



STUDY

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# GLASS CEILINGS

FACTORS AFFECTING THE CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN IN THE  
PUBLIC SECTOR IN IRAQ

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>ISIS</b>	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual and gender-based violence
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual health and reproductive rights

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## KVINNA TILL KVINNA

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The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993. For every woman and girl's right to be safe and to be heard.

Today, we are one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with over 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all. The future is equal. And together, we are change.

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## ABOUT THE STUDY

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The governmental institutions in Iraq are considered a safe space for women and provide them with sustainable job opportunities, making them the preferred choice for Iraqi families. It is highlighted that the percentage of female employees in these institutions is much higher than in other sectors in the country.

Given this reality, Kvinna till Kvinna seeks to collect data on the working conditions of women in Iraq through this study, which aims to improve sustainable work conditions. This initiative reflects the results of the ongoing in-depth dialogues that Kvinna till Kvinna conducts with Iraqi women, who constantly point to the urgent need for more research in this field. This study complements the efforts of Kvinna till Kvinna in promoting women's economic empowerment in the Middle East and North Africa region, both regionally and globally.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Women in the public sector are concentrated in administrative positions, which represent the lower levels of the hierarchical structure. There is a clear deficiency in their representation in senior positions.

The post-2003 Iraqi governments were formed based on a quota system, dividing political positions and state institutions among the Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish components, according to the number of seats won in parliamentary elections. This has resulted in the transformation of senior administrative positions in these institutions into political quotas unrelated to expertise, competence, and administrative merit. The quota system has created an environment within the public sector institutions that prevents women from reaching senior positions. Women are excluded from leadership positions because they do not represent a certain sect, ethnicity, or political party.

The quota system applied to all government agencies has exacerbated corruption. There is a lack of clear and scientific criteria in selecting employees, especially leaders, and a lack of equal opportunity principle in job positions. The phenomenon of officials exploiting public positions for personal and partisan gains is one of the key indicators covered by corruption data. Although the law has defined clear conditions for assuming administrative positions, corrupt networks shape promotion decisions within administrative bodies and can bypass or change these laws to serve their interests. Favouritism, nepotism, and loyalty in filling senior positions instead of merit and competence are common forms of corruption in public sector institutions in Iraq.

Female workers suffer from intersectional discrimination, not only based on gender but also through unfair competition with men for opportunities that often favour males. They also face unfair competition with their female colleagues, as promotion criteria now rely on party affiliations, loyalties, personal connections, and favouritism rather than administrative qualifications and merits.

The applicable labour law in Iraq and the civil service law provide a set of provisions that ensure non-discrimination between women and men, whether in employment, training, working conditions, or requirements. However, discrimination occurs in practice, which is one of the main loopholes in the public sector in Iraq. One of the prominent manifestations of discrimination is the lack of equality between women and men in membership of important committees. Statistics related to wages in Iraq reveal significant biases in favour of males, resulting from systems, laws, and employment practices in general, leading to income disparities in public sector jobs. Another form of discrimination is favouritism towards males in delegations and important training programs, where female employees are excluded and not nominated for participation, except in cases where the delegation does not confer any privileges. Men have greater access to benefits and privileges provided by public sector employment compared to women.

Although there are job descriptions that specify the responsibilities, tasks, and competencies of a specific position, female employees are assigned additional work and tasks that overload them much more than male employees. Assigning additional and secondary tasks to female employees only affects the performance of working women and leads to discrimination in the eligibility of working women for promotion. Secondary tasks are like a “glass ceiling” that does not grant female employees the opportunity to climb the career ladder.

There are no legal obstacles preventing women from assuming higher administrative positions, such as heads of department, especially positions depending on nomination mechanisms. However, the institutions' culture and practices operate subtly and invisibly to prevent women from reaching these positions. Men have greater access to the benefits and privileges available to public sector workers compared to women.

Female employees in the public sector receive less important or secondary training, and these trainings are often limited to the boundaries of the institution they work for. Participation in these courses is imposed by promotion procedures and rules, and it is unknown whether the trainings are designed and determined based on the assessment of administrative needs or if there is a training plan that is defined in the light of a national policy for capacity building. Such courses do not help female employees ascend to higher job levels, nor

do they enable them to acquire high-level experiences and skills that qualify them to compete for leadership positions.

Promotion policies and practices impose many barriers that prevent working women from moving up the career ladder and reaching senior administrative positions. Most of the interviewed female workers face obstacles in their promotion and career progression; many of them did not get promoted despite completing the specified period of time between grades. Getting promoted to higher grades is made even harder, especially to the second and first grades, by the limited job titles within these grades; the only first grade positions are those of "Assistant Director" and "Expert." Institutions and ministries cannot create grades and job titles other than those exclusively specified by the Ministry of Finance. Given these limited degrees, the informal policies of public sector institutions limit the competition for these jobs to male employees.

In addition, the issue of work-life balance is gaining more attention today due to its importance in promoting gender equality at work and its impact on working women's professional development. Female public sector employees suffer from time poverty and struggle to strike a balance between domestic work and paid work outside the home. This is a major obstacle that prevents their career progress and causes them psychological and physical pressure.

The time poverty that working women face is made worse due to the country's weak infrastructure and deteriorating services. Traffic congestion, power outages, unreliable water and sewage networks, and poor health and educational services double the time that women spend outside their homes, in addition to their housework and unpaid care work. All of this is physically, psychologically, and mentally straining for women.

