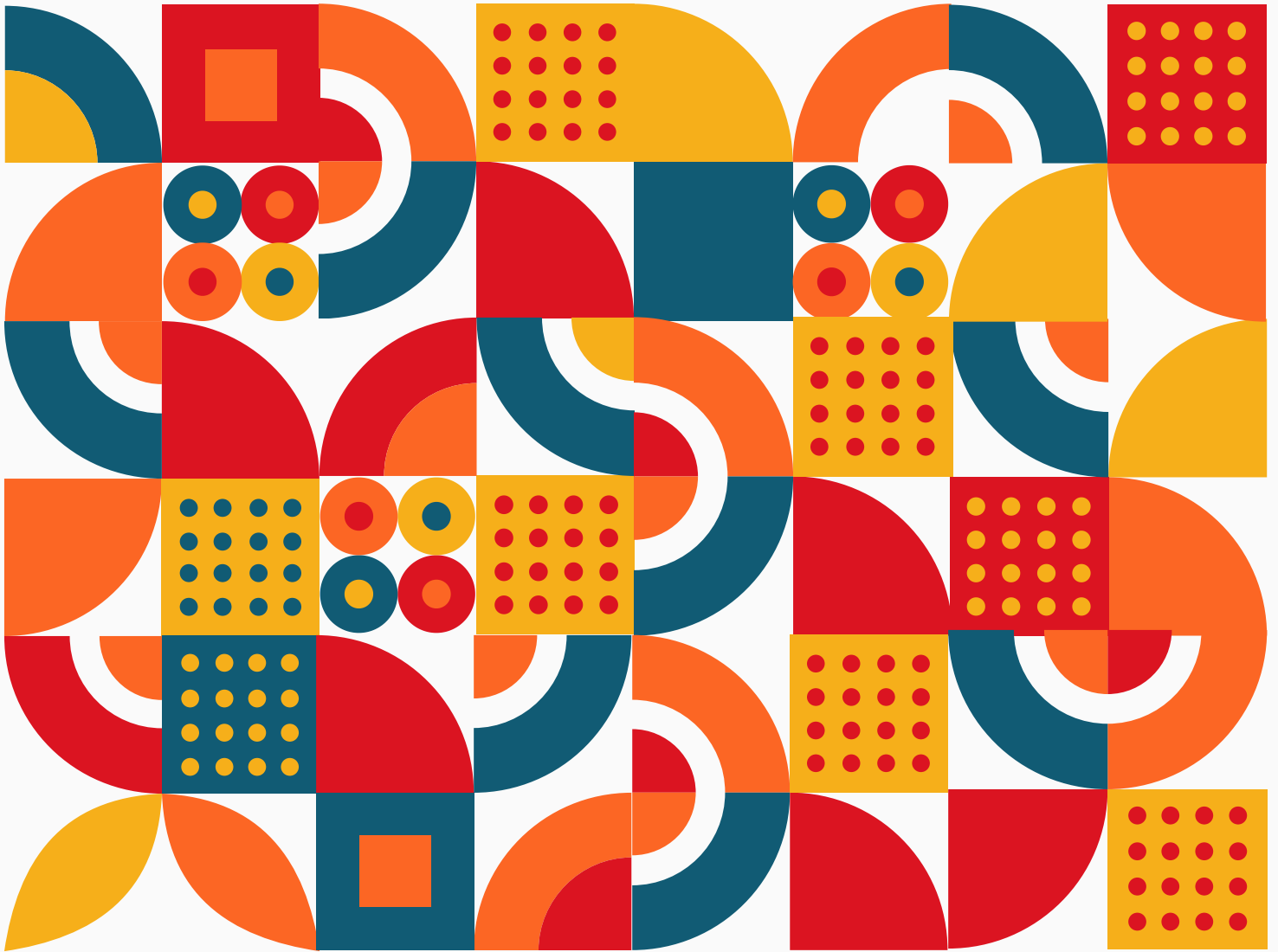


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IRAQ CIVIL SOCIETY INSIGHTS

Rights, Resources and Civic Space in Iraq

A REPORT BY IRAQI CIVIL SOCIETY SOLIDARITY INITIATIVE



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Contributors

Un Ponte Per; Information Center for Research and Development; Protect Iraqi HRDs Now! Campaign; Kurdistan Social Forum; ICSSI Core Team; Humat Dijlah Association; Greencane Organization; Ahwari Network; Public Aid Organization. For Her Organization; 188 Alliance.

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iraqicivilsociety.org
icssi.project@gmail.com

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Issue No. 1

Rights, Resources and Civic Space in Iraq

Foreword

“Rights recognised in law are not always protected in practice.”

Iraqi civil society operates in a context marked by political uncertainty, institutional weakness, environmental degradation and growing pressure on fundamental rights. Across the country, organisations, activists, journalists and community initiatives document violations, support affected communities and protect spaces for public participation. Yet their knowledge and experience do not always receive the attention they deserve.

Iraqi Civil Society Insights was created to bring some of these perspectives together. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive account of Iraq’s political and human rights situation. Instead, it focuses on selected concerns emerging from ICSSI’s networks, consultations and engagement with civil society actors, making locally grounded analysis accessible to national and international audiences.

This first issue, Rights, Resources and Civic Space in Iraq, explores how legal, institutional, environmental and economic pressures affect people’s rights and participation in public life. It addresses women’s rights and the personal status framework; restrictions on civic space, media freedom and digital expression; the water crisis and its impact on the Marshes; the continuing obstacles facing Yazidis in Sinjar; unequal access to essential resources; and the growing financial and operational pressures affecting civil society organisations.

This issue moves beyond examining rights violations as isolated events. Instead, it adopts a systemic approach, demonstrating how economic pressure, legislative reform, administrative hurdles for NGOs and digital surveillance mechanisms—such as the Baligh platform—interlock to create an environment of self-censorship and institutional pressure. By connecting these dimensions, the publication shows how civic space is constrained not only through direct bans, but also through the cumulative weight of systemic uncertainty.

Across these areas, common patterns emerge. Rights recognised in law are not always protected in practice. Institutions often fail to respond adequately to affected communities, while access to reliable information remains limited. Meanwhile, civil society organisations face increasing needs, diminishing resources and fewer opportunities to sustain long-term work.

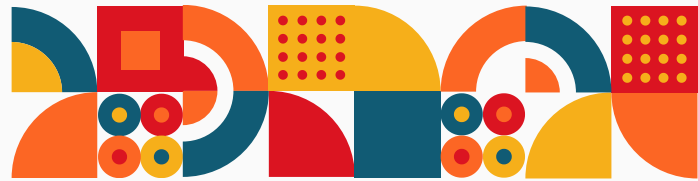
Acronyms and Abbreviations

Key organisations, institutions and terms used throughout the issue.

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	CMC	Communications and Media Commission
GSCOM	General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers	ICSSI	Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	IQD	Iraqi Dinar
ISIS / ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria / Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant	IWN	Iraqi Women Network
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PAO	Public Aid Organization	PFO	Peace and Freedom Organization
PIHN	Protection and Inclusion Human Rights Network (PIHN Campaign)	PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization	UPP	Un Ponte Per

About ICSSI

The Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI) is a cooperation and solidarity platform connecting Iraqi civil society organisations, activists and social movements with international partners. It supports collective action on human rights, civic freedoms, environmental justice, women's rights, peace and social justice. ICSSI creates spaces for civil society actors to exchange knowledge, coordinate initiatives and strengthen their advocacy. It does not claim to speak for Iraqi civil society as a whole, but seeks to amplify locally grounded perspectives and foster relationships based on solidarity, equality and respect for civil society's independence. This publication reflects that approach. It is an evolving effort to document concerns, identify connections across sectors and support informed discussion.



Methodology

This issue uses a qualitative approach combining civil society consultations, written contributions and documentary review. It aims to identify recurring concerns and emerging developments rather than produce nationally representative findings. The process began with an ICSSI update meeting held in July 2026, during which members, partners and friends of the network shared developments and concerns emerging from their organisations, communities and areas of work. The meeting minutes provided the initial basis for the report and were subsequently complemented by follow-up contributions, clarifications and additional information from selected civil society actors. Between July and August 2026, the ICSSI coordination team organised and edited the material, identified connections across the thematic contributions and conducted a complementary desk review. The report reflects information collected and reviewed during July and August 2026.

