

Baghdad Women Association

2021-2024 Strategy



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Introduction

Due to conflict and terrorism, as well as the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19, BWA continues to renew and extend its strategy from 2021 to 2024. BWA continues to reduce the negative impact of those factors on the economic and political process, especially the rise of gender-based violence and inequalities.

BWA is confident in its abilities to continue to work to enhance women's and girls' situation in Iraq. In over a decade, BWA gained a variety of experiences in women's rights, combating violence against women, and solid qualifications that allow the association to overcome challenges, conduct operations, and implement projects in remote areas.

The coming sections explain the problems of women's challenges in Iraq concerning BWA's mandate. It also explains BWA's role and key plans in the coming years to address them.

Why do we exist? An overview of the Iraqi context

Women and girls are often the most affected persons in the political, social, and economic crisis. The political participation of Iraqi women is always challenged by patriarchy and gender stereotypes. Besides, the protracted nature of the conflict, gender-based violence (GBV), and discrimination cases have increased. There is also an increase in economic and social inequalities between men and women, which led to shifting the gender power dynamics and influencing women's independence and the rise of domestic violence.

There is a massive need to work on women's political participation both in enhancing women's capacity and establishing a policy framework to achieve equal political participation. The economic empowerment of women also requires capacity building programs including providing training and seeking funds to support women independent. Also, women and girls exposed to violence and discrimination should be protected, have access to justice and effective remedy

Political Challenges of Women

Iraq's political institution is fragile, affected by tribal governance as well as social norms and traditions. Institutions lack an understanding of democracy and respect for everyone's right to political participation and inclusion. Many laws need to be legislated and others need to be repealed, but this process is challenged by those factors and is very slow. There is a lack of legal policies to promote the exclusion of members of minorities and vulnerable groups. Although Iraqi women have a 25% quota in the political process, and currently there are 83 women in the parliament, women's participation in leadership and taking decision making positions are still challenged by the socially constructed patriarchal system, as well as the stereotypical view of women as subordinates not an equal member of the society. Also, women require leadership skills and capacity building to improve their political participation impact.

Social and Economic Challenges for Women and Girls

There are three main key impacts on women's economic situation in Iraq: First, Women lack equal opportunities to access the labor market and financial loans in comparison to men. Girls' unequal access to education which impacts their opportunities in the labor market. Moreover, women are challenged by discriminatory laws. For example, the inheritance law; it gives women half of men inherent, this by nature an act of increased inequalities. Second, there were additional demographic and economic challenges in post Self-proclaimed Islamic States (ISIS) conflict; liberated areas are neglected and the affected persons lack access to basic services and adequate standards of living. Third, the unprecedented crisis of COVID-19 led to the loss of jobs, decrease of income, and shut down of factories, companies, and other business and governmental services. Besides, the significant drop in crude oil prices highly affected the Iraqi economy and the individual's income. Those factors contribute to women and girls becoming victims of modern slavery and labor exploitation, especially breadwinners such as widows, divorced, unmarried and displaced, and returnees to the liberated areas.

Gender Stereotypes, Gender-Based Violence & Discrimination Against Women & Girls

The substance of the previous sections overlaps with the current one. As stated, the economic and political challenges are driven by social norms and traditions which contribute to GBV and discrimination against women and girls (DAWG). BWA's teams concluded that the most challenging issue on GBV and DAWG can be summarized in the following points:

- The magnitude of the ISIS impact on women is huge. ISIS conflict-affected mainly two groups of women. The majority group who lived under the rule of ISIS: those women were exposed to discrimination and abuse while living under the terrorists' rule of law. The minority groups of Yazidis, Christians, Shabak Turkman, and others, who faced extreme sexual and GBV. Both groups of women and girls are in urgent need of psychological rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Girls, on the other hand, were deprived access to education, exposed to early and forced marriages, and other types of sexual exploitation. Finally, we must not forget the issue of children born by ISIS rape whether under the umbrella of wedlock or outside of it. Those children lack access to basic services, the domestic law challenges the issuance of their identification documents.
- Women lack **access to basic health services** and **access to reproductive rights and services** especially women in rural areas. This constitutes an unspoken stigma against survivors of sexual violence or other women who are at the risk of losing their lives for maternity mortalities.
- The law on domestic violence has not been adopted. The issue of domestic violence continued to increase during and in post ISIS conflict, as well as during the COVID-19 crisis in many regions of Iraq. Many Iraqi women and girls are still experiencing all forms of GBV, harmful social norms, and traditions. Honor killing and leverage marriages are still committed. Women and girls are abused verbally and physically, they are also considered a

financial and social burden and therefore exposed to forced and early marriages and different types of exploitation.

- **DAWG in the media** sector continues to rise. Despite the improvement of women's participation in the media after 2003, women are still constrained within the stereotypical view of society that criticizes women working in this field. Women also often do not have the opportunity to assume leadership roles in media institutions. In addition to that, the visual, audio, and print media outlets do not adequately cover issues on women's challenges and achievements. In October 2019 protests, women from various regions of Iraq participated to convey women's voice and their demands for their rights, however, women faced death threats, kidnapping, and defamation. There was a clear practice of all forms of GBV and DAWG.

Main Objectives

Given the previously stated challenges, and to achieve substantive gender equality, BWA 2021-2024 strategy focuses on enhancing women's political participation, promoting socio-economic empowerment, and combating GBV and DAWG. BWA seek to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or another status., women with disabilities, women living in rural areas, camps, and poverty; displaced and returnees and refugees, leaving no one behind. Taking the human rights-based approach and promoting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, BWA's key areas of actions are summarized as the following:

Political Participation of Women

- Promote women's role in effective and accountable institutions to acquire good governance.
- Cooperate with women politicians for repealing discriminatory laws and establish new policies to protect women's and girls' rights among politicians.
- Enhance women's capacity and skills in politics by holding training and awareness-raising campaigns.