Family responsibilities prevent and hinder working women from making progress in their careers and limit their ability to develop their skills and improve their performance. They also make it difficult for women to compete with men in senior administrative positions. Women can only progress when they are free from family obligations or when they do not have such responsibilities. Poor or non-existent (low-cost) care services provided by the government and the unequal distribution of domestic work between men and women have limited the time that female workers can spend on their professional development.



Therefore, because of their caregiving responsibilities, working women drop many opportunities that could enable them to make important transitions in their careers and double their income. Due to family tasks and obligations, many female employees abstain from assuming administrative responsibilities that could prepare them for higher leadership roles, because these responsibilities require full commitment to work and sometimes additional working hours.

Public sector labour policies in Iraq do not facilitate the work-life balance, and the government does not provide comprehensive services to reduce unpaid care work. For instance, working women have to provide day-care services, care for the elderly, and other caregiving services.

Compared to previous decades, especially in the 1980s, the government's capacity as a service provider has significantly declined due to wars and economic sanctions. Women lost many of the services and facilities that were previously provided by the government and that used to reduce the caregiving burden on the family in general, and on working women in particular, such as transportation routes, high-quality nurseries, and the allocation of lands to public officials to solve the housing crisis. Most of the measures taken by the Iraqi government are focused on leaves, paid or unpaid; however, public sector departments still lack a system of flexible or reduced working hours and other measures that could have a significant impact on women's professional lives.

Cultural legacies and stereotypes place many barriers that hinder working women's professional development and greatly affect women's representation in senior administrative positions. Customs and traditions also impose restrictions that limit women's opportunities for career development and prevent them from acquiring the necessary experience in basic fields to be able to compete for leadership positions at all levels.

Traditional beliefs and ideas that picture women as weak and lacking the required experience and knowledge to qualify them for leadership positions are still prevalent in the public sector and greatly affect working women's professional development.

There are hostile attitudes prevailing in the work environment that picture women as competing with men for their sources of livelihood;

many accuse working women of taking over men's employment opportunities and crowding them out at work, leaving their children at nurseries and abandoning their primary caregiving role.

These cultural attitudes and opinions link women to the private sphere and consider them incapable of assuming responsibilities in working environment; they also believe that leadership is an attribute of males and not females, which explains the discrimination and hostility that working women face when assuming administrative responsibilities.

The patriarchal administrative culture in public sector institutions, and the perception of working women as less efficient and unable to assume higher administrative responsibilities, lead to ignoring women workers' contributions, disregarding their experiences and initiatives, and not considering their suggestions and recommendations for the enhancement of work processes. This stifles the ambition of female workers and weakens their spirit of initiative and innovation.

Barriers related to customs and traditions that have thus far limited women's right to work outside their home and determined the type of professions women were allowed to practice are slightly declining. For example, families have started accepting and allowing their daughters to work in professions that women and girls were not allowed to practice in the past.

Interviewed women stated that this change is due to many factors, most notably the economic dimension, livelihood disruption, and families' need for the additional financial resources provided by working women, after the rise in unemployment rates, inflation, and consumerism.

This study sheds light on the transformations and changes related to women and works in areas with tribal structures that are characterised by a conservative perspective on women's work outside their household and the family's farm.

The shift in perception regarding women's work and the level of tolerance of the traditional cultural system for women going out of the home to work are linked to the conflicts that these regions have witnessed. The ISIS invasion of these areas has become a marker that separates two eras about women and work (before ISIS and after ISIS). It seems that displacement, particularly to Baghdad and Kurdistan, has

left a positive impact on women's empowerment. Customs, traditions, and the related concepts of isolating women and restricting their movement are on the decline. However, these changes alone have not been sufficient to bring about this major shift in the acceptance of women's work in conservative and closed cultural environments. It can be concluded that the harsh living conditions that these areas' residents suffered during their displacement and after returning to their destroyed homes, in addition to the loss of their sources of livelihood, have weakened the influence of customs and traditions related to women's work outside the home and interacting with strangers and forced families to accept the idea of women's economic participation, especially after men lost their sources of livelihood.

Despite the changes in attitudes and trends related to women's work and the professions they are allowed to practice, customs, traditions, and stereotypes still hinder the professional development of public sector female workers. They still impose restrictions on many women, preventing them from attending required training, participating in delegations outside their regions, or working in fields consistent with their academic specialisations, and preventing them from assuming important administrative positions.

This could mean that allowing women to go out of the home to work has not led to the recognition of their right to access resources and opportunities, nor has it marked a real shift in the social values related to women. Rather, it shows that these steps were driven by families' need for additional resources due to economic conditions.

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## REQUIRED INTERVENTIONS

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- Activating the role of the Federal Public Service Council and granting it the powers stipulated in Law No. 4 of 2019, which allow it to plan and supervise the recruitment process based on merit fairly, away from nepotism, favouritism, and partisan affiliation.
- Preventing the politicisation of public sector institutions through plans and strategies for public sector reform, including balanced representation of both genders in senior administrative positions, and implementing legal measures to address the scale of corruption in public sector institutions.
- Adopting codes of conduct, codes of honour, and work ethics within government institutions which define a set of behaviours that would prevent the misuse of positions in hiring, promotions, and nominations. This would also limit one of the widespread forms of corruption, which is offering favours to people close to the director in delegations, privileges, and promotions, and would ensure accountability and impose penalties on violators.
- Forming independent higher committees to follow up on career advancement, to ensure women's professional development and their advancement in senior positions. Considering complaints submitted about the eligibility of qualified female employees to hold administrative positions according to their entitlements and the reasons and barriers for delaying their promotion. Establishing an accountability system for the reasons preventing qualified women from reaching leadership positions.
- Adopting objective criteria that are precisely defined for selecting candidates for higher and special job grades, based on competence, merits, qualifications, and points to make appointments, instead of relying on partisan, sectarian, and ethnic affiliations and gender-based biases. Preventing the parties dominating the ministries from selecting their candidates.
- Making legislative amendments to the Civil Service Law, which stipulates that "the promotion of employees shall be based on their competence and period of service." However, the text does not indicate how to determine "competence." This is a legal

loophole that must be addressed so as not to leave room for nepotism and partisan affiliations to interfere in determining the person's eligibility to get nominated to an administrative position.<sup>1</sup>