Executive Summary

Iraqi Civil Society Insights — Issue No. 1 examines how political, legal, economic and environmental pressures are reshaping rights and civic participation in Iraq. Drawing on civil society consultations, written contributions and documentary review conducted between July and August 2026, the report brings together locally grounded perspectives on civic space, women's rights, the Kurdistan Region, environmental justice and the Iraqi Marshes, and the continuing crisis facing Yazidis in Sinjar. It does not seek to provide a nationally representative assessment, but rather to identify recurring concerns and connections across different areas of civil society work.

Across these areas, the report identifies a common pattern: rights and protections that formally exist are increasingly shaped by political influence, institutional weakness, unequal access to resources and prolonged uncertainty. Civic space is not restricted only through explicit bans. Administrative requirements, legal ambiguity, regulatory intervention, digital surveillance, security pressure, economic vulnerability and the risk of retaliation can combine to increase the cost of public scrutiny and encourage self-censorship. At the same time, declining international funding is reducing the capacity of organisations to document violations, retain experienced staff and provide protection and legal assistance.

A Troubled State and a Shrinking Civic Space

Civil society input: PIHN Campaign

01

“Civic space is shaped by the interaction of political power, economic vulnerability and institutional uncertainty.”

Iraq entered 2026 at the intersection of political, regional and economic pressures that cannot be understood in isolation. The prolonged government-formation process following the November 2025 elections, divisions among Shi’a, Kurdish and Sunni political forces, the influence of armed factions, and competing pressures from the United States and Iran unfolded alongside a fiscal crisis rooted in the country’s dependence on oil revenues. Together, these dynamics have further constrained the state’s capacity to make independent decisions, protect rights and respond effectively to citizens’ needs. Understanding the situation of Iraqi civil society must therefore begin with the wider political and institutional environment in which it operates. The ability of organisations, activists, journalists and human rights defenders to act depends on the state’s capacity to enforce the rule of law, preserve institutional independence, regulate armed actors and tolerate public scrutiny. When these foundations weaken, civic space becomes more vulnerable even when organisations formally remain registered and active.

The political landscape produced by the 2025 elections did not fundamentally alter the mechanisms through which power is exercised. Traditional political forces retained significant influence in Parliament, while groups connected to armed factions preserved a substantial political presence. Following months of negotiation, a new government led by Ali al-Zaydi emerged from a settlement intended to end the deadlock, but it continues to operate within an entrenched network of partisan, security and economic interests.

The continued presence of weapons outside effective state control is among the clearest expressions of this problem. Although successive governments have committed to consolidating weapons under state authority and integrating some armed formations into official institutions, several factions continue to regard their military capabilities as an essential component of their political position. Iraq consequently seeks to affirm its authority over security while negotiating with actors that possess both weapons and institutional influence.

Regional tensions have further exposed the limits of Iraqi sovereignty. Baghdad has attempted to prevent the country from becoming a battlefield in confrontations involving Iran, the United States and Israel, but it does not always possess the capacity to prevent armed actors from taking decisions that exceed the government's own security and diplomatic calculations. The consequences extend beyond foreign policy: regional escalation affects internal political priorities, economic stability, public debate and the practical environment in which civil society and international partners operate.

Iraq's dependence on oil revenues intensifies this vulnerability. Disruptions to exports, trade or regional security can rapidly affect the state's ability to finance salaries, pensions, social protection and essential public services. Measures intended to manage fiscal pressure—including expenditure cuts, borrowing, currency devaluation or delayed salary payments—transfer much of the cost to households and risk increasing economic insecurity and public discontent.

The government is therefore managing not only a political and fiscal crisis, but also the stability of the social arrangements on which the post-2003 system has relied. As pressure increases, independent oversight, access to reliable information and public accountability become more necessary. Yet this is also the moment in which institutions and political actors may become less willing or able to tolerate scrutiny.

From a Crisis of the State to a Crisis of Civic Space

Iraq's public sphere has never been fully open since 2003. Nevertheless, the early post-2003 period provided space for independent media, human rights organisations, protest movements and new forms of civic mobilisation to emerge. Digital platforms later created additional opportunities for journalists, activists and citizens to reach wider audiences without relying entirely on institutions or media outlets connected to established political forces.

This space has gradually been reconfigured. Restrictions on civil society and public expression no longer operate only through direct bans, closures or explicit prohibitions. They also emerge through administrative requirements, legal uncertainty, regulatory intervention, security pressure, digital surveillance, defamation campaigns and the possibility of physical retaliation. Individually, these measures may appear temporary or limited; cumulatively, they increase the political, financial and personal costs of accountability.

This reflects one of Iraq's central post-2003 challenges: formal state institutions exist, but the state does not always function as the sole centre of political, economic and security decision-making. Political parties exercise extensive influence within public bodies, while armed factions combine military capacity with political representation and economic power. These actors intersect with networks connected to public resources, government contracts and official appointments, making responsibility for public decisions increasingly difficult to identify and accountability correspondingly harder to enforce. The continued presence of weapons outside effective state control is among the clearest expressions of this problem. Although successive governments have committed to consolidating weapons under state authority and integrating some armed formations into official institutions, several factions continue to regard their military capabilities as an essential component of their political position. Iraq consequently seeks to affirm its authority over security while negotiating with actors that possess both weapons and institutional influence.

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Political Power, Civic Space and Freedom of Expression

2.1 **Iraq amid Regional Tensions**

Civil society input: Un Ponte Per (UPP)

Regional tensions continue to produce direct security, political and operational consequences inside Iraq. Missile and drone activity, together with renewed instability in the Kurdistan Region, has demonstrated how developments connected to wider confrontations involving Iran, the United States and Israel can rapidly affect areas beyond the immediate sites of attack. For civil society organisations and their international partners, even temporary security incidents can disrupt travel, training programmes, field visits and public activities. Changes in airport operations, security procedures or institutional risk assessments may lead international organisations to postpone visits or suspend activities. Programmes dependent on movement, exchange and external participation can therefore be affected even when the organisations or communities involved are not directly targeted.

Regional insecurity also influences political priorities and the space available for public scrutiny. During periods of confrontation, political actors and media institutions tend to place national security above other concerns. Questions relating to civic freedoms, democratic participation, the rule of law and accountability may consequently be pushed away from the centre of public debate. Security arguments can also make it more difficult for journalists and civil society organisations to request information, examine responsibility for attacks or question the activities of armed actors.

The consequences are particularly visible in areas where authority is already fragmented. Movement and access to Sinjar and surrounding areas remain a concern for organisations working in Ninewa. Local actors must navigate procedures involving different governmental and security authorities, while foreign staff and European organisations may face additional restrictions.

Although Iraqi organisations can sometimes move more easily, inconsistent access procedures continue to affect coordination, monitoring and the ability to maintain sustained engagement with communities.

Relations between the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government have recently appeared more pragmatic, but earlier experience demonstrates that political agreements do not necessarily produce lasting institutional improvements.

Commitments concerning transparency, coordination and democratic governance may be weakened during implementation, leaving civil society and residents to manage the consequences of unresolved disputes.

Iraq also continues to balance its relationships with Washington and Tehran while attempting to prevent regional competition from translating into internal confrontation. The government's limited control over some armed actors reduces its ability to guarantee that decisions affecting national security will remain within official institutions.

Regional tensions therefore affect civil society through more than the immediate risk of violence. They disrupt programmes and mobility, restrict access to affected communities, shift political attention away from rights and accountability, and make sensitive issues harder to discuss publicly. For Iraqi organisations, operating amid regional instability requires continuous adaptation to security conditions over which they have little influence, but whose consequences directly affect their ability to work.

2.2 Political Power and the Restriction of Civic Space

Civil society input: InfoCenter and PIHN Campaign

The restrictions affecting Iraqi civil society reflect the wider distribution of power described in the Introduction. State institutions retain formal responsibility for protecting rights and regulating public life, but their decisions are influenced by political parties, security bodies, armed actors and economic interests. Diplomatic engagement and selective reforms should therefore not automatically be interpreted as evidence of deeper institutional change.

