Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	**1616**
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights
Titel:	Maat for Peace' report submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the Republic of Iraq
Udgivet:	April 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	9. oktober 2025

ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights

Maat for Peace' report submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the Republic of Iraq

April 2025

Maat for Peace, Development, and Human Rights welcomes the submission of the Republic of Iraq's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on May 4, 2021, and commends this step as part of Iraq's commitment to UN human rights mechanisms, particularly the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Despite this positive step, Maat expresses its concern about Iraq's continued reservation to the first paragraph of Article (14) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates "the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion." The Iraqi government justified the continued withdrawal of this reservation by citing its incompatibility with the Iraqi constitutional and legislative framework and the provisions of Islamic law. Maat notes that this reservation is inconsistent with the spirit and fundamental principles of the Convention, particularly the principle of non-discrimination (Article 2) and the principle of the best interests of the child (Article 3), as previously recommended by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its previous concluding observations.

After studying the Iraqi national report and reviewing the data and information provided therein, Maat is preparing this parallel report based on recent field and analytical information and evidence, to assess the extent of Iraq's compliance with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a focus on a number of substantive rights such as the right to education, the right to a name and nationality, and ensuring the best interests of the child, in addition to the conditions of vulnerable groups of children, including refugee and displaced children, and children who have lost their families as a result of armed conflicts or exceptional humanitarian circumstances.

Maat believes that the Iraqi national report lacked sufficient detail in terms of qualitative and quantitative statistics and data, which limited the relevant committee's ability to accurately assess progress. Maat hopes that the Iraqi government will address these gaps in its next periodic report.

This report is based on independent monitoring by Maat and aims to highlight areas of progress, as well as the ongoing challenges hindering the implementation of the provisions of the Convention in Iraq.

First: The Best Interests of the Child (Article 3)

ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان
Maat For Peace, Development, and Human Rights
Headquarters:148 Misr Helwan El-Zyrae Road, El Matbaa Sq, Hadayek El Maadi, 4th Floor, No 41, Cairo, Egypt
Maat Training Center: 380 Corniche El Nil St., Gawharet El Maadi Tower,38th Floor, Tower B, Cairo, Egypt
490 El Maadi **WWW.**maatpeace.org maat@maatpeace.org
00(20) (2) **25266026** 00(20) (2) **25266019** **+201226521170**

Article (3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities, or legislative bodies**".**

In this context, Maat appreciates the efforts made by the Republic of Iraq to ensure respect for the principle of the best interests of the child in government policies and programs, and notes the adoption of a number of positive measures to achieve this fundamental principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child**.**

The Iraqi government adopted a national program for decent work in cooperation with UNICEF, which includes combating child labor among its main objectives. [1]. A joint program to formulate policies to combat child labor was also launched in February 2024, reflecting an institutional commitment to reducing economic violations against children.[2] Regarding the protection of children from recruitment and involvement in armed conflict, in March 2023, the Iraqi government signed an action plan to prevent the recruitment and use of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces. [3] This culminated in Iraq's removal on June 14, 2024, from the UN Secretary-General's list of states and armed groups that recruit children. This is a positive development for the country in implementing its obligations under Article 38 of the Convention. [4]

In the context of addressing the impacts of climate change on children, Maat commends Iraq's signing of the "Children, Youth and Climate Action Declaration" on November 20, 2023, which represents a commitment to include children's rights in national climate policies and make them a central part of climate action strategies. This also intersects with the Sustainable Development Agenda, particularly Goal 13 (Climate Action). [5.]

