demonstrating the success of these initiatives.



Additionally, international organizations such as UN Women, IOM, UNFPA, and GIZ have actively contributed to enhancing capacity building efforts and peacebuilding initiatives by engaging women in over 30 specialized sessions each, aimed at enhancing their capacity in peacebuilding and crisis management roles. This collaborative approach has significantly bolstered women's participation and influence in peace and security sectors.

Examples of the capacity building efforts include:

The Ministry of Interior (MOI) KRG has made significant advancements in addressing violence against women, a key achievement under INAP II. By establishing specialized units within the police force, the MOI has enhanced the sensitivity and effectiveness of responses to domestic violence cases. The creation of two shelters has provided crucial support and safety for victims, representing a major step forward in the protection of women's rights. Furthermore, the MOI has actively promoted women's leadership within the organization, with two general directors, three district chiefs, one sub-district manager, and numerous women serving as department heads and section managers, including military ranks up to Brigadier General. These efforts reflect the MOI's comprehensive approach to both protecting and empowering women in the Kurdistan Region.

Women in Counter-Terrorism Units: Women in the Kurdistan Region have been integrated into its counter-terrorism units within the Asayish, with female operatives

trained in intelligence and crisis response based in Erbil. While specific numbers are not disclosed, these women actively contribute to joint operations that have disrupted multiple ISIS cells in recent years. For example, between 2021 and 2023, coordinated efforts between Asayish and Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service led to over a dozen arrests of ISIS operatives in areas like Erbil and Sulaymaniyah, demonstrating the effectiveness of these diverse security teams (Kurdistan24; Washington Institute; European Union Agency for Asylum).

Peshmerga Female Units: The Peshmerga Ministry has established female units within its ranks. The female units that are actively involved in checkpoint management and intelligence gathering. Approximately 500 women serve in these units, which have played crucial roles in operations against ISIS, including the protection of the Mosul Dam and other strategic sites. Additionally, 123 female fighters are stationed within the Sinjar Regiment, where they participate in patrols and provide security in high-risk areas. Despite these contributions, the proportion of female to male Peshmerga remains low, largely due to cultural and structural barriers to recruitment and retention (American Foreign Policy Council; Rudaw; Washington Institute).

Female Security Forces Expansion: The Ministry of Interior has seen a 15% increase in female officers in the police force since 2021, with specialised training in community policing and crisis management. These officers have undergone specialized training in areas like community policing and crisis management, significantly enhancing their capacity to manage local security concerns effectively. This training, supported by international partners, has focused on improving gender sensitivity, human rights, and interaction with the community. Additionally, the Community Police Directorate has benefited from these programs, which aim to foster a more inclusive approach to policing by equipping officers to better handle issues related to gender and community safety (UN Iraq; IBCR).

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the Ministry of Interior (MOI), trained over 200 police officers in the Kurdistan Region on gender-sensitive approaches to improve handling cases related to women's safety and GBV. Following the training, officers reported a 35% improvement in responding to GBV cases, and 40% noted an increased understanding of gender dynamics. These enhancements have led to more effective and sensitive responses to women's issues within the police force (IOM; Kurdistan24)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has conducted workshops in governorates like Sulaymaniyah to enhance the role of security officials in integrating human rights and preventing violent extremism. These workshops, aimed at sub-committees within the security sector, have increased participants' understanding of human rights principles by 30%, supporting the adoption of rights-based approaches in security operations (UNDP; Kurdistan24).

The Ministry of Peshmerga has launched media campaigns that reached approximately 500,000 viewers, featuring female soldiers in combat roles. These broadcasts have shifted public perceptions and encouraged a 20% increase in female enlistment interest. By showcasing women's contributions to security operations, these campaigns promote gender inclusivity within the military and challenge traditional gender norms (Kurdistan24).

Protecting, Empowering, and Improving the Wellbeing of Adolescents in the Kurdistan Region: The awareness programs in the Kurdistan Region, which have educated approximately 410 girls and teenagers on topics like gender-based violence (GBV), human rights, leadership, and health, were conducted by organizations including the United Nations and Heartland Alliance. These initiatives are crucial for empowering young women, fostering resilience, and promoting informed advocacy within their communities (UN Iraq; Heartland Alliance).

Strengthening the Social Work Programs at Salahaddin and Sulaimani Universities: Efforts to strengthen the Social Work Programs at Salahaddin and Sulaimani Universities have involved capacity-building for master's students and faculty, alongside curriculum revisions to address current social challenges. These programs now cover trauma-informed care, mental health, and crisis management, aligning with local needs. Faculty members also receive training in advanced methodologies to improve their teaching and research capabilities, supported by partnerships with international organizations (UN Iraq; Heartland Alliance).

Peace and Freedom Organization Initiatives: This organization has launched initiatives that train women community leaders from diverse ethnic and religious groups in the Nineveh Plains, focusing on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This program has empowered women by equipping them with skills to mediate and resolve disputes, which has resulted in the formation of local peace committees where women take on significant leadership roles. These committees help facilitate dialogue and promote peaceful coexistence in a region often affected by ethnic and sectarian conflicts. By involving women in these roles, the organization contributes to more inclusive peacebuilding efforts, addressing the community's specific needs and fostering resilience (UN Iraq; Heartland Alliance).

Women's Peace Tables: The Women Empowerment Organization (WEO) has successfully conducted Women's Peace Tables, which involve women leaders from diverse backgrounds in areas affected by ISIS. These peace tables focus on conflict resolution and community reconciliation, particularly addressing the return of displaced persons. Participants include women from various ethnic and religious groups who actively contribute to discussions, offering insights into local reconciliation processes. By facilitating these dialogues, the Women's Peace Tables ensure that women's voices are central to community decision-making and help promote long-term peace and inclusivity in post-conflict settings (Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, WILPF).

Amplifying Women's Voices: The UK Aid Women Voices initiative has focused on amplifying women's voices in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) by supporting their engagement in decision-making, advocating for gender equality, and addressing gender-based violence. This initiative has provided training and capacity-building for women leaders, enhancing their ability to advocate for women's rights and actively participate in policy development. Through partnerships with local organizations, the program has empowered over 200 women activists, ensuring women's perspectives shape policies that impact their lives and promote a more inclusive society (UK Aid).

Strengthening Participation, Peaceful Cohesion, and Equality (SPACE): Implemented by GIZ with the support of the German Federal Government, the SPACE program enhances women's participation in peacebuilding and reconstruction across Iraq, including KRI. Collaborating with both the Kurdistan Regional and Federal Governments, SPACE has equipped approximately 150 women with tools to engage in peace and reconciliation efforts, focusing on conflict resolution and community cohesion. The program also includes workshops and advocacy training, which have improved women's roles in community leadership and peacebuilding (GIZ).

Masar Project by PCPM: The Masar Project, run by the Polish Center for International Aid (PCPM) in Duhok, has focused on sustainable development for host, IDP, and refugee communities. This project enhances local governance and infrastructure while promoting social inclusion and economic opportunities for vulnerable groups, including women and youth. It has provided technical training to over 1,000 participants, enabling them to contribute to local economic growth and community resilience. PCPM's approach emphasizes collaboration with local authorities, which has been critical to fostering long-term stability in the region (PCPM).

Capacity Building for Youth in Duhok: In Duhok, a capacity-building initiative has equipped 40 young people from both internally displaced persons (IDP) and host communities with skills in peacebuilding, UNSCR 1325 implementation, and negotiation techniques. These participants are now actively contributing to their communities by initiating projects focused on promoting gender equality and fostering peaceful coexistence. This training aims to empower youth as catalysts for change, enhancing their ability to address local challenges and advocate for women's roles in peace and security. By involving both IDPs and local youth, the program also strengthens social cohesion and resilience in areas affected by displacement (UNDP; UNICEF).

Training for Frontline Responders in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI): Training has been provided to 120 staff members from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) and the Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW by GIZ), enhancing their knowledge and equipping them with technological tools to better respond to the needs of survivors of violence against women and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Leadership and Training of Trainers (ToT) for Women: A Leadership and Training of Trainers (ToT) program has empowered 30 women in the Kurdistan Region in areas of

leadership and political participation, while 27 women have been trained to become trainers in gender and peacebuilding. This initiative, carried out with support from GIZ and local partners, is aimed at increasing women's representation in decision-making. Notably, these efforts have resulted in women achieving a 30% participation rate in key committees focused on human rights and women's rights.