The concentration of political power, weak social justice and tolerance of corruption remain defining features of the system. Anti-corruption measures often focus on prosecuting individuals without addressing the political, financial and electoral networks surrounding their activities. Similarly, limited progress has been made in establishing effective state control over all armed formations. These weaknesses reduce institutional accountability and shape the environment in which civil society organisations attempt to document violations and challenge abuses of power.

Multiple layers of restriction

Restrictions on civic space do not originate from a single authority or take a uniform form. Laws, regulatory institutions, security agencies, political forces, armed groups and coordinated

social or digital campaigns may each exert pressure on individuals and organisations. These mechanisms can operate separately or reinforce one another, making responsibility difficult to identify and remedies harder to obtain. Pressure also does not always begin with an explicit prohibition. Organisations assessing whether to publish a report, organise an event or address a politically sensitive issue must consider the possibility of administrative obstruction, legal action, security questioning, defamation or public intimidation. The resulting uncertainty can affect institutional priorities and discourage sustained advocacy on controversial issues.

Administrative pressure on organisations

ICSSI's consultations documented increasing administrative pressure on civil society organisations. Requirements concerning registration, taxation, social security and reporting can be particularly difficult for organisations already facing declining resources and the loss of experienced staff.

Organisations attempting to close may still be required to resolve earlier administrative issues, complete additional procedures and pay outstanding fees. Closure can therefore generate further liabilities rather than provide a clear conclusion to an organisation's legal responsibilities. Concerns have also emerged regarding suspension and closure decisions issued by the NGO Directorate. Minor administrative gaps have reportedly been used to justify suspensions even when the measure appeared disproportionate to the alleged violation.

The absence of sufficiently transparent procedures, written reasoning and effective opportunities to appeal creates additional uncertainty for organisations.

The suspension of the Iraqi Women Network illustrates these concerns. After a meeting in which officials indicated that the suspension might be lifted, the Network received a further decision extending it on different administrative grounds. The Network considered the measures connected to its engagement with the CEDAW review and its publication of alternative reports on women's rights.

International engagement can itself create vulnerability. Iraqi organisations may face scrutiny because of positions adopted by international partners, including on matters unrelated to their activities inside Iraq. Cooperation with international institutions or participation in human rights mechanisms may consequently expose local organisations to additional political or administrative pressure.

An institutional protection gap

These pressures are compounded by the continuing paralysis of the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights.

According to the European Union's 2025 country assessment, the Commission remained dysfunctional because its Board of Commissioners, dissolved in 2021, had still not been reappointed. The absence of a fully functioning national human rights institution weakens independent monitoring and reduces the institutional avenues available to civil society organisations, activists and affected communities

seeking protection or accountability. At a time when organisations face increasing administrative and political pressure, one of the institutions intended to monitor violations and uphold human rights remains unable to perform its role effectively.

Funding and operational capacity

Political and administrative restrictions are unfolding alongside a substantial reduction in international funding. Since 2025, changes in international assistance policies—particularly cuts in support from the United States—have affected an important source of funding for Iraqi civil society.

For human rights organisations, this is not only a financial problem. Reduced funding can mean losing the capacity to document violations, provide legal assistance, maintain protection mechanisms and retain staff with accumulated expertise. Projects may be suspended, services reduced and experienced personnel forced to leave the sector.

The combined effect of administrative pressure, institutional weakness and financial contraction can leave organisations legally authorised to operate but without the independence or resources required to perform their role effectively. Iraqi civil society continues to work, but the space available for addressing sensitive issues, supporting affected communities and holding institutions accountable is becoming increasingly difficult to preserve.

2.3 Freedom of Expression as the First Line of Defence

Civil society input: InfoCenter and PIHN Campaign

Freedom of expression is not a concern affecting journalists alone. Human rights defenders rely on it to expose violations, civil society organisations to publish their findings, survivors to make their experiences visible and citizens to understand how public institutions exercise power. Restrictions on expression therefore weaken one of society's principal mechanisms for scrutiny and accountability.

International assessments continue to reflect the seriousness of the situation. Freedom House classifies Iraq as “Not Free”, with a score of 31 out of 100, citing weak institutions, limited media independence, the influence of armed groups and violations committed through both legal and extralegal means. In the 2025 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders ranked Iraq 155th out of 180 countries, two places lower than in 2024. Together, these assessments describe a media environment affected by political influence, legal pressure, threats and persistent impunity.

Regulation of public discourse

The Communications and Media Commission has assumed an increasingly prominent role in regulating public expression. Originally established to license and oversee media and telecommunications institutions, the Commission has expanded its intervention through decisions and

Political Power, Civic Space and Freedom of Expression

warnings affecting journalists, analysts, media outlets and online accounts. During the first months of 2026, this regulatory activity became particularly visible. Media outlets received warnings concerning their coverage of conflict and attacks inside Iraq, while journalists and political analysts faced increasing uncertainty about the boundaries of permissible public discussion.

Journalists have long experienced pressure from political parties, armed actors and security institutions. Official regulatory and administrative measures now add another layer of restriction. Decisions presented as technical media regulation may determine which issues can be discussed, how particular events can be described and whether responsibility can be publicly attributed.

Regional conflict has made reporting on security issues especially sensitive. Questions concerning attacks inside Iraq, the activities of armed factions and relations with regional or international actors may expose journalists and media organisations to regulatory action, political pressure or other forms of retaliation. As a result, events with major consequences for Iraqi citizens can become among the most difficult to investigate and discuss openly.

Protest, legal action and the legacy of Tishreen

Restrictions on expression also affect public protest. Demonstrations concerning electricity shortages have resulted in clashes and arrests, including during protests in Najaf. Although those detained were subsequently released, the use of arrest can discourage participation and communicate that peaceful mobilisation

carries personal and legal risks.

More serious concerns arise from the reopening of proceedings connected to the October 2019 protest movement. Cases dating back several years have again led to trials and sentences. In Dhi Qar, young people accused of burning party and government offices received four-year prison sentences. Activists who returned home believing that their cases had been resolved have consequently faced renewed legal uncertainty.

These proceedings affect more than the individuals directly involved. The possibility that participation in protest may result in prosecution years later can discourage future mobilisation and deepen public mistrust in the predictability and impartiality of the justice system.

Risks for journalists and human rights defenders

Journalists, activists and human rights defenders must continually assess the consequences of public visibility. Their work may require identifying alleged perpetrators, examining institutional responsibility, documenting corruption or violence, protecting sources and publishing information concerning politically influential or armed actors. Protection therefore involves more than physical security. It also requires responding to defamation and incitement, securing accounts and sensitive data, protecting survivors and sources and managing the legal risks created by public reporting. The cumulative effect of these pressures encourages caution and contributes to self-censorship across the wider civic community.

The killing of prominent feminist and human rights defender Yanar Mohammed on 2 March 2026 demonstrated the severity of the risks facing activists. She was shot outside her residence in northern Baghdad following years of women's rights advocacy and previous threats. Her death generated renewed demands for an effective investigation and accountability.

When attacks against defenders remain unresolved, their impact extends beyond the individual victim. Impunity communicates that others undertaking similar work may face the same danger and that public institutions may be unable or unwilling to protect them. In this way, violence and the absence of accountability contribute to silence throughout the civic sphere.

Protecting freedom of expression requires more than formally recognising the right to speak. It requires independent media, clear and proportionate regulation, protection against legal and physical retaliation and credible investigations when journalists, activists and human rights defenders are threatened or attacked. Without these safeguards, civil society cannot reliably document violations, communicate public concerns or hold power accountable.

2.4 Digital Rights, Online Regulation and Surveillance

Iraq's digital transformation is proceeding without adequate legal, institutional and technical safeguards. Measures affecting digital platforms, social media content and individual online accounts became particularly visible during June and July 2026, raising concerns about surveillance, selective enforcement and the protection of personal data.

A central concern is the continued use of the Baligh digital reporting platform by the Ministry of Interior. The platform allows users to report content considered "low" or "indecent" and has been used as part of official campaigns targeting online expression.

This reporting model reproduces through digital tools practices of surveillance and denunciation historically associated with the "secret informant." Activity that previously took place through physical reporting and monitoring can now be conducted rapidly and on a much wider scale through online platforms.

Authorities present these measures as necessary to address harmful or offensive entertainment content.

However, their application has not been limited to this stated objective. Content creators have been arrested, while several cases remain unresolved.