Regarding early childhood support, the Iraqi government, in partnership with UNICEF, launched the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development in May 2022. This strategy is expected to

[1] Decent Work Country Programme in Iraq: Recovery and Reform- Q&A Blog, https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/decent-work-country-programme-iraq-recovery-and-reform-qa-blog

[2] Launch of a joint program to stimulate decent work and affordable housing in Iraq, at the following link: https://tinyurl.com/y3mf25ss

[3] The Government of Iraq, supported by the United Nations, strengthens its commitment to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed forces, https://tinyurl.com/557p59bh

[4] Al-Asadi announces Iraq's exit from the list of using children in armed conflicts, ina, 14 june 2024, https://tinyurl.com/2wskcpj2

[5] UNICEF commends the Government of Iraq for signing the Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action, UNICEF, https://tinyurl.com/39ezxsmz

contribute to accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Target 4.2 of Goal 4. However, Maat expresses concern about the lack of a written or published document for this strategy, which limits opportunities for monitoring and assessing its impact on the ground. [6]

In the context of enhancing protection from gender-based violence, Maat commends the continued provision of protection services, with at least 220,000 girls receiving protection services during the period covered. The Child Welfare Authority also established two child helplines in cooperation with UNICEF and Child Helpline International, as a monitoring and reporting mechanism within the national child protection policy. [7]

At the legislative level, the Iraqi Parliament discussed a draft Child Protection Law in November 2022. The law stipulates the state's responsibility to care for children and protect them from all forms of violence. It also establishes a mechanism for children to file complaints about abuse by their guardians. While welcoming this initiative, Maat believes the proposed mechanism may be impractical in the absence of an environment that guarantees confidentiality and child protection during the filing of a complaint. This requires reconsidering its design and implementation. [8]

Maat also expresses deep concern over the delay in adopting a comprehensive child rights law in Iraq, which leaves a legislative gap and prevents the provision of a comprehensive legal framework that translates the state's international obligations into practical measures at the national level.

Finally, despite initiatives aimed at reducing early marriage, Maat expresses its concern about the continued high rates of child marriage, as it is estimated that about 28% of girls in Iraq marry before reaching the legal age, which constitutes a clear violation of Article (19) of the Convention, which obliges states to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse, including harmful social practices. [9]

Second: The right to life and development of children (Article 6)

Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “every child has the inherent right to life,” and obliges States Parties to ensure the child’s survival and development to the maximum

[6] Iraq launches, with the support of UNICEF, the National Strategy on Early Childhood Development, https://tinyurl.com/57jj8ap5

[7] UNICEF IN IRAQ FOR EVERY CHILD, page 17, https://www.unicef.org/iraq/media/2411/file/Annual%20Report%202022%20-%20Eng..pdf

[8] Legislative Review of the Draft Law on Child Protection, Prepared by the Institute for International Law and Human Rights, https://iilhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ChildProtectionDraft21May23_EN.pdf

[9] World Children’s Day, https://www.seedkurdistan.org/world-childrens-day/

extent possible. This right is the cornerstone upon which the other rights guaranteed in the Convention are built, and States may not violate it under any justification**.** [10]

In this context, Maat commends Article 15 of the Iraqi Constitution for protecting the right to life, as well as the ongoing legislative efforts to pass the Child Rights Bill, which is expected to include explicit provisions guaranteeing this right and enabling children to grow up in a healthy and safe environment. Maat also notes government initiatives aimed at improving the level of healthcare provided to children. Data indicates that coverage of basic childhood vaccines exceeded 90% by the end of 2023, a positive development linked in part to the shift to digital platforms for managing the immunization process, along with the implementation of campaigns to vaccinate children in high-risk areas against diseases such as measles. [11]

Despite this progress, violations related to this right remain a major concern. Maat has documented that children in Iraq continue to be at risk of death or injury as a result of remnants of armed conflict, particularly mines and unexploded ordnance. Statistics indicate that more than 500 children were killed between 2017 and 2023 due to mine explosions, including 100 children in just nine months of 2021. The period from January to March 2023 also recorded the death or injury of 16 children due to landmines, reflecting the continued absence of a safe environment for children in some areas and highlighting the urgent need to expand mine risk awareness campaigns, particularly in schools and affected communities. [12].

These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure in health facilities. It is estimated that approximately 40% of health facilities are not fully operational, negatively impacting children's access to necessary medical care. Maat notes with concern that neonatal mortality rates remain alarmingly high, representing approximately 54% of all deaths among children under the age of five. This is largely linked to the lack of primary healthcare services, particularly antenatal and postnatal care, as well as weak reproductive health programs.