- Developing an accountability mechanism that measures the level of satisfaction of male and female employees regarding the performance of the public sector institutions and the prevailing culture in these institutions. This mechanism should also encourage female employees to demand accountability for violations and transgressions.
- Building the capacities of women's empowerment units in public sector departments and institutions to act as watchdogs for discrimination based on gender, favouritism, and nepotism, which prevents female employees from accessing the necessary training, prevents their nomination to important committees within their institutions, hinders their promotion or access to higher administrative positions, or prevents them from being assigned technical tasks that align with their academic specialisations and qualifications. Accepting complaints from female employees to look into any discriminatory behaviour or violence against female workers in public sector institutions.
- Developing mechanisms, systems, and procedures in the workplace that prevent sexual harassment and ensure that perpetrators do not evade punishment. Developing a reporting mechanism on sexual harassment in the workplace. Firmly and confidentially handling complaints of sexual harassment. Adopting policies and procedures that allow female workers to report sexual harassment and request compensation.
- Ending all restrictions imposed on women's work in labour laws and adopting specific laws that guarantee a safe environment in the workplace, in addition to legal protections against sexual harassment in transportation, education, and public places. These are among the main reasons that hinder women's economic participation, prevent many women from pursuing their studies, and push many women to leave work.
- Launching a large campaign across social media platforms calling for a safe work environment free of violence and harassment; seeking to activate the accountability system against perpetrators; ending impunity and encouraging victims to report harassment in the workplace.

- Conducting surveys and studies to collect data about the risks that women face in the workplace which threaten their safety and increase their possible exposure to harassment. Evaluating the measures taken to protect women in the workplace and monitoring violence and harassment rates in the workplace.
- Establishing a maternity protection system at work that includes, in addition to the applicable maternity leave in public sector institutions, flexible working hours, additional breaks, and an officially recognised and authorised breastfeeding break. This system should also guarantee pregnant women's right to return to their job after their leave.
- Amending training course programs according to a national plan for training and developing job cadres based on training needs and ensuring that women acquire the necessary experience qualifying them to compete for leadership positions at all levels.
- Offering non-traditional training and educational programs that guarantee female workers' access to non-traditional vocational training and allow them to use information technology with a high degree of efficiency in order to eliminate gender stereotypes at work.
- The government should focus in the next phase on the care economy and develop care work as a field that can provide job opportunities for many women. On the one hand, it should work on reducing the burden of unpaid care work, which is solely the responsibility of women, and support women's equal opportunities at work on the other hand.
- Taking measures to facilitate the work-life balance, including flexible work arrangements such as working from home several days a week, the option to work part-time, or specifying and regulating the number of working hours per week that women should spend at the office, regardless of what time she arrives and leaves work. Removing the fingerprint system from departments as it is inconsistent with working women's family responsibilities, and adopting family-friendly systems in a way that allows working women to focus on their work and develop their abilities.
- Establishing daycare centres that provide high-quality services for children and take care of children after school at all institutions and ministries. Departments in which the number of children is less than the minimum required to establish these

facilities in the workplace should be allowed to have their children enrolled in other daycares.<sup>2</sup>

- Guaranteeing balanced gender representation in bodies, committees, trainings, and delegations.
- Modifying trends and shifting positions to eliminate stereotypes by developing a comprehensive strategy that includes training programs, workshops, seminars, discussions, and awareness campaigns through various media platforms. Supervising school curricula and the educational system is crucial to make this desired cultural change in the lives of women and their abilities and to encouraging people to stop viewing leadership as an exclusive male trait.
- Assigning field tasks and responsibilities to women and ensuring equal representation of both genders in these jobs to break gender stereotypes at work.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Although women's economic participation in Iraq has declined, most working women are employed in the public sector. However, women working in the public sector face many obstacles and challenges, as stereotypes about women's roles still limit their access to leadership positions in government institutions.

Men still dominate senior positions in Iraq. Women's work in Iraq is linked to the gender stereotyping of professions, whereby female workers work in specific fields and are excluded from others. This explains why women are excluded from certain activities and how their work is linked to other activities that are often classified as specific to them. All of this is due to an ideology that works to undermine women's status. These beliefs are widespread in social trends and values since women's roles are classified as less valuable than men's.<sup>3</sup>

Housework and childcare responsibilities hinder women's career development, as working women bear the double burden of professional and domestic work at the same time. They have to carry out all caregiving activities in addition to their job outside of the household.

Female public sector workers face major obstacles and challenges that prevent them from reaching senior administrative positions in government institutions. The public sector is where the majority of women work, and, for some of them, it might be the only space offering job opportunities. However, instead of constituting a driving force for achieving development goals related to gender equality, the public sector has become a patriarchal institution that fosters discrimination and widens gender disparities, since senior administrative positions are monopolised by men.<sup>4</sup>



The absence of women in senior administrative positions leads to the absence of a female vision in plans and decision-making processes, and it reduces the chances of achieving gender equality and balance.

Women's presence in these positions is very important in guiding plans and policies and creating a work environment that responds to women's conditions and needs.