Journalists and ordinary users have also been targeted after publishing criticism of the government, state institutions or public events.

Digital transformation without legal safeguards

Government programmes continue to promote digital transformation and the expansion of electronic services. However, Iraq does not yet possess the legal framework or infrastructure required to manage this process safely.

Digital literacy remains limited both within society and inside public institutions. Iraq also lacks a comprehensive personal data protection law and an adequate framework governing digital services, online transactions and the wider digital public sphere.

Cybercrime legislation remains contested. Multiple drafts have been proposed, but no stable, rights-based framework is currently in force. The absence of clear standards creates uncertainty concerning which online activities may be criminalised and which protections are available to users. This gap is particularly serious because digitalisation requires public institutions to collect, manage and store increasing quantities of personal information. Without clear legal limits, independent oversight and effective safeguards, citizens may have little control over how their data are used or shared.

Weak infrastructure and exposure to abuse

The risks are not limited to state surveillance or content regulation. Government websites, ministry platforms and other public digital services remain vulnerable to data theft, security breaches and hostile attacks.

Weak infrastructure and insufficient cybersecurity can expose personal information even when there is no deliberate misuse by public authorities.

The expansion of digital services without parallel investment in security may therefore create new risks for citizens instead of improving their access to public institutions.

Digital transformation requires secure infrastructure, comprehensive privacy protections, clearly defined legal standards and independent oversight. Without these safeguards, the expansion of digital services risks increasing citizens' exposure to surveillance, selective prosecution, data breaches and other forms of abuse. The central challenge is therefore not whether Iraq should pursue digital transformation, but how to ensure that it protects rights rather than creating additional instruments of control.

The Kurdistan Region: Political Disputes and Everyday Economic Pressure

Civil society input: Kurdish Social Forum

03

Residents of the Kurdistan Region continue to bear the consequences of unresolved political and economic disputes between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Federal Government. Salary delays, rising living costs and instability in fuel prices are not separate crises. Together, they reflect wider problems in the management of public resources and in relations between Erbil and Baghdad.

The Salary Crisis

The salary crisis affecting public-sector employees in the Kurdistan Region dates back to 2014–2015 and remains without a durable solution. Recurring disagreements between the KRG and the Federal Government have resulted in delayed, reduced or interrupted salary payments.

At the time of the ICSSI consultation, employees had only recently received their salaries for June, while July was approaching its end without clear information about the next payment. This uncertainty has become part of everyday life for workers and households dependent on public-sector income.

The immediate dispute concerned approximately IQD 130 billion in domestic revenues that the Federal Government expected the KRG to transfer. Regional authorities reportedly maintained that the amount was not available. Both governments appeared to possess options capable of reducing the immediate harm – for example, by deducting the disputed amount and transferring the remainder – but a sufficient political agreement had not been reached.

Public employees are not responsible for disagreements over revenues, oil or political authority. Nevertheless, they experience their consequences directly through prolonged uncertainty and increasing difficulty in meeting household expenses.

Civil society groups have organised protests and raised the issue with European states, international actors and organisations in the United States. These efforts have not yet produced a lasting

solution The salary crisis therefore continues to expose residents to the consequences of political decisions over which they have little influence.

Rising Gasoline Prices

The salary crisis has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the price of gasoline and other essential goods and services. In late June 2026, the price of ordinary gasoline rose to approximately IQD 1,400 per litre, while enhanced and super gasoline reached still higher prices.

The Kurdistan Regional Government and the Ministry of Natural Resources subsequently introduced capped prices. The announced rates included IQD 850 per litre for subsidised ordinary gasoline and IQD 950 for commercially supplied ordinary gasoline, alongside separate limits for enhanced and super grades. Penalties were also announced for stations that did not comply.

The decision initially offered residents some relief. Its implementation, however, produced further disruption. Fuel stations in Erbil and Duhok stopped selling gasoline in what appeared to be a protest by station owners against the price caps. In Sulaymaniyah, stations continued to sell gasoline at higher prices.

The government later introduced a limited quota of subsidised gasoline for distribution through fuel stations. The available quantities were insufficient to meet demand, resulting in long queues and hours of waiting for residents attempting to purchase relatively small amounts.

The dispute also involved the quantities of oil and fuel exchanged between

Baghdad and Erbil. Official statements indicated that the Kurdistan Region was receiving approximately 50,000 barrels per day from the Federal Government while requesting larger quantities.

Baghdad, in turn, indicated that it could guarantee shipments of gasoline subsidised at IQD 450 per litre if the KRG transferred 50,000 barrels per day to the federal authorities.

No agreement had been reached to resolve the crisis by 9 August 2026. At that point, ordinary gasoline had reached approximately IQD 1,600 per litre, enhanced gasoline around IQD 2,200 and super gasoline approximately IQD 2,390.

Party Interests and Weak Accountability

The crisis cannot be understood solely as a temporary shortage. Oil refining and fuel distribution are concentrated in networks connected to political parties. Although the Kurdistan Region receives significant quantities of crude oil for refining, consumers continue to face rising prices and unstable supply. The failure to implement announced price caps also demonstrates weak enforcement. Government decisions did not ensure that stations complied, while the limited distribution of subsidised fuel was insufficient to meet public demand. Political institutions in both Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region are closely connected to commercial interests. Decisions concerning revenues, oil and fuel may consequently prioritise the interests of parties and influential economic actors over those of employees and consumers.

**The Kurdistan Region: Political Disputes and
Everyday Economic Pressure**

Residents remain caught between the unresolved salary dispute, rising living costs, fuel shortages and political disagreement between Erbil and Baghdad. Neither government has provided a fundamental solution capable of protecting citizens from recurring instability.

The gasoline crisis is therefore more than a question of fuel prices, just as the salary crisis is more than a delay in public payments. Together, they reveal a broader crisis of governance, economic management and federal–regional relations whose consequences are borne primarily by ordinary citizens.

Women's Rights across Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region

4.1

Personal Status Law and Women's Rights in Federal Iraq

Civil society input: Alliance 188

Recent changes to Iraq's personal status framework have created serious concerns regarding equality before the law, family unity and the protection of women and children. During the ICSSI consultation, representatives of Alliance 188 described the practical consequences that have emerged since the adoption of the amendments and the introduction of the Jaafari personal status provisions.

Alliance 188 argued that the new framework has not strengthened the protection of women, children or families. Instead, its implementation has generated contradictions in judicial practice and uncertainty over rights that had previously been regulated under the unified Personal Status Law No. 188 of 1959. A central concern is that the expansion of sectarian family-law provisions may gradually replace a common legal framework with different rules based on religious affiliation. This risks producing unequal rights for citizens facing similar family circumstances and weakening the principle of equal citizenship.

These developments form part of a wider protection gap. The long-discussed federal law on domestic violence remained pending before Parliament for 15 years, without tangible progress, while child marriage continued to be widespread. The EU's 2025 country assessment consequently identified both the absence of effective domestic-violence legislation and the changes to the personal status framework as major concerns for women's and girls' rights.

These concerns should also be understood in relation to Iraq's international obligations under CEDAW and the Iraqi Constitution. Civil society organisations have repeatedly called for clearer institutional responsibilities, measurable implementation plans and public monitoring of the recommendations addressed to Iraq.

The consequences are particularly visible in disputes over child custody. According to the Alliance, some fathers and paternal families have used the new custody provisions not primarily to protect the child's best interests, but to punish, pressure or control mothers. Mothers affected by the changes have organised repeated demonstrations, while women's organisations have seen custody become the principal issue in their legal support work.

Custody and Decision No. 93

Alliance 188 identified custody as the most urgent area for legal intervention. Its representatives explained that sustained civil society advocacy had helped secure a maternal custody period of seven years in the adopted provisions, despite interpretations that would have reduced it further. However, serious problems emerged during judicial implementation.

Under certain Jaafari interpretations discussed during the consultation, religious maturity is considered to begin at nine for girls and fifteen for boys. This created uncertainty regarding the age at which children could express a preference about which parent they wished to live with. Mothers initially hoped that daughters transferred from maternal custody at seven might be able to express their choice at nine. Judicial Decision No. 93 subsequently postponed this choice until the age of eighteen. According to Alliance 188, the decision effectively removes the possibility of meaningful choice throughout childhood and departs from previous legal practice.