In light of the above, Maat believes that the Iraqi state needs to take more comprehensive measures to protect the right to life and development. This can be achieved by strengthening protection frameworks against the risks of previous conflicts, expanding investment in the health sector, adopting a preventative approach based on partnerships with civil society organizations and international agencies, and expediting the adoption of a comprehensive child rights law that

[10] Ibid, page 30, https://iilhr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/ChildProtectionDraft21May23_EN.pdf

[11] Iraq Update on the context and situation of children, https://www.unicef.org/media/152576/file/Iraq-2023-COAR.pdf

[12] Why are they still there? Mines are killing Iraqis, Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, https://iohriq.org/ar/34-.html

includes clear commitments to this right and is consistent with the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Third: The Right to a Name and Nationality (Article 7)

Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the right of every child to be registered immediately after birth, to have a name, to be granted a nationality, and to know his or her parents and maintain ties with them. This right is a fundamental foundation upon which a child can enjoy other civil and social rights, such as education, health care, and legal protection.

In this context, Maat notes that the Iraqi Constitution explicitly recognizes the right to obtain civil documentation as a fundamental civil right, and that the current Iraqi Nationality Law grants Iraqi women married to foreigners the right to pass on citizenship to their children[13]. However, Maat expresses concern about the persistence of certain discriminatory restrictions. Children born outside Iraq are denied this right if the mother is Iraqi and the father is foreign. This constitutes a violation of the principle of non-discrimination and increases the likelihood of statelessness for the children concerned[14], in contravention of Article 7 of the Convention, as well as Article 2, which prohibits any form of discrimination.

Regarding birth registration, Maat acknowledges that Iraq has established a legal framework regulating this process through Law No. 148 of 1971 and its amendments. This stipulates that registration procedures must be completed within 15 days of birth in a hospital, or 30 days if the birth takes place at home. [15] While the established procedures appear simple in theory, their practical application reveals significant challenges, particularly in conflict-affected areas or those lacking administrative infrastructure. [16] Data indicates that more than 45,000 children in Iraq lack any identification documents, including official birth certificates. This deprives these children of access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and school registration, and exposes them to the risk of societal exclusion and institutional discrimination. [17]

The problem is exacerbated among some vulnerable groups, particularly children of Yazidi mothers who survived gender-based violence during ISIS rule, who face difficulties in obtaining

[13] Combined twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh periodic reports submitted by Iraq, https://tinyurl.com/m8sa28yx
[14] Gender Justice Assessment of laws affecting gender equality and protection against gender-based violence, Page 8, https://arabstates.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Iraq%20Country%20Assessment%20-%20English_0.pdf
[15] Birth registration, Iraq, https://help.unhcr.org/iraq/en/help/birth-registration/
[16] Can a child obtain retroactive or replacement birth registration documents? https://tinyurl.com/4u44p56z
[17] STATELESSNESS IN IRAQ, https://statelessjourneys.org/wp-content/uploads/StatelessJourneys-Iraq-summary-final.pdf

Iraqi citizenship due to the lack of legal proof of paternity. Children of Bidoon, Kurds, and other marginalized groups also face similar challenges, leading to the risk of statelessness, especially given that Iraq has not yet ratified the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, a legislative vacuum that further exacerbates the vulnerability of these groups.

Reports indicate that some groups of women face administrative and societal obstacles in registering their children, which deepens gender-based discrimination and undermines the inalienable right to birth registration. Maat emphasizes that registering a child immediately after birth is not merely an administrative procedure; it is the legal basis for their existence in the eyes of the state and a guarantee of their full enjoyment of their rights.

In light of these challenges, Maat recommends that the Iraqi state review policies and practices related to birth registration and the granting of citizenship, and adopt special measures to address cases at risk of statelessness, particularly by acceding to relevant international conventions and strengthening the legal framework to ensure equality in granting citizenship without discrimination based on gender, origin, or the legal status of the parents.