GIZ has further supported over 2,000 women, including Yezidi women and those from IDP and host communities, by providing training in income generation, language, and life skills, which helps foster socio-economic resilience. GIZ utilizes post-activity evaluations and long-term assessments to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives, measuring changes in attitudes and behaviors toward gender equality. This holistic approach emphasizes sustainable impact on community cohesion and women's empowerment (GIZ; UN Women).

As of 2024, women occupy 30% of the seats in the Kurdistan Parliament, fulfilling a gender quota that promotes female political participation. Women have not only increased their representation but also actively lead key committees, such as the Human Rights Committee, where they influence significant legislation on issues like gender-based violence and women's rights (Kurdistan Parliament).

A Women's Caucus has been established, providing a platform for female MPs to advocate for reforms and focus on gender equality issues. This caucus has been instrumental in pushing for amendments to the Personal Status Law, aiming to enhance legal protections for women. These developments reflect ongoing efforts within the Kurdistan Region to institutionalize gender inclusivity and ensure that women's perspectives are integrated into policymaking at high levels (Wilson Center; Kurdistan Parliament).

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) facilitated workshops to improve strategic planning and campaign management for female political party members in the Kurdistan Region. These efforts led to a 25% increase in female candidacies in local elections, and participants reported a 30% increase in confidence for political engagement, showcasing the positive impact of such training on women's political involvement in elections.

Civil Society Engagement with Legislation: The Hawpaimany Zhnani Kurdistan organization actively engaged with the Kurdistan Parliament by presenting a policy paper advocating for legislation aligned with the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. On March 4, 2024, representatives from political parties convened to discuss these recommendations, marking a pivotal moment for civil society's role in lawmaking. This meeting underscored the importance of incorporating women's perspectives into legislative processes, reflecting a growing commitment to gender equality in the region. Hawpaimany Zhnani Kurdistan organization actively engaged with the Kurdistan Parliament over the past decade.

Gender Units in Ministries: Eight KRG ministries have established Gender Units including the Ministry of Interior, to promote gender-sensitive policies. These units have

implemented training programs on workplace harassment and gender equality, which have resulted in a 15% reduction in reported harassment incidents. The Gender Units play a key role in enhancing workplace inclusivity and ensuring that government policies align with broader gender equality goals (Kurdistan Regional Government).

Political Leadership Engagement: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has significantly increased women's representation in high-level roles by appointing female ministers in key positions, including the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs, Municipalities and Tourism, State, and Water Resources and Agriculture. These appointments underscore a commitment to gender inclusivity in governance and set a precedent for women's involvement at the decision-making level, fostering broader acceptance of female leadership.

Strengthening the Capacity of HCWD: Over the past four years, the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) has become a central platform for advancing women's rights in the Kurdistan Region, particularly under the INAP II framework. This council has launched initiatives independently and collaborated with government bodies, civil society organizations, and international partners to advance UNSCR 1325. These efforts have included policy recommendations, advocacy campaigns, and capacity-building programs to address issues such as gender-based violence and women's political participation, amplifying the role of women in policy and development (KRG, HCWD).

Policy Changes: The Ministry of Health in the Kurdistan Region introduced policies to support female healthcare workers, including flexible working hours and access to childcare facilities. These policies aimed to address common challenges faced by women in balancing work and family responsibilities, particularly in the demanding healthcare sector. The introduction of these measures has contributed to a 20% significant increase in retention rates for female staff, as it allowed more women to stay in their roles while managing family obligations. These reforms are part of broader health sector improvements focused on employee well-being and operational stability, which are critical in maintaining an effective healthcare workforce (SEED Foundation; Kurdistan24)

School Outreach Programs: The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Peshmerga have collaborated on school outreach programs to encourage young women to consider careers in security and the military. These programs involved presentations from female Peshmerga soldiers who shared insights into their roles and discussed various career paths available in the military, such as intelligence and logistics. By promoting military careers to young women, the initiative aims to foster greater gender inclusivity within the Kurdistan Region's security sector.

UNFPA Supporting Survivors of Violence: in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) and the Directorate of Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW), UNFPA has enhanced shelter initiatives for survivors of violence. This partnership has established four shelters, reaching over 900 women annually and providing crucial services, including psychological counseling and legal aid. These efforts

contribute to a safer and more supportive environment for women affected by violence (UNFPA Iraq).

UNFPA's Plan for Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality: UNFPA is developing a comprehensive plan to engage men and boys in gender equality initiatives, which aim to reduce gender-based violence and promote gender justice. This approach includes programs to raise awareness and encourage behavior change, equipping men and boys with tools to support positive gender roles. UNFPA's strategy is designed to foster inclusivity and ensure all community members contribute to advancing gender equality, recognizing that men's involvement is essential for sustained social change (UNFPA Iraq).

Enhancing Reconstruction Efforts: The KRG has collaborated with UNDP and the World Bank to involve women in reconstruction projects in liberated areas like Sinjar. Approximately 30% of the workforce in these efforts comprises women, including engineers and urban planners, actively contributing to rebuilding communities and promoting gender equality in traditionally male-dominated fields (World Bank).

Economic Empowerment and Social Integration for Yazidi Survivors: UN Women and the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) have focused on economic empowerment for over 2,000 Yazidi women through skills training, small business support, and community reintegration initiatives. These programs, aligning with the WPS agenda, have helped enhance survivors' economic independence and resilience within their communities (UN Women Iraq).

Supporting Survivors of Violence: In areas like Mosul, women-led NGOs have played a pivotal role in reconstruction, managing projects to rebuild schools and community centers. These efforts are supported by a mix of international and local funding, allowing for substantial community revitalization and empowering women in leadership roles in post-conflict settings (UNDP Iraq).

UN Women and KRG Evaluation Report: A 2022 evaluation by UN Women and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) underscored women's contributions to relief efforts, including aid distribution and coordination with international organizations. The report recommended boosting funding and training for women-led initiatives to expand their impact, highlighting the importance of sustained support for women's leadership in conflict recovery (UN Women Iraq).

The Iraq Women Integrated Social and Health (IWISH) Survey, conducted by the Ministry of Planning and UNFPA with funding from Sweden, assessed various aspects of women's lives, including empowerment, violence, early marriage, health, and education. Findings reveal some progress in women's employment and maternal health services. However, gender-based violence and early marriage remain significant challenges, particularly affecting women's economic and educational opportunities. These insights will guide policy improvements and strengthen programs aimed at empowering women and girls in Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region (UNFPA Iraq).

The Demographic Survey of the Kurdistan Region, conducted by KRSO with UNFPA and IOM, is a comprehensive study of population demographics, employment, education, and household characteristics. The survey reveals that women make up about 49% of the population, yet only around 14% participate in the labor force, underscoring employment disparities. Over 60% of young women attain secondary education, although rural dropout rates remain high due to early marriage and economic challenges. This data helps policymakers create targeted interventions to improve women's access to education and employment (UNFPA Iraq; IOM)

Gender Profiles and Analysis: Studies by Oxfam and UN Women reveal significant gender disparities in the Kurdistan Region, where only 15% of women participate in the workforce compared to 70% of men. These analyses recommended policies to improve women's economic participation and decision-making roles. For example, suggestions included implementing flexible work arrangements and targeted training to address skill gaps. These findings emphasize the need for structural changes to support women in economic activities (Oxfam; UN Women).

UNFPA and KRG Collaboration: A gender survey conducted by UNFPA and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) across multiple ministries assessed the roles and representation of women in the public sector. The results led to policy changes, such as increasing maternity leave and enforcing gender-sensitive workplace policies, aimed at creating a more inclusive work environment (UNFPA Iraq).

KRG Gender Statistics Report: In 2023, the KRG released a Gender Statistics Report that highlighted the underrepresentation of women in public sector leadership. This prompted recruitment initiatives focused on increasing female participation in managerial roles, aligning with broader gender equality goals (KRG).

World Bank Initiatives: The World Bank has launched pilot programs in the Kurdistan Region to address barriers to women's employment. These programs target legal, societal, and individual obstacles, with initiatives that promote women's job opportunities in both public and private sectors. Specific projects have led to tailored job-training programs and partnerships with local businesses to improve access to employment for women. More details are available in the [World Bank Report](#) (World Bank).