Participants also reported that some judges had reservations about the decision, although public criticism from within the judiciary remains difficult. Approximately 80–90 petitions were reportedly submitted by mothers to the Public Prosecution. Alliance 188 has sought to support collective action around these cases and has identified the amendment or repeal of Decision No. 93 as an immediate advocacy priority. The Alliance also reported that more than 90 per cent of the cases handled through the relevant legal support network concerned custody, followed by maintenance and other financial claims. These disputes also have an important economic dimension. Custody may be used as leverage to avoid maintenance obligations or to pressure mothers during separation and divorce. The loss of custody can therefore be accompanied by economic insecurity, reduced access to support and increased dependence on family or informal networks.

Civil society achievements and continuing risks

Alliance 188 rejected the idea that the adoption of the amendments meant that civil society advocacy had failed. The Alliance, which brought together women's organisations, lawyers, activists and political actors, identified three important results of its mobilisation.

First, its advocacy contributed to securing seven years of maternal custody rather than the shorter period proposed under more restrictive interpretations. Second, it helped preserve the minimum marriage age established under Law No. 188, limiting attempts to legitimise extremely

إنجازات المجتمع المدني والمخاطر المستمرة

رفض تحالف 188 الرأي القائل بأن إقرار التعديلات يعني فشل جهود المناصرة التي قادها المجتمع المدني؛ إذ حدد التحالف - الذي ضم تحت مظلته منظمات نسوية ومحامين وناشطين وفاعلين سياسيين - ثلاثة إنجازات ونتائج هامة أثمرت عن تحركاته وحشده المستمر:

أولاً، أسهمت جهود المناصرة في ضمان وتثبيت مدة سبع سنوات لحضانة الأم بدلاً من الفترات الأقصر التي طُرحت بموجب تفسيرات وتأويلات أكثر تشدداً. وثانياً، ساعدت في الحفاظ على الحد الأدنى لسن الزواج المنصوص عليه بموجب القانون رقم 188، مما حدّ من محاولات إضفاء الشرعية على الزواج المبكر جداً (زواج القاصرات دون السن القانونية). وثالثاً، نجح التحالف حتى الآن في معارضة إقرار مدونة أحوال شخصية سنّية منفصلة، وهو ما كان سيؤدي إلى مزيد من التفتيت والتجزئة في منظومة قانون الأسرة في العراق.

ومع ذلك، تظل هذه المكتسبات هشة وعُرضة للتراجع؛ فخلال الأشهر التي سبقت مشاورات مبادرة التضامن الدولي مع المجتمع المدني العراقي (ICSSI)، أصبحت الدعوات المطالبة بمدونة سنّية منفصلة أكثر تنظيماً. وحذر ممثلو تحالف 188 من أن إصلاح قانون الأحوال الشخصية لا يزال يُستخدم كأداة للمساومة السياسية، ومن إمكانية مقايضة حقوق النساء والأطفال مجدداً في إطار المفاوضات السياسية الأوسع.

وبناءً على ذلك، يعتزم تحالف 188 مواصلة رصد تبعات الأحكام الجعفرية، والطعن في القرار رقم 93، ومناهضة أي تفتيت طائفي إضافي لقانون الأحوال الشخصية.

وفي الوقت ذاته، رأى التحالف أنه يتعين على المجتمع المدني تجاوز الاكتفاء بردود الفعل الدفاعية تجاه المقترحات التشريعية الفردية؛ إذ ينبغي أن يتمثل الهدف الأطول مدى في بلورة رؤية مدنية وحقوقية واضحة لقانون الأحوال الشخصية، تستند إلى مبادئ المساواة، وعدم التمييز، ومصصلحة الطفل الفضلى.

كما سلّطت المشاورات الضوء على تصاعد الخطاب العدائي الموجه ضد المنظمات النسوية والأمهات اللاتي يُقدن حملات حول قضايا الحضانة؛ وقد شمل ذلك حملات تشهير، وتهديدات، ومحتوى ينطوي على تعريض النساء لمزيد من الأذى والخطر. ويؤدي غياب جهة ومؤسسة واضحة مسؤولة عن رصد هذا الخطاب، وحفظ الأدلة، ودعم الشكاوى القانونية، إلى بقاء هذا التحريض الخطير دون مساءلة أو معالجة تُذكر. تُظهر التجربة التي وثّقها تحالف 188 أن تداعيات إصلاح قانون الأحوال الشخصية لا تقتصر على المسائل الفنية والتقنية لقانون الأسرة فحسب؛ بل تمس جوهر العلاقة بين المواطنة والهوية الدينية، واتساق الحماية القضائية، والأمان الاقتصادي للمرأة، وحقوق الأطفال في أن تؤخذ مصالحهم بعين الاعتبار في القرارات التي تحدد مسار حياتهم ومستقبلهم.

2.4 حقوق المرأة الكردية

وقد حددت عمليات الرصد ثلاثة عوائق متكررة تحول دون تحقيق العدالة: يتمثل أولها في اللجوء إلى المصالحات العشائرية أو التسويات غير الرسمية، والتي قد تُستبدل بها الإجراءات الجنائية أو تُفرغها من مضمونها وتُضعفها. ويتمثل العائق الثاني في التدخل السياسي أو الحزبي، الذي من شأنه توفير الحماية للجناة وتكريس الإفلات من العقاب. أما العائق الثالث، فيكمن في التكتّم وحجب المعلومات الرسمية المتعلقة بالجرائم المرتكبة ضد النساء؛ مما يحد من الرقابة العامة ويُقيد قدرة منظمات المجتمع المدني على رصد الاستجابات المؤسسية ومتابعتها.

وعليه، فإن مجرد وجود التشريعات لا يعد كافياً في ظل تعذر الوصول إلى آليات الحماية أو تطبيقها بشكل انتقائي. ويتطلب الإنفاذ الفعال إجراء تحقيقات تتعامل مع العنف ضد المرأة بوصفه قضية تستوجب المساواة الجنائية، وليس نزاعاً أسرياً خاصاً؛ كما يتطلب وجود ملاذات ودور إيواء آمنة ومفَعلة، وخطوط ساخنة للطوارئ، وإجراءات متخصصة قادرة على الاستجابة السريعة والعاجلة عندما تكون حياة النساء معرضة للخطر.

يتأثر أمان النساء في إقليم كردستان بفجوة مستمرة بين الحماية القانونية وإنفاذها الفعلي على أرض الواقع. وخلال مشاورات مبادرة التضامن الدولي مع المجتمع المدني العراقي (ICSSI)، استعرضت نيدار سعيد نتائج أعمال الرصد التي أشارت إلى ضرورة فهم العنف ضد المرأة بوصفه أزمة حماية هيكلية وبنوية، وليس مجرد سلسلة من الحوادث المنعزلة.

وقد وثّقت عمليات الرصد 29 حالة شملت نساء قُتلن أو قُيدت وفاتهن رسمياً على أنها حالات انتحار في الفترة ما بين 1 كانون الثاني/يناير و15 نيسان/أبريل 2026. وتوزعت الحالات المسجلة على محافظات أربيل، وحلبجة، والسليمانية، ودهوك، وكركوك؛ حيث وثّقت 13 حالة وفاة خلال شهري كانون الثاني/يناير وشباط/فبراير، و7 حالات في آذار/مارس، و9 حالات خلال الأيام الخمسة عشر الأولى من شهر نيسان/أبريل.

ويتمثل أحد بواعث القلق الرئيسة في تصنيف العديد من الوفيات على أنها حالات انتحار، ولا سيما في المناطق الواقعة خارج مراكز المحافظات، حيث تضعف آليات الرصد والرقابة المؤسسية وتتقلص سبل الوصول إلى المعلومات ومن شأن هذا التصنيف أن يحول دون إجراء فحص وتدقيق وثيق في الظروف المحيطة بوفاة المرأة، وتجعل من الصعب التحقق مما إذا كانت الوفاة قد اقترنت بالعنف، أو الإكراه، أو الضغوط الأسرية.

الحماية القانونية والثغرات في التنفيذ

تتمتع النساء في إقليم كردستان بحماية شكلية بموجب النصوص الدستورية وأحكام القانون الجنائي، فضلاً عن قانون مناهضة العنف الأسري في إقليم كردستان رقم 8 لسنة 2011؛ ومع ذلك، لا يزال إنفاذ هذه القوانين متفاوتاً وغير متسق.