Fourth: Protection from Violence (Article 19)

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the right of the child to protection from all forms of physical or psychological violence, injury, or abuse, whether committed by parents or others having responsibility for the child's care. In this context, Maat appreciates the steps taken by the Iraqi government to promote this right, including the Council of Ministers' approval of the draft law on protection from domestic violence and its referral to the Council of Representatives, which is an important development in the right direction.

Maat also commends the Iraqi Ministry of Health's launch of the first national plan to address gender-based violence on January 31, 2022. This plan, among other things, aims to combat violence against women and girls, including minors. [18] However, these efforts remain insufficient given the reality on the ground, as girls, particularly minors, continue to face multiple forms of violence, such as sexual harassment and threats, both in public and within educational institutions[19]

[18] First gender-based violence strategic plan launched in Iraq, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/first-gender-based-violence-strategic-plan-launched-iraq-enar

[19] Tackling the rise in cases of sexual harassment in Iraq Tackling the rise in cases of sexual harassment in Iraq, https://www.arabnews.com/node/2186741

This is confirmed by local reports of high rates of harassment of girls in universities and secondary schools, even before they reach the age of 18. [20]

Although Iraqi law punishes sexual harassment with up to seven years in prison under Article 396 of the Penal Code, Maat notes with concern that many cases are resolved through tribal settlements, known as reconciliation and mutual consent. This threatens to perpetuate impunity and undermine confidence in formal justice, especially in areas where tribal customs dominate community life. This traditional social structure perpetuates the violation of girls' rights and deprives them of justice and fairness.

Maat also notes the absence of an explicit prohibition on corporal punishment against children, whether at home or in alternative care sites. Article 41 of the Iraqi Penal Code permits the use of corporal punishment by parents and teachers, and even recognizes its use in social welfare institutions[21]. This approach contravenes international standards calling for the full protection of children from all forms of violence, including corporal punishment under any pretext. [22]

Reliable estimates indicate that four out of every five children in Iraq are exposed to violence, whether at home or in schools, in the absence of effective accountability and monitoring mechanisms. [23] This tragic reality is illustrated by the death of seven-year-old M.W., who died in July 2023 as a result of horrific abuse and torture by his stepmother in the Al-Khatib area of Al-Shu'la city in Baghdad. Maat documented the details of the incident, and testimonies and evidence confirmed that the child was severely beaten and stabbed, an incident that constitutes a flagrant violation of Article 19 of the Convention and highlights a clear shortcoming in protection systems and rapid response to cases of domestic violence against children[24].

In light of the above, Maat emphasizes the urgent need to adopt comprehensive legislation prohibiting all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, strengthening

[20] Shocking testimonies of harassment in universities, hospitals and satellite channels, Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, https://iohriq.org/53-.html

[21] Country Report for Iraq, End Corporal Punishment, https://www.endcorporalpunishment.org/wp-content/uploads/country-reports/Iraq.pdf

[22] Ibid

[23] UNICEF Statement on Violence Against Children, UN Children's Fund, https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/unicef-statement-violence-against-children-enar

[24] Child Abuse in MENA on the Rise: A Persisting Crisis, https://fanack.com/human-rights/features-insights/child-abuse-in-mena-on-the-rise-a-persisting-crisis~263740/

reporting and protection systems, and providing psychological and legal support to child victims, especially in societies where customs trump the law.

Fifth: Children who have lost their families (Article 20)

Article 20 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates the right of children deprived of a family environment to special protection and assistance from the state. In this context, Maat has followed initiatives launched by the Iraqi government in cooperation with civil society organizations to support orphaned children or those who have lost one or both parents. Among the most prominent of these initiatives is the "Alef" initiative, which aims to support marginalized groups, including orphaned children, by providing free education, in coordination between non-governmental organizations and relevant government agencies, particularly the Ministry of Education**.**

Despite the importance of these efforts, the scale of the crisis poses significant challenges for the Iraqi state. Estimates indicate that approximately 800,000 Iraqi children have lost one or both parents, while joint data from the Iraqi Human Rights Commission and UNICEF indicate that the number of orphans in the country could reach five million. These figures contradict estimates from the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, which put the number of orphans at less than one million. [25] Despite this statistical discrepancy, experts and social researchers agree that the magnitude of the problem requires more effective and comprehensive government intervention.