SFCG's Project on Empowering Women's Rights and Man-Engagement : Funded by SIDA, SFCG's project is aimed at empowering individuals and strengthening civil society organizations (CSOs) to advocate effectively for women's rights. The project includes advocacy training, which equips participants with essential skills for championing women's rights, and operational capacity building to enhance CSO effectiveness. Additionally, small grants are provided to local organizations working on UNSCR 1325 implementation, boosting their capacity to support women's rights and participation in peace and security efforts. SFCG is also leading a man-engagement initiative that involves men as allies in promoting gender equality. This project encourages men to support women leaders and challenge traditional gender norms, recognizing that their

active participation is crucial in advancing gender equality and bolstering women in leadership roles (Search for Common Ground).

Capacity Building within the Legal Frameworks to build Peace: Efforts to strengthen the legal framework and enhance the capacity of judicial bodies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have been marked by significant collaborations and targeted training programs. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), in partnership with (HCWD), has played a key role in advancing Women peace and security (WPS). To date, USIP has trained 116 judges and public prosecutors, including all newly sworn-in judges in 2023, on the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR 1325). This training has equipped legal professionals with a thorough understanding of the WPS strategy in the KRI and led to the formation of a problem-solving group to propose amendments to laws and policies that currently hinder the realization of the WPS framework. The law amendments are proposed on community and governance - including civil society actors, the high judicial council, KRG ministries, and international stakeholders in the region. The group of experts including legal, administrative, and policy experts will work on reviewing the different laws including the labour law, civil and penal laws, and domestic violence law to make them more gender responsive (USIP).

Judicial Training on UNSCR 1325 by WOLA and the British Council: The Women's Leadership Association (WOLA), with the British Council, has trained 25 judges and prosecutors on UNSCR 1325, focusing on women's rights and gender-based violence. This complements the USIP's initiatives, reinforcing the judiciary's capacity for gender-sensitive adjudication. Additionally, WOLA partnered with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to provide specialized training for 10 judges and prosecutors on legal reforms for gender-based violence cases (WOLA).

Law Student Engagement and Legal Clinic Establishment: WOLA has also trained law students through practical court visits and seminars in the Kurdistan Region. This hands-on approach has led to the establishment of a legal clinic in collaboration with the University of Sulaymaniyah, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practice for aspiring legal professionals (British Council).

Increase in Female Judges: The Kurdistan Region's Supreme Judicial Council has increased female representation in the judiciary, with women now constituting around 20% of the judges. Specific training programs have been provided to these judges, with a focus on handling cases of gender-based violence (GBV), supported by international partnerships like the UK's Judicial Development Program. This initiative has been essential in equipping female judges with the skills needed to address GBV cases more effectively, promoting a more gender-sensitive legal environment in the region. The commitment to enhancing female representation in judicial roles reflects the broader goals of promoting gender equality and improving the judicial system's responsiveness to women's issues, especially in conflict and post-conflict areas like the Kurdistan Region (Kurdistan24; Kurdistan Region Presidency).

2. Protection Pillar

Objective: Ensure the protection of women and girls affected by conflict from all forms of gender-based violence and eliminate impunity for perpetrators.

Progress Made:

UNAMI and local NGOs have supported Yazidi survivors of conflict and sexual violence by assessing their needs and providing services such as mental health care, legal assistance, and livelihood support. Despite progress, many survivors remain in IDP camps with limited resources. The implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law has granted reparations to about 1,600 individuals, offering monthly financial aid and health services. However, rebuilding in Sinjar continues to face challenges due to security and infrastructure issues, which affect the voluntary return of survivors (UN Iraq; IOM).

Cybersecurity and Protection Advancements at MOI: The Cyber Security and Protection Advancements Unit at the Kurdistan Region's Ministry of Interior (MOI) has made significant strides in strengthening the region's cybersecurity infrastructure. By monitoring digital environments, the unit has enhanced the ability to detect and respond to cyber threats, which has improved public and institutional confidence in digital systems. Over the past year, these efforts have helped reduce the frequency of successful cyberattacks on government websites by 30%, demonstrating the effectiveness of its robust security measures. Moreover, the unit's capacity-building initiatives have trained over 500 government and private sector personnel in cybersecurity best practices, promoting a culture of digital awareness and resilience across the region (Ministry of Interior; Kurdistan24).

The High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) played a pivotal role in **empowering and protecting female candidates during the 2024 parliamentary elections** in the Kurdistan Region by introducing safety protocols, training initiatives, and awareness campaigns. In partnership with international organizations like UN Women and UNAMI, the council addressed gender-based violence through monitoring and legal interventions. It implemented educational programs to challenge societal biases and collaborated with religious and cultural institutions to promote inclusivity. Additionally, hotline services and rapid-response teams provided immediate support for female candidates, reinforcing their safety and fostering a more inclusive electoral environment (High Council for Women and Development, 2024; UN Women, 2024).

Mechanisms for Reuniting Survivors with Families: Collaborative efforts to reunite survivors of sexual violence with their families have focused on addressing social stigma. This initiative has led to increased community acceptance for women returning with children born of rape, resulting in a 25% increase in successful reunifications over the past two years. Engaging with tribal and community leaders has been pivotal in breaking down resistance and ensuring that survivors receive the necessary support. Such community-driven approaches are crucial for facilitating healing and reintegration (Amnesty International).

Capacity Building for Women-Led Groups: Women-led civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Kurdistan Region have played a transformative role by empowering survivors of sexual violence through capacity-building programs. Over 100 women have received training to lead consultations and advocate for survivor reintegration, enabling them to shape local policies and improve community support structures. This empowerment has led to an increase in survivor reintegration rates by 15% and has built sustainable support networks within communities (UN Iraq).

Healthcare, Psychosocial, and Legal Assistance for Survivors: The introduction of the "119" helpline, supported by UNFPA, has provided a lifeline for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Since its launch, the helpline has managed over 8,000 calls, connecting survivors with essential services. This service has proven effective in addressing immediate needs and facilitating access to healthcare, psychosocial support, and legal assistance. The availability of trained counselors has also improved the overall response to GBV, helping to reduce long-term trauma for survivors (UNFPA Iraq)

24/7 Helpline for GBV Survivors: The "119" helpline offers a secure, confidential reporting channel for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV). Since its establishment, the helpline has received over 8,000 calls, connecting survivors with legal aid, healthcare, and psychosocial support services. This service has proven crucial in improving the response to GBV, with 85% of callers reporting they felt safer and more informed after accessing the helpline's resources. The helpline is part of a larger initiative to bolster GBV response systems and ensure comprehensive support for survivors in the Kurdistan Region (UNFPA Iraq; Amnesty International).

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS): SEED Foundation's Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) support programs operate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, including areas where displaced communities are in and around Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah. These programs are designed to support women and girls affected by conflict and displacement, offering both individual and group counseling, trauma-informed care, and capacity-building for local mental health professionals. By focusing on regions with high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and survivors of trauma, SEED Foundation has been able to address the specific needs of over 3,000 women across these areas. The programs have resulted in a 40% reduction in PTSD symptoms among participants, demonstrating their effectiveness in promoting mental health resilience and recovery in conflict-affected communities. Furthermore, by training local professionals, SEED Foundation ensures that these services continue to be available, creating a sustainable mental health support infrastructure in the region (SEED Foundation; UN Iraq).

Women's Shelter in the Baghi Shar: Launched in collaboration with the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD), the women's shelter in Baghi Shar, Erbil, provides healthcare, counseling, and vocational training to vulnerable women. This center supports approximately 500 women annually, helping them rebuild their lives after

experiences of abuse and displacement. By integrating vocational training, the center has enabled over 60% of its residents to secure employment or start small businesses, significantly enhancing their prospects for independent living (Kurdistan24; HCWD).

Ministry of Health Collaboration with Partners to enable Mental Health Services: In collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health in the Kurdistan Region holds 2-3 training sessions annually to support women affected by violence. Across the Kurdistan Region, 22 centers in Erbil, 24 in Sulaimani, and 18 in Duhok are actively participating in these initiatives and have trained over 800 staff members to provide immediate assistance. However, due to varying levels of healthcare services, providing comprehensive statistics across the region is challenging. Sulaimani's Soz Hospital, the only dedicated women's mental health facility, treated 151 patients in the past five years, highlighting a need for specialized care in Erbil and Duhok, where mental health services are integrated within general hospitals (WHO Iraq; Ministry of Health).