انعدام الأمن الاقتصادي والنزوح وعدم المساواة في الحماية

مشاركة النساء المدنية تحت الضغط

أثيرت خلال الجلسة التشاورية قضية اعتقال الناشطة النسوية بهار علي، التي جاءت بحسب التقارير إثر اتهامات وجهت إليها بالإساءة إلى شخصيات دينية، بوصفها نموذجاً للضغوط التي تواجه الأصوات النسوية. وتجسد هذه القضية كيف يمكن للنساء اللاتي يتحدثن علناً عن الحقوق أو الدين أو الأعراف الاجتماعية أن يتعرضن للملاحقة القانونية، أو العداء المجتمعي، أو القيود المفروضة على حريتهن في التعبير.

ولا يقتصر تأثير هذه الضغوط على الناشطات كأفراد فحسب، بل يمتد ليطال الفضاء العام المتاح أمام المنظمات النسوية لتوثيق العنف ومناهضة الإفلات من العقاب والمشاركة في النقاش العام. كما أن القيود المفروضة على تداول المعلومات المتعلقة بجرائم قتل النساء والفتيات تحدّ بدرجة أكبر من قدرة هذه المنظمات على المناصرة بالاستناد إلى أدلة وبيانات موثوقة.

يُظهر الواقع الموثق في إقليم كردستان الفارق بين واقعهنّ وواقعهنّ في العراق. لا يمكن فصل تجارب النساء وواقعهنّ عن قضايا الأمن الاقتصادي، والنزوح، والتفاوت الجغرافي والمناطقية؛ فالقدرة على التماس العدالة الناجمة من العنف غالباً ما ترتفع بتوفر الدخل، ووسائل النقل، والمأوى الآمن، والخدمات المحلية الموثوقة. وإجراء رصد مستقل، وبناء مؤسسات قادرة على العمل والتحرك بمنأى عن أي تدخلات سياسية أو حزبية أو عشائرية.

ربطت المشاورات أيضاً بين انعدام أمان النساء والوضع الاقتصادي والسياسي الأوسع نطاقاً في إقليم كردستان؛ إذ إن لتأخير صرف الرواتب، وارتفاع تكاليف المعيشة، وحالة عدم اليقين الاقتصادي تداعيات ذات بعد جندي، حيث تفاقم الضغوط داخل الأسر وتقلص قدرة النساء على مغادرة البيئات غير الآمنة أو الحصول على دعم مستقل.

وتواجه النساء المقيمات في المناطق الريفية والحدودية مخاطر إضافية؛ فقد أجبر القصف وانعدام الاستقرار الأمني بعض العائلات على

النزوح المتكرر، مما أدى إلى تعطيل سبل العيش وإضعاف إمكانية الوصول إلى الخدمات وآليات الحماية. وتكتسب هذه الضغوط خطورة بالغة خارج المراكز الحضرية، حيث يكون الوجود المؤسسي ودعم منظمات المجتمع المدني محدودين في الأصل.

وبناءً على ذلك، لا يمكن فصل تجارب النساء وواقعهنّ عن قضايا الأمن الاقتصادي، والنزوح، والتفاوت الجغرافي والمناطقية؛ فالقدرة على التماس العدالة الناجمة من العنف غالباً ما ترتفع بتوفر الدخل، ووسائل النقل، والمأوى الآمن، والخدمات المحلية الموثوقة.

Environmental Justice, Water and the Iraqi Marshes

5.1 Environmental Degradation as a National Challenge

Civil society input: Humat Dijlah

Iraq's environmental crisis extends beyond the natural environment. It increasingly affects water and food security, public health, economic stability, rural livelihoods and the country's overall resilience.

Water scarcity is driven by a combination of climate change, reduced flows from upstream states, inefficient use and weak domestic management. These pressures affect agriculture, biodiversity and the livelihoods of communities that depend directly on water resources. Climate change, however, should not be used to obscure failures in national governance and resource management.

Pollution represents another major concern. Rivers continue to receive sewage and industrial waste, while gas flaring, private generators and open dumps contribute to deteriorating air quality. Iraq still lacks an integrated waste-management system and a credible national programme capable of addressing these problems at scale.

Desertification is also expanding as temperatures rise, vegetation declines and dust storms intensify. Agricultural production is falling, leaving rural communities increasingly vulnerable. During recent years, environmental and economic pressures have contributed to movement from rural areas towards cities, placing additional pressure on urban services and labour markets.

These challenges are intensified by weak environmental governance. Existing laws and policies suffer from poor implementation, limited funding, insufficient coordination and the absence of long-term planning. Iraq lacks a coherent strategy connecting climate change, water security, food security and economic development.

Environmental degradation must therefore be treated as a national development and security challenge. Effective action requires institutional reform, integrated management of natural resources, community participation and closer alignment between environmental and economic planning. Iraq must move beyond repeated emergency responses towards long-term adaptation and resilience.

households affected by environmental degradation. The exclusion of the southern Marshes from improvements recorded elsewhere demonstrates that national water levels alone do not provide an adequate picture of the crisis. Water governance must also consider how available resources are distributed and whether the communities facing the most severe consequences are receiving sufficient protection.

5.2 Water Scarcity and the Exclusion of the Southern Marshes

Civil society input: Greencane Organization

Iraq has faced an acute water crisis since at least 2021. Although water levels have recently improved in parts of central and northern Iraq, the southern regions – particularly the Marshes – have not received a corresponding increase in their allocations. This unequal distribution leaves Marsh communities exposed to continuing environmental and economic decline.

Reduced water availability affects fishing, agriculture, livestock and other activities on which local livelihoods depend. It also increases displacement and places additional pressure on households already facing poverty and limited access to public services.

Water quality presents a further concern. Research conducted in Dhi Qar indicates extremely poor conditions, with significant consequences for the health of women living in Marsh communities. These effects extend beyond illness itself. Women may face greater caregiving responsibilities, reduced opportunities to earn an income and additional pressure within

5.3 Protecting the Marshes and Their Communities

Civil society input: Ahwari Network

After years of drought, seasonal rainfall and floods temporarily restored water to parts of the Iraqi Marshes. Fish stocks began to recover, and some residents were able to resume activities connected to fishing, livestock and everyday life. This revival, however, was not the result of a stable water-management policy or sustained action by the authorities. It depended almost entirely on temporary weather conditions.

The recovery is already under threat. Regular water allocations to the Marshes remain extremely limited, and water levels have begun to fall again, particularly in the Hawizeh Marsh, part of Iraq's UNESCO World Heritage Site. Without sustained releases, the areas that recently recovered may return rapidly to drought. A large-scale death of fish in one of the Amarah marshes demonstrated the immediate consequences of interrupted water flows. When allocations were cut, fish became trapped in confined waterways. Overcrowding and declining oxygen levels caused extensive losses

within a short period.

This deterioration has continued despite an improvement in Iraq's overall water reserves. According to figures announced by the Ministry of Water Resources and cited in the community statement, national storage increased from approximately four to 34 billion cubic metres. Nevertheless, the Marshes continued to receive little of their required allocation. The availability of water at the national level has therefore not guaranteed its equitable distribution to the southern wetlands.

The survival of the Marshes depends on the recognition of a permanent water entitlement. Temporary releases and seasonal rainfall cannot replace a regular allocation capable of maintaining the ecosystem throughout the year. Water must reach the Marshes during periods of scarcity as well as during periods of greater national availability.

Water deprivation and oil expansion

The environmental crisis is also connected to the expansion of oil extraction. Parts of the Marshes have been converted into oil fields, while oil projects continue to operate and expand within and around the ecosystem. Continued water deprivation dries large areas, displaces residents and transforms wetlands into barren land. These changes can facilitate further oil exploration and industrial development. Iraq's economic strategy remains heavily dependent on oil, while the Marshes and other natural ecosystems receive limited political priority. Yet degrading the wetlands directly affects human life. The survival of local communities depends on the health of the ecosystem and on the economic diversity it supports.