Maat is deeply concerned about the risks faced by children deprived of family care, as this group is particularly vulnerable to exploitation, neglect, and trafficking, including sexual exploitation. Local reports indicate that some orphaned children have become easy targets for prostitution networks, in the absence of strict oversight and effective preventative measures by the state.

What exacerbates the crisis is the severe shortage of social workers and psychiatrists capable of providing psychological support and care to these children, in a country with a population of approximately 43 million and facing structural challenges in the social protection and mental health sectors. This shortage represents a fundamental obstacle to developing effective programs to reintegrate children deprived of family care into society and to providing a nurturing environment that protects them from falling into cycles of violence, delinquency, and exploitation.[26]

[25] IHCHR Report: 5 Million Orphaned Children in Iraq, https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3354921/ihchr-report-5-million-orphaned-children-iraq

[26] Iraq conflict: Crisis of an orphaned generation, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20461110

In light of the above, Maat calls on the Iraqi government to adopt a comprehensive national policy to protect orphaned children and children without family care. This policy includes preventative measures, expanding the scope of appropriate alternative care, increasing the number of specialists in social and psychological care, and strengthening oversight of institutions serving these groups, ensuring their transparency and accountability.

Sixth: Refugee children (Article 22)

Refugee children in Iraq continue to suffer as a result of the difficult conditions they face in the country. Data from the UNHCR indicates that approximately 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers reside in Iraq, more than 90% of whom are Syrians. Statistics indicate that 44% of these refugees are children, the vast majority of whom reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, while others reside in the southern and central governorates. [27]

Maat has noted some positive measures launched by the Iraqi government to implement Article 22 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which addresses the right of refugee children to protection and care. The Iraqi Minister of Education issued a decision stipulating the enrollment of refugee children in public schools in Iraq, even if their parents lack the necessary national residency documents, facilitating their access to education. Despite this positive step, Maat notes that the lack of proper documentation remains a challenge for many refugee children to enroll in public schools, hindering their right to education. [28]

As part of Iraq's efforts to provide education for refugee children, the government has allocated approximately 58 schools in the governorates of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah for Syrian refugee children, with approximately 1,200 Syrian teachers assigned to teach the curriculum. Despite these initiatives, significant obstacles remain for refugee children, particularly Syrians, residing in the Kurdistan Region. During the 2022-2023 academic year, the Kurdistan Regional Government, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, implemented an initiative to transform the curriculum taught to Syrian refugee children in camps in northern Iraq from Arabic to Kurdish-Sorani, the official language of the Kurdistan Region. [29]

According to expert assessments, this shift could significantly impact the education of refugee children. The head of the Syrian Teachers' Union in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq believes that this move could lead to approximately 50% of Syrian refugee children dropping out of the region's

[27] UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, Iraq, https://www.unhcr.org/countries/iraq

[28] Annual Results Report 2022 Iraq, UNHCR , page 15, https://reporting.unhcr.org/files/2023-06/MENA%20-%20Iraq.pdf

[29] Empowering Syrian Refugee Students with Kurdish Language Classes in Northern Iraq, People in Need , https://www.peopleinneed.net/empowering-syrian-refugee-students-with-kurdish-language-classes-in-northern-iraq-11124gp

education system, given that half of school-age refugee children do not have adequate grasp of the Kurdish language. [30]

Regarding refugee children's right to healthcare, Maat noted that the Iraqi Ministry of Health has updated the national immunization system to include refugee children, facilitating their access to immunization services. However, significant challenges remain in providing healthcare to refugee children, as refugee girls' access to primary healthcare has declined, impeding their access to basic healthcare[31].