This study focuses on the challenges and obstacles facing working women's access to decision-making and senior administrative positions. Women's participation in the workforce cannot be considered a sufficient indicator of women's contribution to government work if it does not involve real and equal participation in occupying senior administrative positions.

The study relies on multiple methodological instruments. First, a desk review was conducted on reports, documents, surveys, and previous literature related to women and labour, based on which various challenges facing working women were identified. Data and statistics from public institutions reflecting women's status in the workforce were also consulted. The study also relied on interviews as a main tool to collect in-depth data and information about the obstacles and challenges facing female public sector workers, emphasising women's experiences and expertise. Twenty-five interviews were conducted with female employees of different ages who have served for 3 to 35 years in different government institutions in Baghdad, Karbala, Diyala, Anbar, Dhi Qar, and Basra.

In order to complete this information and access quantitative data for generalised findings, the study used a sample social survey. The survey sample consisted of 250 female employees from various government departments distributed across several governorates in Iraq.

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## OBJECTIVES

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- Determining the organisational factors related to the institution's policies and organisational practices and their impact on female employees' professional development in government agencies;
- Identifying social and cultural factors and explaining how beliefs, traditions, stereotypes, gender-related bias, and stereotypical perceptions affect female public sector workers and hinder their access to senior administrative positions;
- Identifying family factors and to which extent unpaid care work, domestic work, and time poverty affect the performance and career development of female public sector workers;
- Shedding light on gender-based discrimination in public jobs;
- Identifying the types of violence against women that female government employees endure;
- Identifying care policies and measures taken to protect female public sector workers;
- Offering practical recommendations to guide government policies and plans to adequately meet the needs of women working in the government sector and reduce obstacles that hinder their career progression; and
- Providing a powerful tool for organisations to lead advocacy campaigns and implement programs and activities on the priority issues identified in the study.

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## METHODOLOGY

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This is an analytical and descriptive study that relies on cross-cutting approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Individual interviews were conducted to obtain information deemed helpful in

understanding women's viewpoints, experiences, and awareness of the challenges they face.

The sample social survey method was also used to gather data that can be classified and interpreted and that reflects the opinions of a large number of women, which makes the results reliable and generalisable.

Qualitative and quantitative material was collected in successive stages; individual interviews were first conducted prior to the survey.

The field study was conducted in June-July 2023.

The work group consisted of a primary female researcher, a female research assistant, and a statistical analyst.

### **Study tools and sources of information**

*Desk Review:* A desk review was conducted before and during the study in order to obtain secondary data and information to draft the interview questions, the survey form, and the proposed answers.

The review included reports, documents, and policies issued by international organisations and bodies on women and labour, in addition to data and statistics issued by official bodies that reflect women's status in the workforce. The information and data collected from this review were included in the study's structure.

*In-depth Interviews:* To obtain qualitative and quantitative data, the study relied on in-depth individual interviews as they are flexible and allow access to detailed information that helps form a better understanding of the issue. These interviews and the data they produce are objective and not affected by personal opinions. The interviews targeted 25 female employees occupying various administrative positions in various government institutions.

An interview guide for working women was developed, which included some key questions and sub-questions aiming to motivate the interviewees to give detailed answers. The questions tackled the most significant problems facing female public sector workers, the obstacles and challenges facing their professional advancement, access to training, and aspects of gender-based discrimination, in addition to the

violence and sexual harassment to which they are exposed in the workplace and the reporting behaviour.

*Table (1): Female employees participating in the interviews, distributed according to areas of study and job description.*

No	Governorate	Ministry or Sector	Job Title
1	Baghdad	Ministry of Education	Secondary school teacher affiliated with a public department
2	Kirkuk	Not mentioned	Retired head of department
3	Baghdad	Ministry of Health / Yarmouk	Employee
4	Baghdad	Ministry of Youth and Sports	Employee
5	Baghdad	Municipal Health Sector/Ministry of Health	Administrative employee
6	Basra	Ministry of Education	Teacher
7	Basra	Ministry of Electricity	Security clearance employee
8	Baghdad	Ministry of Planning - National Center for Training and Development	Consultant
9	Baghdad	Ministry of Culture / Department of Books and Documents	Employee – Data entry
10	Nasiriyah	Ministry of Agriculture	Senior Engineer

11	Baghdad	National Security Advisory	
12	Anbar	Ministry of Electricity	Employee
13	Baghdad	Baghdad Governorate	Head of division
14	Diyala	Ministry of Electricity	Electrical engineer
15	Baghdad	National Security Advisory	Researcher
16	Baghdad	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	Senior director
17	Baghdad	Ministry of Industry, Industrial Research and Development Authority	Employee
18	Diyala	Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities, and Public Works	Director
19	Anbar - Hit	Ministry of Education	Teacher
20	Anbar - Ramadi	Higher Education - University of Anbar	Assistant teacher
21	Maysan	Higher Education - University of Maysan	University lecturer
22	Nineveh	Ministry of Education	Educational adviser
23	Anbar - Ramadi	Ministry of Education - University of Anbar	Teacher – Assistant teacher
24	Baghdad	Ministry of Defense	
25	Baghdad	Ministry of Education / Science and Technology	Irrigation engineer

### **Sample social survey**

The survey relied on a questionnaire that was developed in light of the study's objectives and based on the outcome of the interviews conducted with working women and previous literature. The questionnaire included six basic axes. The first axis presents the respondents' demographic data; the second examines female workers' career paths; the third addresses economic conditions; the fourth tackles access to training and its efficiency; and the fifth highlights the most significant discrimination acts in public jobs. The sixth axis attempts to reveal the difficulties facing working women in balancing between their professional life and family responsibilities, the amount of time they spend on care work daily, and the assistance they receive. The seventh axis includes the factors affecting women's professional development and preventing them from reaching administrative and senior positions; these are classified into organisational factors, cultural factors, and family factors. Finally, the last axis addresses violence in the workplace.