Fishing, buffalo herding, agriculture and other traditional livelihoods cannot continue without water. The loss of these activities reduces household income, damages food production and places further pressure on residents to leave. Protecting the Marshes is therefore not only an environmental objective; it is necessary to protect communities, public health, local economies and the right of residents to remain on their land.

Community mobilisation and demands

Residents and environmental activists have continued to demand the release of the Marshes' water allocation through peaceful protests and public advocacy. Recent protest actions have warned government authorities that, without immediate releases, wider demonstrations may resume.

The central demand is clear: the Marshes require a stable and continuous share of water rather than temporary relief produced by rainfall, flooding or short-term emergency measures. This allocation must be treated as a right and as a necessary condition for the survival of both the ecosystem and its communities.

Local mobilisation, however, operates with limited resources and visibility. Protecting the Marshes requires broader support from public institutions, environmental organisations, specialists, activists, the media and international actors. Their role is essential in amplifying community demands, monitoring water allocations and preventing environmental protection from being subordinated to oil expansion.

Some areas have temporarily recovered, but this progress remains fragile. Without sustained water releases, the remaining wetlands will not withstand continuing drought and environmental pressure. The future of the Marshes cannot be separated from the future of the people who live within them. Protecting one requires protecting the other.

Minority Rights and the Continuing Crisis in Sinjar

06

Twelve years after the 2014 genocide, the Yazidi community continues to face displacement, missing persons, inadequate reconstruction, limited access to justice and harmful public narratives. These problems are interconnected: the absence of accountability and services discourages return, while hate speech and misrepresentation deepen insecurity and reopen the trauma experienced by survivors.

6.1 Public Narratives, Hate Speech and the Dignity of Yazidi Survivors

Civil society input: PAO

The representation of Yazidi survivors in public media has serious consequences for individual dignity and community trust. Concerns emerged following a programme broadcast by Al-Iraqiya, Iraq's state-funded television channel, concerning a Yazidi woman who had been abducted by ISIS. Her family had been destroyed, and she had reportedly experienced sexual enslavement, forced conditions and the loss of her husband and children.

The programme focused primarily on the claim that she had become Muslim and wished to remain so, highlighting the housing, documentation and public assistance she had received. This framing caused deep anger within the Yazidi community because it presented a religious conversion occurring in circumstances of captivity, violence and extreme coercion as a positive personal outcome.

The priority should have been the survivor's recovery, dignity, access to appropriate support and ability to reconnect with her community. Presenting coerced religious change without sufficient attention to the conditions in which it occurred risks reproducing part of the narrative imposed by ISIS.

Yazidi representatives and the Minorities Alliance submitted a letter to the prime minister's adviser for Yazidi affairs condemning the broadcast and the message it communicated. The case illustrates the particular responsibility of publicly funded media when reporting on survivors of genocide, sexual violence and captivity.

The problem extends beyond one television programme. Hate speech targeting Yazidis and other minorities increases following political, religious or media events and spreads rapidly through Facebook, TikTok, Instagram and closed WhatsApp groups. Fabricated reports and distorted statements can reinforce narratives portraying minority communities as socially or religiously inferior.

For survivors, such rhetoric can trigger memories of the violence experienced in 2014 and intensify fear, anxiety and feelings of vulnerability. It also affects decisions concerning return. Families are less likely to return to Sinjar when they continue to encounter narratives questioning their identity, belonging or right to live safely in the area.

Existing legal provisions, including Article 372 of the Iraqi Penal Code, provide a basis for addressing some forms of religious incitement. In practice, access to remedies is obstructed by procedural complexity, fear of retaliation and slow institutional responses to content circulated online.

Public institutions, media organisations and religious authorities must therefore take greater responsibility for preventing incitement and protecting the dignity of survivors. Responses should include accurate and trauma-sensitive reporting, public rejection of takfiri narratives, legal action against serious incitement and support for positive narratives that strengthen coexistence rather than reproduce coercion and stigma.

6.2 consequences of the 2014 genocide

Civil society input: Needar Saeed

The consequences of the 2014 genocide remain unresolved. Available documentation records 6,417 abducted Yazidis, of whom 3,593 have been rescued or escaped captivity. A further 2,558 people remain missing, including 1,225 women and 1,333 men. Families continue to live without knowing whether their relatives are dead, alive or held in detention sites and camps in northeastern Syria.

Progress in examining mass graves and identifying victims remains slow. Ninety-three mass graves have been identified in Sinjar and surrounding areas, while the remains of only 162 victims have been officially exhumed and returned to their families. Delays in exhumation and DNA matching deny families the possibility of closure and create additional legal problems for widows and relatives of missing persons.

Domestic accountability also remains limited. ISIS members prosecuted in Iraq have generally been charged under Anti-Terrorism Law No. 13 of 2005 rather than for genocide, crimes against humanity or sexual slavery. This contrasts with proceedings in several European countries where courts have explicitly recognised crimes committed against Yazidis as genocide and crimes against humanity.

The Yazidi Survivors Law No. 8 of 2021 established an important framework, but implementation remains limited. Monthly pensions have reached some

beneficiaries, while provisions concerning land, healthcare, education, rehabilitation, memorialisation and collective reparations remain largely unfulfilled.

Displacement continues because return requires more than physical access to Sinjar. Large areas remain destroyed, while healthcare, electricity, water and education services are inadequate. Schools operate through multiple shifts and severe overcrowding, healthcare and psychological support are limited, and many communities depend on private wells and unstable electricity. Families living in displacement camps face deteriorating conditions and declining assistance. Many lack the resources required to rebuild their homes or establish a livelihood in Sinjar. Premature camp closures risk forcing residents to return to areas without adequate housing, services, employment or protection.

The governance and security situation presents a further obstacle. The 2020 Sinjar Agreement has not resolved the presence of multiple armed actors, rival administrations or disagreement over local authority. The agreement was developed without sufficient participation from local civil society, tribal leaders and community representatives, contributing to a lack of local trust and ownership.

A safe and dignified return requires reconstruction, compensation and reliable public services, together with locally accepted security arrangements. It also requires continued psychological and medical support, protection against hate speech, completion of mass-grave exhumations and meaningful

implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law.

Without progress in these areas, displacement and emigration will continue to reduce the Yazidi community's presence in its historical homeland. Twelve years after the genocide, the central challenge is no longer only recognition of what occurred, but the translation of recognition into justice, protection and conditions that allow survivors and displaced families to rebuild their lives.

Cross-Cutting Findings

7.1 Uncertainty Functions as a Form of Pressure

Delayed salaries, unclear water allocations, contested legal amendments and unpredictable restrictions on expression create prolonged uncertainty. This limits people's ability to plan their lives and pushes organisations towards caution and self-censorship.

7.2 Resources Are Distributed through Political Power

Water, salaries, public services and reconstruction are not governed only as administrative matters. Their distribution is shaped by political bargaining, territorial disputes and unequal influence between regions and communities.

7.3 Legal Protection Is Becoming Increasingly Selective

The cases examined show that laws are not simply weakly implemented: they may also be interpreted or enforced differently depending on gender, political influence, geographic location or the subject being discussed.

7.4 Peripheral Communities Carry the Cost of Institutional Failure

The consequences of decisions made in Baghdad or Erbil are concentrated elsewhere: in Sinjar, the southern Marshes and communities dependent on delayed public salaries. Those most affected often have the least influence over the decisions shaping their lives.

7.5 Women Absorb the Hidden Costs of Multiple Crises

Legal regression, economic insecurity, displacement and environmental degradation increase women's caregiving responsibilities, health risks and dependence while limiting their access to justice and public participation.

7.6 Civil Society Is Asked to Fill Institutional Gaps While Its Space Is Restricted

Civil society organisations document violations, provide support and connect affected communities with institutions. At the same time, they face legal, administrative and digital pressures that reduce their ability to perform precisely these functions.