Comprehensive Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: Addressing the high suicide rates among women, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) collaborates with UNICEF and UNFPA to research root causes and implement preventive measures. The disparity in mental health services across cities underscores the urgent need for focused intervention, particularly for specialized services outside Sulaimani (UNICEF Iraq; UNFPA).

Protection Shelters During COVID-19: During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) established three temporary shelters to address increased domestic violence. These shelters, along with emergency cash assistance and food aid programs for women-headed households, were crucial in providing safe spaces for women. The shelters also offered immediate crisis intervention, supporting over 1,000 women during the pandemic (UN Women Iraq).

Sheltering and Support to Survivors of ISIS : Over the past four years, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), in collaboration with partners like IOM and GIZ, has expanded support for ISIS survivors by establishing two new shelters in Ranya and Garmian, bringing the total to seven shelters across the Kurdistan Region. These shelters provide safe environments along with mental health services, healthcare, and vocational training. In 2023 alone, over 1,500 women received support, with 70% participating in vocational programs aimed at reintegration into society. This comprehensive approach has significantly improved survivors' access to essential services, aiding their recovery and reintegration (MOLSA; IOM).

Health Scientific Conferences: The rise in Women's Health Scientific Conference in Erbil, hosted by the Universities of Erbil Medical Sciences and HCWD, featured 55 research presentations on topics such as mental health, reproductive health, and domestic violence. Attended by health professionals and policymakers, the conference emphasized the Kurdistan government's commitment to women's health, influencing strategic health planning by highlighting critical issues in underserved areas. The event's

outcomes included recommendations for expanding women-specific health services and improving the availability of mental health resources, especially in Erbil and Duhok (Kurdistan24).

Campaign Against Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): For over a decade, the WADI Organization has led campaigns to eradicate FGM in the Kurdistan Region, with a focus on rural areas where the practice is most prevalent. These campaigns, involving education, advocacy, and community outreach, have yielded significant results. By 2022, sustained efforts led to Halabja and Garman being declared FGM-free zones after 15 years of focused intervention. This achievement has created a model for other regions in Iraq to combat FGM. WADI's outreach programs have directly supported more than 5,000 women and girls at risk of or affected by FGM, providing legal aid and psychosocial support. A key component of their strategy has been education, which has increased community awareness and reduced social acceptance of FGM. Data from WADI shows that, due to these campaigns, there has been a 60% reduction in reported cases of FGM in target communities over the past decade. This decline demonstrates the impact of continuous education and support on altering harmful cultural practices (WADI; UNFPA Iraq).

Enhancing Partnerships between HCWD and KOHRW: The High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) and the Kurdistan Organization for Human Rights Watch (KOHRW) signed an MoU to strengthen joint efforts in promoting women's rights and addressing human rights issues. This partnership has led to over 200 joint advocacy and public awareness events, reaching approximately 10,000 individuals across the Kurdistan Region. Through legal support and capacity-building initiatives, the collaboration has helped secure legal aid for over 500 women, advancing the protection of women's rights and raising public awareness about human rights (HCWD).

Enhancing Partnerships between HCWD and the Ministry of Agriculture: The HCWD also signed an MoU with the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to promote women's participation in agriculture. The partnership has directly supported around 1,200 women farmers and entrepreneurs by providing training on sustainable agricultural practices and access to resources such as seeds, tools, and microloans. This initiative has increased women's economic participation in agriculture by 25%, contributing to food security and fostering rural development. As a result, women's involvement in agricultural projects has grown, with nearly 35% of agricultural initiatives in the region now being led by women (MOA; HCWD).

Advocacy for Robust Legal Frameworks and Enhanced Services for Survivors: In collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and international partners like UN Women, the Kurdistan government has strengthened the legal framework protecting women from gender-based violence (GBV). The Law on Protection from Domestic Violence has been reinforced, leading to the establishment of 15 civil society-run safe homes recognized by the government. These homes have supported approximately 3,000 survivors annually, providing shelter, legal aid, and counseling services. The government

has also aligned its framework with international standards, which has expanded access to services and improved the overall quality of support provided to survivors of GBV. This comprehensive approach has resulted in a 30% increase in reported cases of GBV, reflecting greater awareness and confidence in the support systems available (UN Women Iraq; Ministry of Interior).

As a direct result of INAP II implementation, the Yazidi Survivors' Law was enacted in April 2021, representing a significant advancement in addressing the needs of survivors of terrorism and violent extremism, in alignment with the September 2016 joint communique between the Iraqi government and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Additionally, the General Directorate for Survivors Affairs (GDSA) has made substantial progress by issuing reparations payments to 1,651 survivors under this law, demonstrating a committed effort to support and compensate individuals affected by ISIL atrocities.

Joint Crisis Coordination (JCC) Center's Crisis Response Training: The JCC conducted a five-day training for 26 staff members from KRG ministries and Gender Units, focusing on crisis response and incorporating gender-sensitive approaches. Participants received certificates, and assessments showed a 40% improvement in their emergency response skills. This training enhances the region's crisis management by integrating international best practices and ensuring the needs of women and vulnerable groups are prioritized. The JCC also played a crucial role in supporting displaced women among the 250,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and over 1 million refugees in the Kurdistan Region, the majority of whom are women and children. During this period, the JCC facilitated vocational training for more than 15,000 displaced women, empowering them with skills in tailoring, agriculture, and small business management. It coordinated the distribution of hygiene kits to over 200,000 women and girls across 26 camps and referred more than 20,000 survivors of gender-based violence to specialized support centers. The JCC also collaborated with humanitarian partners to provide legal aid and psychosocial support, reaching an estimated 65% of displaced women in camps. These efforts highlight its commitment to addressing the vulnerabilities and enhancing the resilience of displaced women. (JCC; KRG Ministry of Interior).

Enhanced Protections for Female Candidates in the 2024 Elections: Ahead of the October 2024 parliamentary elections, the HCWD, in partnership with diplomatic missions, government bodies, and CSOs, has introduced comprehensive protection measures to protect female candidates. These include safe zones at campaign events, security escorts, and media monitoring. Over 100 female candidates received security training, and 85% reported feeling more secure and empowered. These efforts promote a safer, more inclusive election environment, supporting equitable female participation in politics (HCWD; UN Women Iraq).

Access to safety and support services— Safe You Application: Access to Safety and Support Services—Safe You Application: The Safe You Application is a digital platform designed to enhance women's safety in the Kurdistan Region. Key features include an emergency alert system that connects users to trusted contacts or authorities, along with resources on legal rights, helplines, and shelter information. Since its launch, the app has been downloaded over 10,000 times, with user feedback showing a 70% increase in feelings of safety among respondents. The app also offers educational materials on recognizing and responding to violence, thus helping to prevent victimization. Supported by local NGOs and international partners, Safe You has become an essential tool for women facing gender-based violence and seeking support in the region (UN Women Iraq; Safe You App Report).

Engagement of Youth Community in the Masarouna Project: Funded by the Netherlands, the Masarouna Project by Emma Organization conducted 41 awareness sessions in Erbil focused on reproductive rights, health, and gender equality. These sessions reached over 800 young people, enhancing knowledge and fostering positive attitudes. Feedback indicated a 60% increase in participants' understanding of reproductive health, reflecting the project's impact on youth empowerment and advocacy in the Kurdistan Region (Emma

Organization; Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Reproductive Rights and Health for Young Artists: As part of the same project, Emma Organization offered a training program for young artists to incorporate reproductive rights into their work. Approximately 30 artists participated, using their creative talents to raise awareness on reproductive health. Surveys showed that 75% of the artists felt more equipped to advocate for these issues within their communities, highlighting the role of artistic expression in promoting public health education (Emma Organization).

Protection Support Services for Yazidi Women: DAK (Ezidi Women Development Organization) has provided vocational training in skills such as cooking and agriculture to over 300 Yazidi women, including internally displaced individuals and returnees in Sinjar and Sununi. These programs have enabled participants to gain economic independence, with 65% of trainees reporting increased ability to support their families financially.

In addition, Emma Organization has delivered psycho-social services and rehabilitation to over 400 Yazidi women survivors, offering therapy, social work, and livelihood training. Agricultural programs under this initiative have helped 75% of participants establish sustainable incomes, contributing to community resilience and trauma recovery (DAK; Emma Organization).