The questionnaire form was redesigned and re-coded electronically. A link was also established and connected to a Google account email through which the data of filled forms was collected. This guarantees access to data and responses from all governorates. A database was also designed on "Porsline," an electronic program that ensures the database is filled out electronically. The electronic form was tested to ensure that it could achieve the purpose for which it was designed. The quantitative data was processed, analysed, and combined with the results of the qualitative study and the information collected during the interviews.

### **Sample**

The survey sample consisted of 250 female employees from government institutions and departments in different Iraqi governorates. The participants received the survey and filled out the forms either through direct contact or through indirect contact by sending the form electronically through snowball sampling, and

through networking activities that the researcher and the researcher's assistant conducted in the governorates. Each participant was asked to send the questionnaire link to a group of female employees that they know and who are eligible to be part of the sample. They were encouraged to answer and participate in the survey and to promote it among their families, acquaintances, and friends in the same governorate. Each respondent asked the new participant to promote the survey and invite other female employees in the governorate where she lives to participate. This ensured that the sample grew without biases like a snowball. Over two weeks, the total number of participants in the qualitative and quantitative study sample reached 275 female employees from different governorates working in various state institutions.

*Table (2): Total number of interview and survey participants*

Number of interview and survey participants	
25	Total number of individual interviews
250	Total number of survey samples
275	Total

### **Geographic scope**

The sample was distributed according to governorates: 92 participants from Baghdad, 38 participants from Anbar, 26 participants from Diyala, 14 participants from Babylon, and 14 from Dhi Qar. The number of participants varied in other governorates, according to the table below.

*Table (3): Distribution of the study sample according to the governorates included in the study.*

Number of questionnaires by governorate		
Basra	13	5.2%

Al-Qadisiyyah	2	0.8%
Al-Muthanna	7	2.8%
Najaf	4	1.6%
Anbar	38	15.2%
Babylon	14	5.6%
Baghdad	92	36.8%
Diyala	26	10.4%
Dhi Qar	14	5.6%
Saladin	4	1.6%
Karbala	9	3.6%
Kirkuk	5	2.0%
Maysan	8	3.2%
Nineveh	10	4.0%
Wasit	4	1.6%

*Table (4): Distribution of the study sample according to the ministries included in the study.*

Number of questionnaires by ministries		
Other	26	10.4%
Entity not affiliated with a ministry	23	9.2%
Anbar	3	1.2%
Ministry of Communications	1	0.4%
Ministry of Planning	7	2.8%
Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities, and Public Works	9	3.6%
Ministry of Education	93	37.2%



Ministry of Culture	7	2.8%
Ministry of Agriculture	14	5.6%
Ministry of Youth and Sports	9	3.6%
Ministry of Health	21	8.4%
Ministry of Industry and Minerals	1	0.4%
Ministry of Justice	3	1.2%
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs	4	1.6%
Ministry of Electricity	15	6.0%
Ministry of Finance	3	1.2%
Ministry of Oil	9	3.6%
Ministry of Transportation	1	0.4%
Ministry of Human Rights	1	0.4%

## OVERVIEW: PUBLIC SECTOR IN IRAQ

Iraq's economic structure depends on the public sector, which is the main driver of employment and hiring. It offers attractive job opportunities for job seekers as it guarantees permanent employment with satisfactory salaries. This made job seekers prefer the public sector because of its wages, benefits, insurance, and guarantees, as well as its capacity to accommodate approximately 39% of the total workforce, i.e. slightly less than half of the total workforce.<sup>5</sup>

The public sector refers to the economic units that produce goods and services and are owned by the state, regardless of the nature of this ownership and the organisational status of the economic units, i.e. government departments, bodies, institutions, or public companies.<sup>6</sup>

The public sector grew in Iraq during the 1960s and dominated many economic sectors, such as foreign trade, the financial and banking system, the manufacturing sector, and services. This was due to

nationalisation policies and the increase in oil revenues in the early 1970s. A strategy of intensive government intervention in economic activities was adopted to extend influence over the state's economic sectors, reflected by the development of central economic plans that formed the general framework for state intervention.<sup>7</sup> This helped achieve a major leap in the Iraqi economy and had a clear role in creating and developing scientific and technical competencies, in addition to administrative and technical skills.

However, the public sector's capacity declined significantly during the 1990s, following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the resulting war and economic sanctions that lasted for nearly 13 years. Industries in the public sector almost came to a complete halt, public spending was reduced, and the state's capacities as a service provider were seriously eroded. Employment opportunities in the public sector thus decreased after the financial inflation resulting from economic sanctions reduced employees' salaries to the equivalent of USD 2.5 per month.

The public sector witnessed significant expansion and growth after the U.S. occupation in April 2003 and the lifting of the international embargo. The number of ministries in the federal government increased from 23 ministries to 27 during the interim government mandate and then to 37 ministries in 2007.<sup>8</sup> This sector also witnessed decisions (by the Coalition Provisional Authority) aimed at bringing about changes in Iraqi economic policy to transform the economic system into a free-market economy system.<sup>9</sup>

The public sector's expansion over the past twenty years included two trends. The first was a triple increase in the total number of employees in the public sector, as the number of employees in the sector in 2003 was estimated at 1.2 million, before reaching its peak in 2015, when this number reached 3 million. The second trend was an increase in employees' average salaries and allowances.<sup>10</sup> This expansion of the public sector was not coupled with any increase or improvement in productivity, which may explain the poor services provided by the public sector.