CULTURAL LENTS

WATCH

The President's Cake

Film by Hasan Hadi, 2025

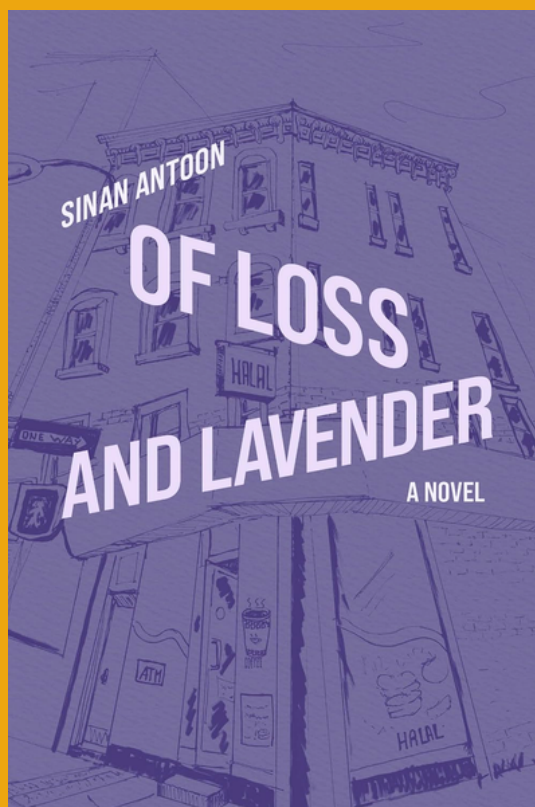
Set in Iraq during the economic sanctions of the 1990s, the film follows a young girl who is selected at school to prepare a cake for Saddam Hussein's birthday. Her search for ingredients reveals how authoritarian power enters ordinary life, while scarcity forces families to navigate difficult choices. Through a child's perspective, the film explores poverty, fear and survival without losing sight of humour, tenderness and human dignity.



READ

Of Loss and Lavender

Novel by Sinan Antoon, published in English in March 2026



The novel follows two Iraqi men living in the United States whose lives remain shaped by war, exile and memories of Iraq. Through their friendship, Antoon explores displacement, ageing and the fragile ways in which personal and collective histories are preserved. The novel complements this report by showing how the consequences of conflict continue beyond national borders and across generations.

CULTURAL

LENTS

LISTEN

Ma Sahbani

Song by Elaf and Alaa Sandouk, 2026

Blending contemporary independent music with Iraqi Arabic and local musical sensibilities, Ma Sahbani offers a glimpse into Iraq's evolving creative scene. The collaboration between Elaf and Alaa Sandouk reflects how a younger generation of artists is developing new forms of expression and using music, visual storytelling and digital platforms to reach audiences inside and beyond Iraq.

ما ساهباني
MA SAHBANI
ايلاف و علاء صندوق
ELAF AND ALAA SANDOUK

Recommendations and Priorities for Action

The following recommendations are directed primarily to federal and regional authorities in Iraq, with specific responsibilities identified where relevant. Their implementation should involve affected communities and independent civil society organisations.

Civic Space, Expression and Digital Rights

1. Introduce due – process safeguards for NGO suspensions.

The NGO Directorate should provide written reasons for every suspension, allow organisations sufficient time to correct administrative shortcomings and guarantee access to an independent appeal.

2. Make media sanctions transparent and appealable. The Communications and Media Commission should publish the legal basis, duration and appeal procedure for every warning, suspension or closure imposed on a media outlet.

3. Review cases arising from peaceful protest and expression.

The Supreme Judicial Council and Public Prosecution should review reopened Tishreen-related proceedings and close cases that do not involve violence or another clearly defined criminal offence.

4. Ensure accountability for attacks against human rights defenders. The Ministry of Interior and judicial authorities should conduct an independent investigation into the killing of Yanar Mohammed, publish information on its progress and protect witnesses and other defenders facing related threats.

5. Prevent the misuse of digital reporting mechanisms. Reports submitted through Baligh should not result in arrest, account closure or prosecution without judicial review and full due-process guarantees.

6. Adopt rights-based data-protection and cybercrime legislation. The Council of Representatives should adopt a comprehensive data-protection law and ensure that any cybercrime legislation narrowly defines offences, requires judicial authorisation for access to personal data and protects legitimate journalism and human rights work.

The Kurdistan Region

7. Establish a protected mechanism for salary payments.

The federal Ministry of Finance and the Kurdistan Regional Government should publish monthly transfer amounts and payment dates and prevent political or oil-related disputes from interrupting public-sector salaries.

8. Disclose and enforce fuel allocations and prices. Relevant KRG authorities should publish refinery volumes, subsidised allocations, official prices and distribution by governorate, while monitoring compliance with announced price caps.

Women's Rights

9. Address the consequences of the personal status

amendments. The competent judicial authorities should review Decision No. 93, ensure that custody decisions are guided by the child's best interests and meaningful consideration of the child's views.

10. Implement protection against gender-based violence throughout the Kurdistan Region. KRG authorities should enforce Law No. 8 of 2011, prevent tribal settlements from replacing criminal accountability, publish data on killings and suspected suicides and strengthen shelters, hotlines and services outside major cities.

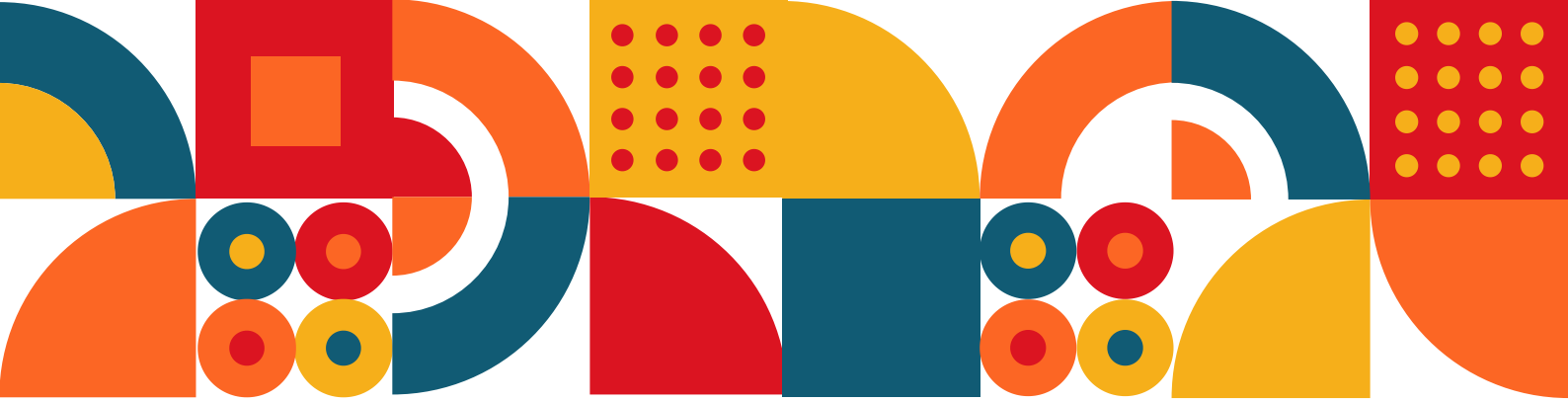
11. Create a public mechanism for implementing CEDAW recommendations. Federal and regional institutions should develop a time-bound implementation plan with the Iraqi Women Network and other women's organisations, identifying responsibilities and publishing regular progress reports.

Environmental Justice and the Marshes

12. **Guarantee and disclose a permanent water allocation for the Marshes.** The Ministry of Water Resources should establish a stable year-round allocation, publish planned and actual releases and explain publicly any reductions affecting the southern wetlands.
13. **Monitor water quality and health impacts in Dhi Qar.** The Ministries of Health, Environment and Water Resources should establish regular testing, publish the results and collect gender-disaggregated information on related health and household consequences.
14. **Require independent scrutiny of oil expansion in and around the Marshes.** The Ministries of Oil and Environment should not approve new projects without publicly accessible environmental and social impact assessments, community consultation and measures preventing displacement and ecosystem loss.

Sinjar and Yazidi Rights

15. **Ensure full implementation of the Yazidi Survivors Law with community-led oversight:** Authorities must accelerate and fully fund all provisions under Law No. 8 of 2021—including restitution, land, healthcare, and collective reparations—while ensuring the active participation of Yazidi civil society organizations, survivors, and displaced families in the design and monitoring of these processes.
16. **Publish and fund an integrated implementation plan for Sinjar.** Federal, regional, and Ninewa authorities should establish clear deadlines and dedicated budgets to expedite mass-grave exhumations, the identification of missing persons, comprehensive post-conflict reconstruction, and the restoration of essential public services to enable safe, voluntary return.



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