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World Report 2025 - Iraq

While Iraq continued to enjoy increased security and stability in 2024 following decades of armed conflict, impunity and a lack of justice and accountability for serious crimes, shrinking civic space, flaws in the justice system, discriminatory legal norms disproportionately impacting LGBT people, women, children, and minorities, and inadequate provision of government services remained key areas of concern.

In August, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani launched Iraq's [National Development Plan](#) (2024-2028), focusing on improving services, developing oil and gas, and initiating projects aligned with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Vision. However, ongoing [disputes](#) between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal Iraqi government over oil revenue, the payment of government salaries, and delayed regional elections have intensified political polarization.

Authorities also ramped up attacks on Iraqi's rights by passing or attempting to pass draconian laws that would restrict their freedoms. These include a law [criminalizing homosexuality](#), passed in April, a draft amendment to the [Personal Status Law](#), and a draft law on the [right to information](#). Violent [repression](#) of protesters and [arrests](#) of journalists covering protests continued in 2024.

Throughout the year, Türkiye increased its military operations in federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). According to the NGO [Community Peacemaker Teams](#), the Turkish military advanced 15 kilometers into Dohuk governorate, resulting in the displacement of the population of at least 162 villages and the destruction of civilian property. Turkish drone strikes allegedly killed [three journalists](#) and [eight civilians](#) in 2024.

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a coalition of Iraqi militias with links to Iran, claimed responsibility for [around 200 attacks](#) on US military bases in Iraq, Syria, and Israel that it says were conducted in retaliation for US support for Israel amid hostilities in Gaza. Reuters reported in September that the US and Iraq have reached an understanding that would lead to the [withdrawal](#) of the remaining 2,500 US troops in Iraq by the end of 2026. In January, Iranian ballistic missile [struck a home in Erbil](#), killing four civilians and injuring six others. Iranian authorities claimed the attacks targeted a "Mossad espionage center," a reference to Israel's intelligence agency, a claim the KRG [categorically rejected](#).

Women's Rights

Women and girls in Iraq continued to struggle against patriarchal norms embedded in Iraq's legal system. Iraq's [penal code](#) enables [impunity](#) for male violence against women, including provisions that allow the husband to punish his wife, parents to discipline their children, and mitigated sentences for violent acts including murder for so-called "honorable motives." The penal code also allows perpetrators of rape or sexual assault to escape prosecution or have their sentences quashed if they [marry their victim](#).

Iraq's parliament debated an [amendment](#) to the country's Personal Status Law that would allow Iraqi religious authorities, rather than state law, to govern marriage and inheritance matters at the expense of fundamental rights. If passed, the amendment would have [disastrous effects](#) on women's and girls' rights as guaranteed under international law and would undermine the principle of equality under Iraqi law by removing protections for women regarding divorce and inheritance.

The draft amendment would also authenticate unregistered marriages, which are conducted by religious leaders but not registered with personal status courts and are [illegal](#) under the current

Personal Status Law. The amendment would also remove criminal punishments for men entering these marriages and allow religious leaders, rather than the courts, to finalize marriages.

Unregistered marriages are already a [loophole enabling child marriage](#) in Iraq, where child marriage rates have been rising over the last 20 years. Unregistered marriages also have [extremely harmful effects](#) on women and girls' ability to obtain government services and social services linked to their civil status, obtain birth certificates for their children, or claim their rights to dowry, spousal maintenance, and inheritance.

Iraq's parliament failed once again to pass a long-awaited [anti-domestic violence law](#). This law has been stalled for over a [decade](#) despite persistent advocacy from civil society groups and women's rights organizations. Survivors of [gender-based violence](#) had [limited access to shelter or justice](#). While there were a small number of [underground shelters](#) for women in federal Iraq, run by local NGOs, they were not widely supported, but often criticized, and over the years they have been attacked by families and raided by authorities.

A [report](#) by Amnesty International found that survivors of gender-based violence in the KRI faced significant obstacles in accessing justice and protection despite state-established reporting and protection institutions and a [law criminalizing domestic violence](#) that has been on the books for 13 years. The few government shelters in the KRI only allowed women to enter or leave with [court orders](#).

Children's Rights

Child marriage rates in Iraq have been steadily [rising](#) since 2003. Iraq's Personal Status Law sets the legal marriage age at 18, but allows marriage at 15 with a judge's approval, based on the child's "maturity and physical capacity," a provision that violates international legal standards and best practices. The draft [amendment](#) to the Personal Status Law would legalize child marriage for girls as young as 9 and boys as young as 15.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported that 28 percent of girls in Iraq are [married before age 18](#). According to the UN Assistance Mission in Iraq, [22 percent](#) of unregistered marriages involved girls under age 14. [Poverty](#), [insecurity](#), and [lower educational outcomes](#) for girls have all been associated with increased child marriage rates in Iraq. [Child marriage](#) and adolescent pregnancy can have serious adverse health impacts, limit access to education and employment, and exacerbate risks of sexual and domestic violence.