However, the deep and long-term impact on this sector and its institutions resulted from what is called the "quota system" and the

consensual arrangements according to which the sectors managed by ministries and state institutions were divided and their management affairs were entrusted to competing political parties and forces. There were also attempts to impose ethnic and sectarian representation in all state institutions through the unofficial quota system. Institutions have become party fiefdoms over which the main political actors compete. This system led to the creation of new jobs, which caused a massive expansion in the public sector, fully supported by oil revenues. The public sector continued increasing the number of employees. This was not limited to employees with permanent salaries but also included hundreds of thousands of contractors and daily wage workers.<sup>11</sup>

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## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: PUBLIC SECTOR IN IRAQ**

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Women represented a standby labour force, and the state decided when women could join or leave the labour market, in light of the political system's interests. Before the 1970s, women were discouraged from entering the labour market, and their participation in the labour force, especially in the public sector, was very low. This was due to high incomes and the rapid changes in living standards under the rentier state, in addition to the high oil prices, which allowed a small number of workers to support a large group of individuals. As a result, there was no need to employ women, noting that the husband was considered the sole breadwinner in the family, especially within the cultural environment at the time which did not encourage women to work.<sup>12</sup>

Women's participation in the labour market to obtain wages by working for government departments and institutions was linked to the growth of the service sector, which facilitated the creation of new jobs for women. The rise of girls' education levels and their university enrolment rates encouraged women's entry into the labour market to work in their fields of expertise and increase their employment opportunities while boosting their educational qualifications. The state-supported women's employment in the development processes that occurred during the war, as it paved the way for women to engage in the labour market and

fill the void left by men heading to war with Iran during the 1980s. At the time, the percentage of women among those earning an income was 31.4%, compared to only 18% in 1977.<sup>13</sup>

After the war ended, and once men returned, the state adopted a different policy, excluding women and encouraging them to return to their households and practice their reproductive role. There was a clear trend restricting women's competition with men in obtaining jobs, which was reflected in the speeches that the president used to deliver. These speeches stressed that women's patriotic mission was to leave opportunities for men at work and return to their sacred duty as mothers.<sup>14</sup>

Economic sanctions contributed to the return of many working women to their households to perform their traditional roles due to the low incomes and the deteriorating value of wages and the lack of support systems funded by the state, including kindergartens and nurseries. All of this was due to reduced public spending and less employment opportunities for women, because all industries in the public and private sectors were affected, including simple industries such as sewing and food, which used to employ large numbers of working women with low levels of education. The number of female job seekers registered in employment offices decreased after 1990, and they did not exceed 3.5% in 1998. 6% of women owned industrial projects in 1992; however, that number decreased to 3% of after 1995.<sup>15</sup>

Women tend to work in the government sector, considering it is a protected sector that provides a safe work environment for women and offers some guarantees such as retirement and maternity leaves, which encourages traditional families to allow their women to work. The Human Development Report for the year 2000 revealed that 79.2% of the total female workforce worked in the public sector in 1999, compared to 14.3% working in the private sector.<sup>16</sup>

Participation in the labour market at the current stage reflects a clear disparity between women and men, as the percentage of paid female workers does not exceed 11.6%,<sup>17</sup> the lowest in the world. The low percentage of working women was linked to the lack of real

opportunities and their deprivation of earning wages from their work in the agricultural sector and the informal sector.<sup>18</sup>

A study conducted by researchers Nabil Jaafar Abdul Rida and Marwa Abdul Rahim on the participation of Iraqi women in the labour market examines the reasons behind the decline and disparity between men and women in economic participation rates. It shows that they are due to discrimination in the labour market which leads to a stressful work environment that is not responsive to women's needs, such as the lack of a nursery at the work site, not to mention the laws that encourage women to leave work and return to their private sphere.<sup>19</sup> The other factor was related to the lack of experience and skills required for women in the labour market. However, this is not a valid reason, as the number of male workers who hold only a primary school certificate or are uneducated is double the number of women who do not hold an academic degree. According to a recent report published by UNICEF, 55% of working men have not completed primary education, compared to 1.2% of working women.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the reasons behind the decline of women's participation in the labour market cannot be attributed to education and qualification since the labour market accepts uneducated men.

Unemployment among women is higher than in men (22.2% for women compared to 8.05% for men).<sup>21</sup> The gap is wider among the youth, as the youth unemployment rate reached 19.2% for men and 43.8% for women.<sup>22</sup> Due to lower public employment, the politicisation of the public sector, and the influence of party affiliations in light of the division of ministries based on the quota system, it has become difficult for girls to obtain job opportunities unless they are close to the political party that runs the ministry or the institution. The economic situation, fragmentation, and political instability in Iraq have also weakened the private sector and made it incapable of employing women. The rate of female private sector workers decreased from 32% in 2012 to 29% in 2014.<sup>23</sup>

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## **GLASS CEILINGS: WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS**

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The percentage of women's participation in leadership positions remarkably increased after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In fact, the number of women in senior administrative positions and decision-making roles increased from 22 women before 2003 to 342 in 2006, including director-general, assistant director, advisor, inspector-general, and deputy minister.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, stereotypes related to women's roles still have a massive impact on women occupying these positions in legislative, political, and executive institutions. Furthermore, men still dominate senior positions in Iraq by a large margin. According to the Human Development Report, the percentage of women's participation in 2015 in senior administrative positions at the 'director' level reached 9.69%, while at the 'deputy minister' level it reached 2.56%, whereas the number of women in ministerial positions decreased from 6 female ministers in 2004 to two female ministers in 2016.