In light of these observations, Maat calls on the Iraqi government to intensify efforts to promote the rights of refugee children and expand the provision of educational and health services in accordance with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, taking into account the needs of refugee children in all areas of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region.

Seventh: Children's Education (Article 28)

The right to education is a fundamental right guaranteed by Article 34 of the Iraqi Constitution, which guarantees free education for all Iraqis. The Iraqi Constitution also allocates 10% of government spending to education, a percentage that remains below the regional average of 14% in the Middle East and North Africa. Furthermore, Iraq's education strategy seeks to increase this percentage to 16% of the general budget, in a move aimed at boosting investment in the education sector. [32]

Despite these efforts, Iraq faces significant challenges in the education sector. The reality is that there is a significant shortage of educational facilities suitable for accommodating all students wishing to enroll in the educational process. According to estimates by the Ministry of Education in Iraq, an additional 10,000 school buildings are needed to address the infrastructure gap. This shortage has had a significant negative impact on student enrollment rates at all levels of education, particularly at the intermediate and secondary levels[33].

Furthermore, Maat raises concerns about the continued rise in illiteracy rates in Iraq. The latest survey conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning for 2023 showed that illiteracy rates across Iraq reached 12.3%, with this rate significantly higher among females, reaching 28%, while it is

[30] IMMEDIATE NEEDS FOR IRAQI CHILDREN IN IRAQ AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES, page 9, https://tinyurl.com/3hjhejpz

[31] Ten years on, Syrian refugees' lives in Iraq are growing tougher, and past gains might be lost, https://tinyurl.com/4k7ae5ne

[32] Iraq: New schools and improved learning bring hope to the poorest children, but more is needed, https://tinyurl.com/bd9xxrkk

[33] Building a Better Future to Ensure Education for All Children in Iraq: Education Reform Memorandum, World Bank Group, October 20, 2021, link: https://bit.ly/3HlHYCi

estimated at around 13% among males. Muthanna Governorate leads the Iraqi governorates in illiteracy rates, with 22%, followed by Dohuk Governorate, with 18%.

Regarding secondary education, Maat noted weak enrollment rates in Iraq, with data indicating that only 51% of boys and 45% of girls enroll in secondary education. This decline in secondary education enrollment contributes to reducing children's opportunities to obtain well-paying jobs in the future, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and negatively impacting the national economy in the long term. Regarding educational infrastructure, reports have shown that approximately 50% of Iraqi schools lack basic services such as water, sanitation, and personal hygiene. This lack of basic services significantly impacts the quality of education provided to students and constitutes a major obstacle to achieving quality, inclusive education for all children in Iraq[34].

Based on these data, Maat calls on the Iraqi government to increase spending on education, improve school infrastructure, and provide basic services such as water and sanitation to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. Maat also urges measures to reduce illiteracy rates, especially among girls, and expand secondary education to include the largest possible number of children, in line with the right to education enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Eighth: The Worst Forms of Child Labor (Article 32)

Maat has reviewed the measures taken by Iraq to combat child labor. Despite some efforts, Maat notes a tacit acceptance of child labor in some Iraqi circles. Measures taken have been limited to inspection committees from the Department of Labor and Vocational Training in areas where child labor is prevalent. Employers have also been made aware of the need not to discriminate between children and adults in terms of wage rates and treatment. However, actual implementation remains limited and does not address the root causes of the phenomenon.

The Iraqi government issued a National Development Plan for the period from 2018 to 2022, which aims, among other things, to reduce child labor. However, this plan does not include the complete elimination of child labor, reflecting an insufficient approach to addressing this phenomenon. The Labor Law also sets the minimum working age at 15 years, without distinguishing between children working with their families or with others. However, this minimum age conflicts with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and represents a legal loophole that contributes to the exploitation of children in potentially hazardous work, contradicting Target 7 of Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, which stipulates the elimination of the worst forms of child labor.