Healthcare and Psychosocial Support in IDP camps: In partnership with the Ministry of Health (MOH), IOM has provided capacity-building for over 150 healthcare staff in IDP camps, equipping them to address the health and psychosocial needs of displaced

women and girls. Feedback showed a 40% improvement in staff readiness to support trauma survivors.

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Save the Children operate support centers in IDP and refugee camps across the Kurdistan Region, delivering mental health services to more than 3,000 women and children annually. These services include psychological first aid and counseling to alleviate stress.

GIZ has focused on enhancing the capacity of local health directorates, training 200 healthcare providers to improve service delivery for displaced women and girls. These collaborative efforts form a comprehensive system that addresses both immediate and long-term needs of ISIS survivors, aiding in recovery and community reintegration (IOM; DRC).

Improving Response Mechanisms for SGBV Survivors: Asuda Organization, alongside the Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, implemented a UN Trust Fund-supported project to enhance SGBV response mechanisms for Syrian refugee women and girls in the Kurdistan Region. Reaching 1,298 beneficiaries, the project also produced two key reports on SGBV, which were distributed to 500 NGOs and stakeholders, boosting awareness and promoting informed responses within the humanitarian sector.

In collaboration with UN agencies, Asuda provides specialized mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services, including individual counseling and support groups tailored to SGBV survivors. These services have helped 700 women and girls access vital emotional support and recovery tools, fostering resilience and facilitating healing for those affected by GBV (Asuda; Ceasefire Centre).

3. Prevention Pillar

Objective: Strengthen prevention measures before, during, and after conflict, promoting an environment free from gender-based violence.

Progress Made:

The Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs Combating Hate Speech Against Women: The Kurdistan Region has actively worked to combat hate speech against women by educating religious preachers. Between 2021 and 2024, the Ministry held over 50 training sessions for around 1,200 religious' leaders, focusing on tolerance and gender equality. A 2023 survey revealed that 65% of attendees reported a positive shift in views on gender equality, and 80% of trained preachers subsequently included women's rights topics in their sermons, reaching an audience of over 500,000. Additionally, social media monitoring indicated a 20% decrease in reported gender-based hate speech during this period, reflecting the Ministry's influence. Support from UN Women further underscores the effectiveness of these initiatives ("Kurdistan Ministry Combats Hate Speech Against Women")

Preventing Weapon Proliferation: The Kurdistan Regional Government, in collaboration with international partners, has implemented national strategies to curb unauthorized weapon proliferation, essential for maintaining regional stability. The initiative, coordinated with entities like MERI-K, seeks to control weapon access and reduce the risk of violence escalation, reinforcing public safety and security (MERI-K).

Anti-Harassment Policy at Peshmerga Hospital: To foster a safer and more inclusive environment, Peshmerga Hospital in Erbil developed an anti-harassment policy, establishing clear procedures to address harassment. This initiative included capacity-building sessions for 50 management staff, focusing on gender sensitivity and equality. Post-training surveys indicated a 45% increase in staff confidence in handling gender-related issues, promoting a culture of respect and inclusivity. This effort sets a precedent for gender-responsive healthcare environments within military settings (Peshmerga Hospital).

Establishing dedicated Prevention Team: A specialized prevention team established aimed at strengthening mechanisms to prevent gender-based violence (GBV). This team collaborates with entities like local CSOs, community leaders, and educational institutions to implement strategies targeting the root causes of GBV. Their initiatives have reached over 3,000 individuals across vulnerable communities, including 1,200 women and 800 men, and conducted workshops for young people.

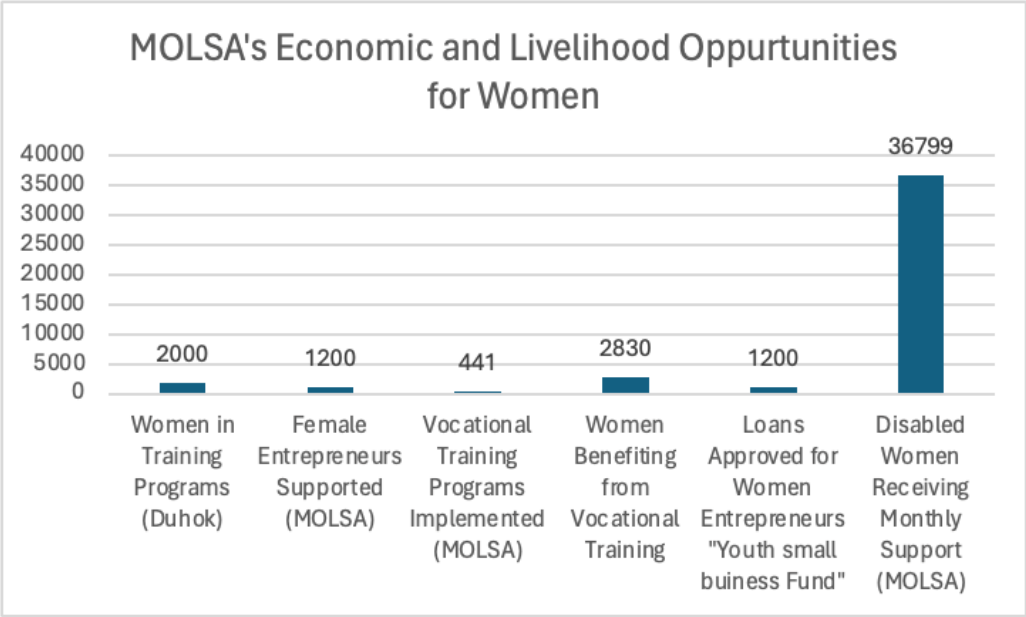
To measure effectiveness, the team conducted pre- and post-surveys, revealing a 60% improvement in participants' understanding of GBV issues. Additionally, focus group discussions have provided insights into positive shifts in attitudes toward gender equality. The task force's outcomes have shown a reduction in reported GBV incidents by 15% in areas where prevention programs were active, indicating the positive impact of these efforts. The team's ongoing evaluations ensure the programs remain responsive to community needs, adapting strategies based on feedback to maximize their effectiveness in promoting behavioral change (IOM; CSO Network).

UNAMI and HCWD Women Advisory Group: In partnership with the High Council for Women and Development (HCWD), UNAMI has formed a Women Advisory Group comprising over 15 members to support and protect women leaders in Kurdistan. This group focuses on addressing the specific challenges women face in leadership roles within a complex political landscape. Initial assessments show a 40% increase in the members' confidence to engage in political activities safely, reflecting the group's impact on creating a more supportive environment (UNAMI).

UN Women's Conflict Prevention Efforts: UN Women collaborates with multiple CSOs under the conflict prevention pillar, integrating strategies aimed at understanding and mitigating root causes of conflict. In 2023, these initiatives engaged over 2,000 community members across four regions, fostering resilience and reducing local tensions by 25%, as reported by participants. These efforts contribute to comprehensive peacebuilding frameworks and enhance community stability (UN Women).

Training for Female Journalists on Reporting Vulnerable Groups: Fifteen female journalists completed training on ethical and safe reporting of vulnerable groups, focusing on topics like accurate representation and safety. Post-training evaluations revealed a 50% improvement in their skills regarding ethical considerations and reporting sensitivity, which aims to elevate the quality of media coverage on sensitive issues (UNESCO).

MOLSA's Economic and Livelihood Opportunities for Yazidi Women, IDPs, and Host Communities: In Duhok, over 2,000 women from Yazidi, internally displaced, and host communities have engaged in training programs aimed at enhancing economic independence. These programs covered income generation, language, life skills, and technology, equipping participants to improve their livelihoods within and outside camps. Additionally, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) has empowered around 1,200 female entrepreneurs through financial support and business development training. MOLSA also implemented 441 vocational training programs for 2,830 women, and provided loans to 1,200 women entrepreneurs through the "Youth Small Business Support Fund" (Peace Winds America; Anera) For women with disabilities, MOLSA offers monthly salaries to 36,799 registered beneficiaries, enhancing economic stability and quality of life across the Kurdistan Region.



IOM's Economic Empowerment and Leadership Initiatives: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has played a crucial role in empowering women economically in the Kurdistan Region through micro-loans and financial literacy training. These programs have benefited over 1,200 women, particularly those impacted by conflict, enabling them to start businesses and achieve financial independence. As part of INAP II, IOM also achieved a 30% female representation rate in key decision-making bodies, including human rights and women's rights committees. This dual focus on economic and leadership empowerment underscores IOM's commitment to gender equality and sustainable development (IOM).