By November, the Iraqi parliament had not yet passed a draft [child protection law](#) introduced to parliament in June 2023. If passed, the law would be the first child protection law in the country and a vital step in safeguarding children's rights in Iraq. The law addresses crucial issues like child labor, exploitation, and abuse. It would also explicitly enshrine children's fundamental rights into law, including the rights to life, health, education, and citizenship.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

On April 27, Iraq's parliament [passed an amendment](#) to the country's existing "Law on Combatting Prostitution," No. 8 of 1988 punishing same-sex relations with a penalty of between 10 and 15 years in prison. The law also allows for a prison term between 1 and 3 years for people who undergo or perform gender-affirming medical interventions and for "imitating women." The law provides for 7 years in prison and a fine between 10 million Iraqi dinars (US\$7,700) and 15 million dinars (\$11,500) for "promoting homosexuality," which the law does not define. On August 8, 2023, the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission issued a [directive](#) ordering all media outlets to replace the term "homosexuality" with "sexual deviance" in their published and broadcast language and banning the use of the term "gender."

The [digital targeting](#) of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and [violence against](#) them, including killings, abductions, torture, and sexual violence by armed groups in Iraq continued to be met with impunity. Iraqi authorities have also targeted LGBT people using a range of vague provisions in Iraq's penal code aimed at policing morals and public indecency and limiting freedom of expression.

Death Penalty

Iraq has long had one of the highest rates of executions in the world. About [8,000 prisoners](#), most charged with terrorism offenses, are on death row in Iraq. Authorities in 2024 carried out the executions despite well-documented [flaws in Iraq's judicial system](#) that deny defendants' right to due process and a fair trial and rely on confessions obtained through torture. On December 25, 2023, Iraqi authorities [executed](#) thirteen men in Nasiriyah prison, the first mass execution since [21 men](#) were executed on November 16, 2020. Multiple mass executions occurred in 2024, including the [execution of 13 people](#) on April 22. The Iraqi government does not provide public figures on executions.

Authorities undertook executions [without regard](#) for the basic rights of those facing the death penalty, including executions carried out without prior notice and not allowing prisoners to call their families or lawyers before their executions.

The Kurdistan Region has [466 people held in prison](#) with pending death sentences, according to the KRG Directorate of Corrections. The KRG has maintained a de facto [moratorium](#) on the death penalty since 2008, banning it "except in very few cases which were considered essential," according to a KRG spokesperson.

Returns of Displaced People

Seven years after the last territory controlled by the Islamic State (ISIS) was retaken by forces from Iraq and a United States-led international military coalition, about [1.1 million](#) Iraqis remain internally displaced, [mostly](#) across the KRI.

In January, the Iraqi Council of Ministers [announced](#) a July 30 deadline for the closure of the last remaining internally displaced people (IDP) camps in the Kurdistan Region. To encourage returns, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement also announced a package of [aid and incentives](#) for returnees, including a one-time payment of 4 million Iraqi dinars (about \$3,000) per family, some government jobs, social security benefits, and interest-free small business loans.

According to the International Organization for Migration, [7,699 households](#) left IDP camps between April 3 and August 29, the majority of whom returned to Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates. In July, the last IDP camp in [Sulaymaniyah](#) governorate was officially closed.

[Human Rights Watch](#) and [other](#) rights [groups](#) raised concerns that prematurely closing the camps by the July 30 deadline would imperil the rights of IDPs. IDPs [cited](#) ongoing security concerns, lagging reconstruction, a lack of livelihood opportunities, issues of property rights, and unresolved tensions as reasons preventing their return. [Some families](#) also fear retaliation or persecution from local communities who view them as having been associated with ISIS.

On July 25, the government [announced](#) it would postpone the July 30 deadline for camp closure to the [end of 2024](#).

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Iraq is among the [most vulnerable](#) countries to global warming and faces various environmental crises, including [droughts](#), [desertification](#), increased frequency and severity of [sandstorms](#), [pollution](#), and [rising temperatures](#). Extreme industrial pollution, enabled by weak environmental legislation and poor enforcement, is common. In recent years there is increasing attention to the [health harms](#) experienced by communities living near sites of oil and gas production, particularly from [gas flaring](#).

A growing [environmental movement](#) in Iraq seeks to address environmental degradation, help prepare Iraq to adapt to global warming, and promote Iraq's transition away from a fossil fuels-based economy. Their efforts, like those of activists across the civil society space, have been met with [harassment](#), [intimidation](#), and [threats](#).