- Raise awareness for gender equality among public officials in various sectors.
- Promote the participation of accountable women who respect human rights and equality for everyone.
- Continue to promote and implement the Iraqi National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, in cooperation with the Iraqi government, civil society and relevant stakeholders. The plan contributes to women's participation in decision-making positions and reconciliation and peace negotiations.
- Contribute to peacebuilding and negotiation processes.

Social and Economic Empowerment of Women and Girls

- Promote equal access to the labor market and financial loans.
- Establish awareness-raising campaigns among families about the importance of girls' access to education. In addition to collaborating with governmental institutions to ensure girls' access to education is respected, protected, and fulfilled.
- Advocate for repealing discriminatory laws in both social and economic spheres.
- Contribute to action plans that promote access to basic services and an adequate standard of living for people in ISIS liberated areas, camps, and rural areas.
- Establish economic empowerment programs to train women on small scale projects and seek the possibility to access funds and loans. This plan will target and prioritize the most vulnerable groups and women breadwinners.
- Advocate for establishing financial credit programs within the private and public sectors.
- Continue to cooperate with the government, civil society actors, and relevant stakeholders to achieve substantive gender equality and women's empowerment.

Combating Gender Stereotypes, Gender-Based Violence & Discrimination Against Women & Girls

- Cooperate with civil society actors and public officials to establish the domestic law bill.
- Facilitate women and girls' access to justice and remedy, by providing free legal counseling and representation in courts, especially for survivors of domestic and GBV.
- Cooperate with civil society actors and public officials to repeal discriminatory laws and policies such as, but not limited to, laws promoting honor killing and allowing rapists to marry their victims.
- Advocate and raise awareness to eliminate child and forced marriage., and other forms of GBV.
- Provide psychological and social services for survivors of domestic and GBV. Especially in ISIS liberated areas as well as women and girls in southern areas.
- Ensure the social and legal protection of women and girls' survivors of sexual and domestic violence.
- Cooperate with health institutions and relevant actors to provide access to health services for women and girls. This includes awareness-raising and education on reproductive rights.
- Provide legal assistance to women access to identity and other forms of identity documentation. Including promoting access to children born by rape to documents and social services.
- Promote legal policies and frameworks that protect women from verbal abuse in media.
- Contribute to the implementation of CEDAW recommendations.

Institutional Objectives

- Continue to expand its geographical area of work to include persons of diverse origins and ethnicities in order to maximize the impact and benefits. This includes expanding BWA's work in ISIS liberated areas in the northwest, as well as in southern governorates .
- Increase BWA's institutional capacity and resources through staff capacity building training as well as seeking fund diversity.
- Enhance media policy and communication to maximize access to the affected population, leaving no one behind .
- Build and strengthen BWA's international network with feminist organizations, alliances, and personnel.

International Legal Instruments

BWA promotes the following international instruments to leverage its scope of work and operations:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Optional Protocol. Specifically, the adoption of the final recommendations of the CEDAW committee.
- The recommendations of Beijing of 1995 and Beijing + 5 of 2000 conferences.
- The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, Focusing on Goal #5: Gender equality, Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.
- United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 of 2000 on women security on the ground, and other related Resolutions 2122 of 2013 and 2242 of 2015, that emphasize the importance of women's participation and protection against violence and sexual exploitation during and after conflicts. They also express the necessity to include women in negotiation, peace-building, and decision-making processes. UNSCR 1820 of 2008, to prevent conflict-related sexual violence an essential component of a peace and security process and indicates that sexual violence in conflict constitutes a war crime. Finally, UNSCR 2106 of 2013 emphasizes the importance of gender equality and political, social, and economic empowerment of women in efforts to prevent sexual violence in armed conflict and after it.

- UNSCR 1888 of 2009, which stressed the importance of ending impunity and provide victims with an effective remedy.
- UNSCR 1960 of 2010, which provides a system of accountability for conflict-related sexual violence.
- National strategies and plans such as The National Strategy for the Advancement of Women, the National Action Plan for implementing UNSCR 1325, the anti-corruption strategy in Iraq, Poverty reduction strategy, and finally the policies and legislation for rural women.

Networks and Memberships

BWA is a member in diverse regional and local networks, this will allow partnerships and cooperation to address BWA's objectives:

- Iraqi Women Network: The network gathers local Iraqi organizations working on women's rights and conduct local and international advocacy on issues related to Iraqi women.
- Alliance 1325: the alliance 1325 bring women organizations dedicated to promoting the implementation of UNSCR1325 in Iraq. The alliance has developed a National Action Plan towards implementation of UNSCR1325 and conducts lobbying towards the Iraqi Government to ensure funding is allocated to allow implementation.
- Roa'a: A regional Arabic feminist network which works towards women's development in all Arab countries. It provides opportunities for capacity building and developing regional work and advocacy strategies to address specific issues.
- Karama: A regional Arabic network which brings together women organizations from the region to exchange experience and work on common issues such as UNSCR1325 and CEDAW.
- Arab Regional Network for Women, Peace and Security: This network brings together women organizations and activists from the region and discuss issues related to UNSCR1325 and violent extremism.

About Baghdad Women Association

Vision: Our vision as Baghdad Women Association is to combat all forms of violence against women and girls and ensuring legal protection, equality, respect, and all human rights for women and girls.

Mission: Baghdad Women Association work to reduce violence against women and girls by providing all necessary support services to survivors of such violence, advocating for the implementation of appropriate laws, policies, and government programs as well as working to increase women's political participation through leadership development, knowledge and capacity building.