The 2018 "Gender Reality in Ministries and State Institutions in Iraq" report indicates significant disparities between the numbers of women and men in leadership roles in most ministries. According to the report, the number of men in the positions of director-general and assistant director-general was 923, compared to 128 for women.

The Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Iraq included the highest number of women in senior administrative position. However, the number of men in senior positions within these sectors was twice the number of women; for every 33 men, there are 12 women in senior administrative positions.<sup>25</sup> Women are not represented in senior administrative positions in the Ministries of Health and Interior.

Meanwhile, the percentage of female school principals did not exceed 30%, compared to 70% male principals in the Ministry of Education, where women represent more than two-thirds of the number of employees (71.3% female teachers compared to 28.7% male teachers).<sup>26</sup>

The Labour Force Survey in Iraq also showed that 17.5% of women hold administrative positions, compared to 82.5% of men. There are 14.5% of women working as administrative and commercial directors, compared to 85.5% of men. Furthermore, 29.2% of women work as production and service directors, compared to 70.8% of men.<sup>27</sup>

The chances of women accessing decision-making positions in state institutions and the public sector are higher than in private sector institutions and companies, as Iraq ranks the third lowest among the 139 countries in the proportion of companies that assign women the position of director-general, with only 2%. Iraq ranks the fifth lowest among 139 countries in the proportion of companies in which women share ownership (less than 7%). For every company in which women share ownership in Iraq, there are three similar companies in the Middle East and seven in high-income countries, which clearly prevents women from contributing to decision-making and planning for the future. It also reduces the chances of achieving gender balance in public and private institutions.<sup>28</sup>

The low percentage of women in senior administrative positions is a major indicator of the invisible glass ceilings that keep women at a certain professional level that they cannot exceed and hinder their professional advancement.

The glass ceiling is a major concept in modern management and refers to an invisible and systemic barrier that limits the career advancement of women and minorities in institutions and organisations, preventing them from rising to senior positions and depriving the organisation of their experiences and potential, which are often distinguished.<sup>29</sup>

The glass ceiling also refers to a set of artificial barriers based on biased attitudes that prevent qualified individuals from advancing to senior administrative positions within their organisations.<sup>30</sup> It is an invisible barrier that cannot be easily defined because it does not exist in the organisation's official policies and legislation, and it is not linked to competence and ability. However, it prevents women from reaching senior leadership positions, regardless of their qualifications, abilities, and competence.<sup>31</sup>

Glass ceilings are a global phenomenon that women suffer from in both developed and developing countries, and they constitute one of the main reasons that prevent women from reaching the top of the career pyramid.<sup>32</sup>

Recent studies have revealed that 81% of women qualified to undertake senior leadership positions face serious barriers and invisible obstacles known as the glass ceiling and that breaching this ceiling is still far-fetched.<sup>33</sup>

All definitions converge on the fact that there are no objective reasons that prevent women from accessing positions and that this is due to biased ideas and impressions about women's management abilities and the bias of the organisation's structures in favour of men.<sup>34</sup>

The glass ceiling, as a series of barriers and obstacles preventing women from assuming senior administrative positions, is associated with a set of factors, including administrative obstacles related to the organisation's policies, cultural restrictions, and family care responsibilities that hinder the professional development of female workers. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) identified the factors contributing to the existence of glass ceilings as obstacles that limit women's access to senior positions in management and business, financing networks, cultural stereotypes, insufficient self-development, biased legislation against women, work responsibilities, family care, and patriarchal corporate structures.<sup>35</sup> Other studies considered the lack of objectivity in promotion policies, discriminatory treatment between men and women within the organisation, and total disregard for the employee's distinctive characteristics as a measure of the glass ceiling.<sup>36</sup>

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## **FIELD STUDY RESULTS**

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### **1. Functional and administrative (organisational) challenges**

These refer to the difficulties associated with the work environment itself which female employees face in terms of the institution's policies



and organisational practices, and which affect the development of female employees and hinder their access to senior leadership positions. These include equality at work, non-discrimination, unfair management and promotion practices, an environment that isolates and excludes women, lack of training and qualifications, and weak support by senior management.

### **1.1. Inequality and discrimination in the work environment/gender equality and non-discrimination**

The Labour Law in force in Iraq and the Civil Service Law affirmed the principle of equality. They include a set of provisions that guarantee non-discrimination between women and men, whether in employment, training, or working conditions.<sup>37</sup>

All female participants in the study agreed that Iraqi law is fair and treats male and female workers equally. Additionally, it includes provisions in favour of women, namely, maternity leaves. However, they believe that the laws are not fully enforced and that discrimination in public sector institutions occurs at the level of practice, not law.

It is difficult for female workers to identify aspects of discrimination in the laws regulating their work, which may be direct, evident, and explicit, or indirect and implicit.

Although laws and legislation emphasise the principle of equality, they nevertheless encompass references and articles that could result in indirect discrimination against working women. For instance, based on the “Gender Equality in Public Jobs” report, neutrality and equality in law can produce inequality and sometimes disadvantage women, as they do not take into account biological differences, stereotypes, and biases against women. According to studies, many neutral laws end up being discriminatory as they do not take into account women’s needs, privacy, and biology,<sup>38</sup> a phenomenon referred to as indirect discrimination. When the law is applied to everyone without considering its disproportionate and uneven impact on men and women, it can lead to discrimination.