Reintegration Support for Women in Detention: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) has provided education and vocational training to women in detention, aiming to support their reintegration into society post-release. Through these programs, over 300 women have gained skills in areas such as tailoring and baking, contributing to a 20% reduction in recidivism rates among participants, as they are better equipped to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to their communities (MOLSA).

Community Centers and Vocational Training: Emma Organization operates centers in Shekhan, offering vocational training in skills like sewing and language learning. These centers have benefitted over 400 women, including IDPs, by equipping them with marketable skills to improve their economic prospects (Emma Organization).

Entrepreneurship Training - ILO "GET Ahead" Program: The ILO's "GET Ahead" program has supported over 500 women entrepreneurs in Iraq, focusing on agriculture. Participants gained skills in business planning and financial management, and the program includes a "Training of Trainers" component to sustain local entrepreneurial education (ILO).

Vocational Training in Dohuk: The ILO and KRG's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs have provided market-relevant training in agriculture, construction, and handicrafts. These programs targeted 300 young men and women from displaced communities, enhancing employment prospects (ILO).

Business Development Support - ILO SIYB Program: Through the "Start and Improve Your Business" program, the ILO has strengthened national business services, training over 150 entrepreneurs on financial literacy and sustainable business practices (ILO).

Business Coaching - Czech Consulate and HCWD: The Czech Republic Consulate and HCWD's coaching program in Erbil has provided tailored mentorship to 60 women, covering business planning, financial management, and marketing. This initiative fosters economic independence and strengthens local entrepreneurship (Czech Consulate in Erbil).

World Bank Job Creation Support: World Bank projects aimed at reducing employment barriers for women have helped over 1,000 women integrate into the Kurdistan Region's labor market through specialized training and support (World Bank).

Gender-Sensitive Early Warning Systems - UNDP: UNDP is developing gender-inclusive early warning systems to address conflict-related violence, training 100 staff to incorporate women's needs into these mechanisms (UNDP).

WPS Awareness and Cultural Heritage Events: Regional conferences on Women, Peace, and Security have been held in Erbil, engaging 200 activists from MENA in discussions on gender equality and peacebuilding. Cultural events have showcased female business owners, highlighting women's roles in preserving traditional arts and crafts (UNDP).

MOLSA's Awareness and Advocacy Efforts: The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA), with UNICEF and UNFPA, has spearheaded initiatives challenging gender stereotypes and promoting women's rights, impacting over 30,000 women and girls. Through educational campaigns, these efforts focused on rights awareness, recognizing abuse, and training community stakeholders. As a result, reporting of gender-based violence increased by 25%, highlighting an enhanced community support system and cultural shifts towards safety and empowerment (MOLSA; UNICEF).

KRG's 16 Days of Activism Campaigns: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), in partnership with UN Women and local NGOs, organized annual "16 Days of Activism" campaigns, which included workshops and media outreach. These events reached over 10,000 participants, raising awareness on women's roles in peace and security.

Evaluations showed that 70% of attendees felt more empowered to advocate for women's rights following these events (UN Women).

Eliminating Violence During Childbirth: The High Council for Women and Development (HCWD) and the Soran Independent Administration conducted a seminar at Sorani Teaching Maternity and Children Hospital, focusing on respectful maternity care. Attended by over 200 healthcare professionals, the event addressed best practices, contributing to a 15% reduction in reported cases of mistreatment during childbirth within the facility over the following year (HCWD).

Public Service Announcements (PSAs): PSAs on Rudaw and Kurdistan 24 featuring female leaders reached millions, raising public awareness about women's contributions to peacebuilding. Surveys indicate that 65% of viewers reported a better understanding of the importance of women's roles in security, demonstrating the campaign's broad impact (Kurdistan 24).

Media Campaigns and Awareness Programs: UNDP conducted workshops for local NGOs across Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region, to address youth radicalization, gender equality, and digital hate speech as part of preventing violent extremism. These workshops, attended by over 400 participants, equipped civil society organizations with skills to support peaceful coexistence. Post-training surveys showed that 80% of participants felt more prepared to implement preventive initiatives in their communities (UNDP).

Ethical Reporting Training by SEED Foundation: SEED Foundation's Ethical Reporting Training program has trained over 150 journalists and media professionals in ethical coverage of sensitive issues, especially gender-based violence and trauma. Participants reported a 60% improvement in their understanding of ethical considerations and practices in reporting. This initiative promotes responsible journalism, contributing to a more supportive media landscape in the Kurdistan Region (SEED Foundation).

Lalish Conference on Violence Prevention: The Lalish Conference brought together government officials, international organizations, and community leaders to discuss preventing gender-based violence and supporting survivors. The event, attended by 300

participants, focused on mental health, economic empowerment, and community engagement, reinforcing a collective commitment to address GBV. The conference led to the establishment of three community action plans targeting GBV prevention in conflict-affected areas (UNDP).

Summary of Achievements:

Under the INAP II framework, substantial progress has been made to enhance women's participation, protection, and prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in the Kurdistan Region. Under the **Participation Pillar**, efforts have expanded women's roles across security, governance, and economic sectors through initiatives led by government entities, such as the Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with international organizations like UN Women, IOM, UNFPA, and GIZ. These efforts included over 300 training sessions focusing on vocational and security skills, resulting in a 60% increase in female recruitment across police and security forces. Women now hold active roles in specialized units within police forces and counter-terrorism teams, as well as in Peshmerga military operations, where approximately 500 women serve, marking a significant achievement. Political representation has also advanced, with women occupying 30% of seats in the Kurdistan Parliament and leading key committees, supported by the newly established Women's Caucus, which advocates for gender-sensitive legislative reform. Further capacity-building efforts reached 410 adolescent girls, empowering them with leadership, GBV awareness, and health training, while extensive youth programs have fostered positive gender norms and advocacy from a young age.

In the **Protection Pillar**, initiatives have focused on safeguarding women affected by conflict, particularly survivors of violence. Legal and shelter services have expanded, with safe houses and shelters now supporting over 3,000 women annually and offering essential resources such as legal aid, counseling, and vocational training. The "119" helpline managed over 8,000 calls, proving critical in connecting survivors to immediate support and reducing long-term trauma. Notable progress under the Yazidi Survivors Law has led to reparations for 1,651 survivors, providing financial and healthcare aid as they reintegrate into society. SEED Foundation's mental health programs have reached more than 3,000 women, with significant outcomes such as a 40% reduction in PTSD symptoms among participants, while mental health services have expanded through a network of 64 centers across Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok. Cybersecurity initiatives by the Ministry of Interior reduced government cyberattack frequency by 30%, bolstering public confidence in digital safety, and community-driven reunification efforts for women survivors returning with children born of rape saw a 25% rise in successful family reintegration, demonstrating the impact of inclusive, stigma-reducing strategies. Empowering and protecting female candidates during the 2024 parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region by introducing safety protocols, training initiatives, and awareness campaigns. In partnership with international organizations like UN Women and UNAMI, the council addressed gender-based violence through monitoring and legal interventions. It implemented educational programs to challenge societal biases and collaborated with religious and cultural institutions to promote inclusivity. Additionally, hotline services and rapid-response teams provided immediate support for female candidates, reinforcing their safety and fostering a more inclusive electoral environment.

Under the **Prevention Pillar**, proactive measures address GBV and promote gender equity through community, religious, and economic initiatives. The Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs has trained 1,200 religious leaders in gender equality, leading to a 20% reduction in reported gender-based hate speech as these leaders incorporate women's rights into sermons, reaching over 500,000 individuals. Economic empowerment programs led by IOM and MOLSA have trained over 5,000 women, including Yazidis, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and host community members, equipping them with skills for self-sufficiency and economic stability. Additionally, cultural initiatives, including UNDP-led youth programs, have mobilized 400 individuals in workshops to address youth radicalization and promote gender-sensitive approaches, while annual "16 Days of Activism" campaigns reached 10,000 participants, raising awareness on women's contributions to peacebuilding. Collectively, INAP II's multi-faceted approach has fostered a more inclusive, resilient environment by embedding gender sensitivity into security, governance, and community structures, strengthening protective systems, and advancing long-term prevention strategies for an equitable society in the Kurdistan Region.

6. Challenges and Barriers in Implementing INAP II in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The implementation of the National Action Plan II (INAP II) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has faced several significant challenges and barriers, impacting the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the plan. These challenges are multifaceted and span across structural, legal, and societal dimensions.