Estimates of child labor in Iraq vary, with some statistics indicating that approximately 900,000 children work at an early age due to poverty and economic deprivation. Despite efforts, there are

[34] Cost of Inaction: Education Deprivation in Iraq and the Potential of Social Protection to Reverse it, International Labour Organization , https://tinyurl.com/88nkrs4w

still complaints about social support programs for children working in the worst forms of child labor, which are considered limited and insufficiently effective. Even with Iraq's commitment to the International Labor Organization's conventions to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, permissive child labor practices persist in some sectors.

Regarding official statistics, the Child Labor Combating Unit at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs identified only 109 children under the age of 15 working in the worst forms of child labor, while more than 600 children work in hazardous conditions. However, unofficial estimates indicate much higher numbers, with estimates of child labor in Iraq ranging from 800,000 to 1 million children, some of whom work in hazardous, life-threatening conditions.

During its assessment of measures to reduce child labor, especially in hazardous conditions, Maat noted a shortage of labor inspectors in Iraq. Reports indicate that Iraq needs approximately 690 labor inspectors to cover the workforce, ensure the implementation of labor laws, and protect children from exploitation. Poverty and economic deprivation are among the main reasons children work in these hazardous conditions. According to a UNICEF report, one in two children in Iraq lives in multidimensional poverty, increasing their likelihood of being exploited in the worst forms of labor.

Based on these facts, Maat calls on the Iraqi government to strengthen efforts to eliminate child labor, especially in hazardous work, by providing adequate resources to labor inspectors and increasing social support for affected children. Maat also urges a review of the working age and its definition in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ensuring the protection of children from exploitation and safeguarding their right to education and healthy development.

Recommendations

1. Encourage the Iraqi Parliament to accelerate discussions on the Child Law and work to adopt it as soon as possible, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to ensure the protection of children's rights in Iraq**.**
2. Consider publishing the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development, so that civil society can evaluate its implementation and participate in promoting children's rights in Iraq**.**
3. Address the cases of more than 45,000 children in Iraq who lack identity papers and civil documents, including birth certificates, to ensure their right to identity and legal protection**.**
4. Increase awareness campaigns targeting children in Iraq to raise awareness of the dangers of landmines and how to avoid them, thus contributing to providing a safe environment for children in war-affected areas**.**

Headquarters:148 Misr Helwan El-Zyrae Road, El Matbaa Sq, Hadayek El Maadi, 4th Floor, No 41, Cairo, Egypt
Maat Training Center: 380 Corniche El Nil St., Gawharet El Maadi Tower,38th Floor, Tower B, Cairo, Egypt
490 El Maadi **WWW.**maatpeace.org maat@maatpeace.org
00(20) (2) **25266026** 00(20) (2) **25266019** **+201226521170**

5. Encourage Iraqi authorities to make greater efforts to remove mines, shells, and unexploded ordnance using modern technologies and advanced tools, and not relying solely on manual labor, to improve the effectiveness of mine clearance operations**.**
6. Encourage Iraq to provide labor inspectors and criminal investigators with specialized training courses and programs to reduce child labor, thus contributing to improving mechanisms to combat exploitation.
7. Consider acceding to the United Nations Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, to ensure the rights of children at risk of statelessness and protect them from the risks of exclusion**.**
8. Actively participate in the implementation of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by the end of 2024, to promote children's rights to a nationality and protection**.**
9. Strengthen mechanisms aimed at ending all forms of violence against children and ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice, to ensure a safe, violence-free environment in Iraqi society**.**
10. Reduce the worst forms of child labor, in line with Target 7 of Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to ensure children's right to education and to grow up in an environment free from exploitation**.**

Headquarters:148 Misr Helwan El-Zyrae Road, El Matbaa Sq, Hadayek El Maadi, 4th Floor, No 41, Cairo, Egypt
Maat Training Center: 380 Corniche El Nil St., Gawharet El Maadi Tower,38th Floor, Tower B, Cairo, Egypt
490 El Maadi **WWW.**maatpeace.org maat@maatpeace.org
00(20) (2) **25266026** 00(20) (2) **25266019** **+201226521170**