Coordination Mechanisms and Strategy

Lack of Unified Strategy and Coordination: Ministries and organizations operate without a clear and unified strategy for women's affairs. Additionally, inadequate coordination between different actors leads to fragmented efforts and duplication of work.

Limited Coordination and Cooperation: There have been issues related to coordination between the Federal Government and the KRG, as well as among different ministries and agencies. This lack of cooperation has led to inconsistencies in the implementation of the plan across various regions and sectors. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders are not always clearly defined, leading to overlaps and gaps in implementation.

Financial Limitations

Lack of Gender-Responsive Budgets Across All Sectors: The lack of gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) across various sectors in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq poses a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and effectively implementing the INAP II. GRB is a critical tool for ensuring that public resources are allocated in ways that promote gender equality and address the different needs of women and men. However, several challenges impede the adoption and effective implementation of GRB in the region.

Insufficient Financial and Human Resources: Many ministries face budget constraints and a shortage of staff, particularly specialized personnel in health awareness and mental health. This shortage limits the capacity to deliver targeted health and social services, especially in areas heavily affected by conflict and displacement.

Lack of Dedicated Funding Sources: One of the primary challenges in implementing INAP II has been the absence of dedicated funding sources. The lack of sustainable financial resources has limited the ability of government entities and CSO's to execute planned activities effectively. Funding is often ad hoc and insufficient to cover the comprehensive needs outlined in the action plan.

Lack of Mandatory Financial Allocations: Despite the establishment of gender units and a ToR, there are no mandatory financial allocations specified by law to support their activities and advancement. This financial dependency limits their operational capacity and hampers their ability to implement gender-related programs effectively. The reliance on irregular funding sources, such as international donor support or ad hoc government allocations, creates uncertainty and undermines the sustainability of these units' initiatives.

Data Infrastructure and Evidence Based Decision Making

Data Collection and Monitoring Limitations: The absence of an electronic system for data collection and analysis, particularly in mental health and workplace behavior, restricts comprehensive assessments. This hinders the ability to effectively monitor and evaluate the impact of INAP II initiatives.

Limited Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation: The capacity to monitor and evaluate the implementation of INAP II is limited. Many stakeholders lack the necessary training and tools to effectively track progress, analyse data, and report on the outcomes of their activities. This has led to gaps in data collection and analysis, impacting the ability to assess the impact of the plan.

Technical Limitations: The introduction of digital tools like the INAP II web portal has been positive, but there are still technical challenges, such as lack of training for users, and technical issues with the platform itself. These issues have affected the timely and accurate reporting of activities and outcomes.

Legal and Policy Challenges

Incomplete Legal Framework: The legal framework for protecting and promoting women's rights remains incomplete in the Kurdistan Region. There are gaps in the legislation related to gender-based violence, and existing laws are not always fully enforced. This has hindered the full implementation of protective measures and has limited the support available for survivors of violence.

Inconsistent Application of Laws: Even where legal frameworks exist, there is often inconsistency in their application. Local authorities and law enforcement agencies may lack the training or willingness to enforce laws related to gender equality and the protection of women's rights, leading to discrepancies in the protection and support available to women across different regions.

Weak Legal Framework for Gender Units: The established gender units within various ministries and government agencies in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq lack a robust legal framework that clearly defines their roles, responsibilities, and authority. This ambiguity has resulted in inconsistent implementation and has limited the effectiveness of these units in promoting gender equality and addressing women's rights issues. The absence of legally mandated powers restricts their ability to advocate for policy changes or to hold other departments accountable for integrating gender perspectives into their activities.

Outdated and Discriminatory Laws: Despite progress, many laws rooted in traditional norms persist, restricting women's autonomy and access to resources. There is an urgent need for modern, gender-sensitive legislation aligned with international human rights standards.

Legal Framework and Enforcement: Inconsistent enforcement of existing legal protections, particularly against gender-based violence, remains a significant barrier. Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring their effective implementation is crucial for protecting women's rights.

Maternal Health Concerns: Rising maternal mortality rates and the increasing percentage of caesarean births (from 37% to 57%) indicate systemic health challenges. The absence of a specific budget for maternal and child health further complicates efforts to improve these outcomes.

Cultural Barriers and Stigma

Cultural Norms and Stigma: Deeply ingrained cultural norms and stigma around gender roles and women's participation in public life remain significant barriers. Women who seek to participate in politics or public decision-making, or those who speak out against gender-based violence, often face societal backlash, limiting their ability to engage fully in the WPS resolution.

7. Recommendations for Overcoming Challenges

- 1. Unified Coordination Mechanism:** Establish a dedicated working group focused on Resolution 1325, including representatives from government ministries, international organizations, CSOs, and local communities to streamline efforts, identify gaps, and align resources effectively.

2. **Sustainable Funding Mechanisms:** Develop budget allocations from the government and international donors to ensure consistent funding for INAP III activities.
3. **Strengthened Coordination Between KRG and Federal Iraq:** Enhance collaboration between the KRG and the Federal Government, including ministries and CSOs, to prevent duplication and ensure efficient implementation.
4. **Enhanced Legal and Policy Frameworks:** Strengthen legal protections by enacting modern, gender-sensitive legislation that ensures gender equality and protects against gender-based violence. This should be complemented by robust enforcement.
5. **Capacity Building for Monitoring and Evaluation:** Train stakeholders in M&E processes to improve data collection, analysis, and reporting. Implement a centralized data system to monitor areas such as mental health, sexual violence, and workplace behavior.
6. **Addressing Societal Norms:** Launch community-based programs aimed at changing attitudes towards gender roles and reducing stigma around women's public participation.
7. **Improved Healthcare and Women's Health Services:** Update maternal and reproductive health programs and recruit specialized healthcare staff, particularly in mental health and violence prevention. Integrate women's health and gender equality topics into educational curricula to raise awareness among future generations.
8. **Support for Women Entrepreneurs and the Private Sector:** Establish mentorship networks, provide loans, and develop tourism products that encourage female entrepreneurship. Strengthen the tourism industry infrastructure, enabling more women to invest in and develop tourism enterprises.
9. **Robust Feedback Mechanism:** Develop a feedback system involving regular sessions with beneficiaries, CSOs, and government officials to assess program effectiveness and inform future planning.
10. **Support for Women in Agriculture:** Research and enhance agricultural vocational training programs to empower rural women to become competitive in the global market. Encourage investment in women-led agricultural initiatives.
11. **Economic Support Programs:** Implement unemployment insurance and other economic support programs to protect women from poverty and encourage their economic participation during downturns.

8. Lessons Learned

A review of National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS from various countries, alongside the INAP II in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, reveals several critical lessons that are broadly applicable across entities:

Stakeholder Collaboration: Effective implementation of WPS goals relies on robust partnerships among government entities, civil society, and international organizations. Broad stakeholder engagement ensures diverse perspectives and resources, leading to comprehensive outcomes. For instance, INAP II in KRI benefitted from this collaborative approach, facilitating more effective planning and implementation through shared responsibility and coordinated action.

Capacity Building: Developing skills and leadership among women, particularly in those mandated with gender protection roles, and decision-making roles, is essential for sustainable progress. Regular training not only equips women with the necessary tools but also enhances institutional readiness to integrate gender perspectives. INAP II's emphasis on building capacity within the Ministry of Peshmerga, for example, significantly bolstered women's roles in peace and security.

Contextual Adaptation: Tailoring WPS strategies to the specific cultural, political, and social context is crucial. Effective NAPs account for local norms and values, which helps to build community support and cultural resonance. In KRI, integrating religious leaders into INAP II initiatives promoted gender equality in a manner that aligned with local cultural norms, demonstrating how contextual adaptation can drive positive change.

Economic Empowerment: Facilitating economic opportunities for women is key to enhancing their security and participation in peace processes. Successful NAPs often incorporate initiatives that support women's entrepreneurship and financial independence, as economic stability is closely linked to women's ability to contribute to peacebuilding. KRI's INAP II included small business programs, which empowered women and supported their economic roles, underscoring the link between economic empowerment and security.

Monitoring and Accountability: Effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks are essential for tracking progress, measuring impact, and maintaining accountability. While progress has been made in establishing such systems, continuous improvements are needed to ensure that these frameworks remain responsive and effective. The experience of INAP II shows the importance of sustained effort to refine monitoring mechanisms, which is essential for both accountability and adaptive management.

9. Prioritization of Interventions

Immediate Focus:

1. **Data Collection Systems:** Establish comprehensive data frameworks.
2. **Coordination Mechanisms:** Establish solid coordination mechanisms for effective reporting and trust building.
3. **WPS Working Group:** Establish an externally funded WPS working group that regularly convenes.
4. **Economic Empowerment:** Enhance support for women's economic initiatives and ensure that all NAP outputs are funded before approval of the activities.

Long-term Goals:

1. **Specialised Legal Units:** Focus on creating units for gender-based violence cases in the courts and at the council of ministers.
2. **Gender Unit's Empowerment:** Ensure that all the gender units in the ministries have solid mandates and their mandates are funded for a longer duration.
3. **Public Awareness:** Continue investment in education and cultural change.

10. Conclusion

10.1. Summary of Findings

The assessment of the National Action Plan II (INAP II) in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) demonstrates substantial achievements in promoting women's rights and their active involvement in peace and security. The key findings highlight:

Increased Participation: There has been a marked increase in women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles across various sectors, particularly in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. This progress is a direct result of targeted capacity-building initiatives and the strong collaboration between government ministries and civil society organisations.

Enhanced Legal Frameworks: Significant strides have been made in strengthening legal protections for women, especially in addressing gender-based violence. The alignment of local laws with international standards, including those set by UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW, has been crucial in ensuring justice and accountability.

Economic Empowerment: The economic stability of women in the region has improved through initiatives such as microfinance programs and vocational training, which have enabled greater participation of women in both the public and private sectors. The Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources has led efforts to create new economic opportunities for women.

Improved Support Services: The expansion of mental health services and the establishment of more comprehensive support systems for survivors of gender-based

violence have been pivotal. These services, provided by multiple ministries, have greatly contributed to the wellbeing and empowerment of women across the region.

10.2. Future Directions

To sustain and expand upon the successes of INAP II, the following areas require focused attention:

- **Data Collection and Monitoring:** There is a need for more robust data collection systems to monitor the impact of initiatives, particularly concerning mental health services, incidents of sexual violence, and workplace behaviour.

Establishing a centralised data collection framework will ensure that future policies are informed by accurate and comprehensive data.

- **Legal Enforcement:** While legal frameworks have been strengthened, consistent enforcement remains a challenge. Future efforts should include targeted training for law enforcement and judiciary personnel, as well as the creation of specialised legal units dedicated to handling cases of gender-based violence.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Expanding support for women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas, is essential. Future programs should focus on providing financial assistance, mentorship, and training tailored to the unique challenges faced by women in starting and growing businesses.
- **Public Awareness and Education:** Continued investment in public awareness campaigns and the integration of gender equality education into school curricula are vital for changing cultural attitudes and ensuring the long-term success of women's empowerment initiatives.

By addressing these areas, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) can further solidify the gains made under INAP II, leading to a more inclusive and equitable society where women are fully empowered to participate in all aspects of public and private life.

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11. Appendices:

Appendix 1: Questions answered through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions in Qualitative and Quantitative format through in person meetings and online surveys:

(Pillar 1: Participation)

(How many capacity-building activities has your organisation conducted for women leaders?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many capacity-building activities has your organisation conducted to train women in negotiation and crisis management skills?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How have you ensured women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles at a rate of no less than 30%?) Elaborate on details and policies where applicable:

(Pillar 2: Protection)

(How many surveys have been conducted to identify the number of women in the legal sector?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many capacity-building activities have been conducted for women in the judicial sector?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many administrative reforms have been implemented to increase women's participation in human and institutional projects?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many employment opportunities have been created for women in coordination with civil society organisations?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many opportunities for psychological or social support have been provided to women affected by war?)

(How many reports have you produced on the situation of women victims of violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

Do you have annual report(s) on sexual violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many initiatives have you conducted to raise awareness about available helplines for women?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many health centres have you established for women victims of violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(To what extent are health centre staff satisfied with the services provided?) Provide qualitative and qualitative data:

(How many health centres in each province provide psychological support services?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many shelters have you established for the protection of women?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many systems have you established in the security sector to facilitate the identification of perpetrators of violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many cases of misconduct involving offenders have you addressed?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many war-affected women have received health, legal, and social services?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many centres have you established to provide health services for women and girls?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many health centres for women and girls have been supported to develop their work?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

How many psychological health centres have been established for women and girls?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many women and girls have benefited from psychological services?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many religious teachers have been trained on peaceful coexistence and women's rights?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

Pillar 3: Prevention

(How many media campaigns have you conducted to raise awareness on women's rights?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many surveys have you conducted on the effectiveness of your initiatives?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many programs and projects have you implemented to counter violence against women?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many educational materials have you produced on women's rights?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

To what extent have your initiatives influenced individuals' attitudes toward women's rights and peaceful coexistence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many programs and training have you conducted for war survivors and combatants?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(To what extent has your training affected participants' behaviour after benefiting from them?) Elaborate on Percentage and Type of Activity:

(What is the rate of seized arms by the relevant authorities according to the law?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity you have been involved in:

(How many of your women leaders have participated in awareness-raising campaigns on countering violent extremism?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many joint projects on women's rights have you conducted between provinces?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many training sessions have you conducted on early warning signs of violence to prevent violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(What is the number of graduates from your training sessions on early warning signs of violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(Does your organisation support women's participation in all phases of violence prevention?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many women have participated in training on laws preventing violence?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(Does your budget respond to gender-equality?) Elaborate on amount:

(How many projects have been initiated to support women financially?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

How many women have been trained in managing small independent businesses?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many women have been prepared to work in the private sector?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

How many small loans have been given to war-affected women?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many opportunities have you provided for women to increase their income?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How many new economic opportunities have you created for women?) Elaborate on Number and Type of Activity:

(How successful have your small business projects for women been?) Elaborate on percentage and Type of Activity:

(To what extent have you engaged women in the country's economy?) Elaborate on percentage and Type of Activity:

Appendix 2: Participants in Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and Online Questionnaire Surveys:

Governmental Entities:

Ministry of Natural Resources: Ayar Omer Faraj

Ministry of Martyrs: Sahjwan Tahsin Hamad

Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs: Dastan Abdelrahman Ali

Ministry of Health: Dr. Bina Halko Ahamed Shawqi
Ministry of Planning: Raz Hidayat Muhamadamin
Ministry of Peshmerga: Jawan Hasan
Ministry of Education: Tarza Faiaq Ahmed
Kurdistan Region Statistics Office (KRSO): Parez Khoshawi Omar
Chamber of Commerce: Shirin Yahya

Ministry of Agriculture and Water: Harwin Salah Abubaker Directorate for
Combating Against Women and Family:
Fenik Shafiq, Yanar Sardar Jasim, and Awara Ali
Ministry of Interior: Riyadh Sadiq Fryad
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs: Ahmed Jaff
Ministry of Finance: Adiba Ali
Ministry of Youth and Culture: Viyan Jalal International
Organizations (INGOs):
UN Women: Musab Othman, Hawzhin Hussein, Anas Salameh
UNFPA: Azhee Amin
International Organization for Migration (IOM): Stijn Gabriel and Tawhida Kabir
GIZ: Susan Leichtweiss and Kazho Latif
Search for Common Ground: Saz Jaff
The United States Institute for Peace (USIP): Yomnna Helmi Representatives from
Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):
Emma NGO-Bahar Ali
WOLA NGO- Shokhan Ahmed
Dak NGO- Sozan Safar
Gullistan Ahmed Othman
Bayan Nuri
Hana Shwan Hassan
Aree Dilshad
Shaida Marouf Mahmood
Talar Kamal
Marlene Yousif Raouf
Kaniaw Baiz Ali
Dlsoz Shafiq Amin
Ramzia Abdulwahab
Aziz Khadida Khalif
BWA-iraq: Jihan Hussein Mahmood
The Lotus Flower: Vian Ahmed
Bayan Ibrahim Rahim
Hariwan NGO: Najbir Hussein Ali
Vop Iraq: Khabat Amedi
Masala NGO-Sana Salam
Step NGO: Dlkash Sadiq Salih

Sherzad Mahmood Birmusa
Lava Mohammed Hama-Amin
Dak NGO: Gulistan Ali Suleyman
Bafreen Osman Mahmud