The issue of unequal gender opportunities is highlighted by the law prohibiting women from working in arduous labour and night work, which is part of the protective measures that the law provides for working women. But, on the other hand, this prevents many women who need to work from practicing professions in several sectors unless they do so without legal protection. Examples include working in the informal economy and engaging in economic units and businesses that lack internal protection and resilience,<sup>39</sup> such as precarious work, including partial, temporary, or seasonal work, compared to fixed, full-time work. These jobs are characterised by low wages, lack of social protection and guarantees, and limited labour rights.

Exempting and preventing women from night work reflects the stereotypical idea that women are a vulnerable group in need of protection from night and dangerous work.<sup>40</sup>

In addition, maternity leave is granted to women and not to men (parental leave), which prevents men from caring for children equally with women.

As for the reality of discrimination and inequality in the public sector from the perspective of female workers, the results of the study have shown that gender discrimination represents one of the major gaps in the public sector in Iraq. More than half of the women surveyed confirmed the existence of discrimination in enjoying job privileges and in the treatment between female and male employees, with advantages often favouring men.

*Table (5): Distribution of the sample of female workers based on their answers regarding discrimination between men and women at work.*

<b>Do you think there is discrimination and inequality among women and men at work?</b>		
There is no discrimination	42%	106
Yes	32%	80
Yes, to a large extent	26%	64

42% of the sampled female employees indicated that there is no discrimination in the workplace between women and men. By contrast, 58% (144 female employees) noted that there is discrimination, either to a large extent (26%) or to a clear extent (32%).

**Discrimination and inequality in public sector jobs from the perspective of female workers**

The survey results showed that one of the main aspects of discrimination is the inequality between women and men in the membership of major committees. 84% (highest percentage) of the 144 female respondents who reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace noted that there is discrimination in favour of men in the membership in major committees, and 82% agreed that there is discrimination in favour of male employees in delegations, whether to a large or moderate extent. Meanwhile, 72% reported discrimination in access to major administrative positions, and 71% confirmed that there is discrimination in favour of men in access to training and skills.

The percentage of female workers who believe that there is discrimination between male and female employees in incentives and compensation was 52.8%. Further, half of the female workers who believe there is discrimination (51%) agreed that there is inequality in assigning major and marginal jobs between women and men. 41% of the surveyed female workers who believe that there is discrimination between men and women think there is inequality in access to promotion and career advancement in favour of men.

*Table (6): Distribution of the surveyed women who believe that there is discrimination between men and women at work, distributed according to areas of discrimination in public sector jobs.*

**If you believe that there is discrimination and inequality, what are the main areas in which you witness discrimination and inequality between men and women at work?**

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
Discrimination in favour of men in membership of major committees	45.8%	66	38.2%	55	9.0%	13	6.9%	10
Discrimination in favour of men in recruitment	50.7%	73	31.3%	45	11.1%	16	6.9%	10
Discrimination in favour of men in promotion and career advancement	23.6%	34	18.1%	26	24.3%	35	34.0%	49
Discrimination in favour of men in incentives and compensation	27.1%	39	25.7%	37	22.2%	32	25.0%	36
Discrimination in favour of men in training and skill acquisition	39.6%	57	31.3%	45	16.0%	23	13.2%	19
Discrimination in attribution of major roles to men and marginal roles to women	25.0%	36	25.7%	37	24.3%	35	25.0%	36
Discrimination in accessing senior administrative positions	42.4%	61	29.2%	42	20.8%	30	7.6%	11

### Employment discrimination

The Labour Law stipulates equality in employment and holding positions, stating that work is a right for everyone without discrimination, and prohibiting any action that may violate this principle.<sup>41</sup> However, workforce data and the numbers of males compared to females reflect discriminatory and male-biased employment policies in the public sector. This means that discrimination in the public sector begins and occurs at the level of the recruitment process itself. The percentage of female employees in the public sector reached 27.7% of total employees, compared to 72.2% of male employees.<sup>42</sup>

Employment rates for working-age men are 48 times higher than women's employment rates, according to a UNICEF report.<sup>43</sup> There are large disparities between the number of women and men, as the number of male employees in ministries and entities not affiliated with a ministry in 2014 was almost double the number of women: 950,932 compared to 569,522.<sup>44</sup> Women's job opportunities in the public sector are decreasing, especially after the government set the percentage of appointments at 25% for females, compared to 75% in 2011.<sup>45</sup>

### **Gender pay gap**

The majority of interviewed women working in the public sector agreed that there is no discrimination in wages between women and men, and that the Labour Law explicitly and clearly stipulates equal pay, which is determined according to the job grade scale, as all workers, whether male or female, receive equal pay based on their job grade.

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*"Everyone is equal in the public sector, because the law does not discriminate in wages, and the job grades on which the salary depends are equal." -  
C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in  
Baghdad*

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Although Iraqi law ensures equal pay for work of equal quality and quantity performed under similar conditions, statistics related to wages in Iraq have revealed significant biases in favour of men in wages.

According to a study conducted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the value of wages earned by women is lower than that of men. While men who have not completed primary education receive 60 million Iraqi dinars over the course of their lives, women with primary education receive 32 million dinars.<sup>46</sup>

Data from the Central Statistical Organisation, based on the percentage of women in the economically active population, the percentage of men in the active population, and the percentage of both men and women together, shows that there is a large gap between the earned income of

women and men, as the annually earned income for women reached \$7,641 compared to \$16,028 for men.<sup>47</sup> This gender pay gap generally results from regulations, laws, and employment practices and leads to a disparity in the income generated by public jobs.

One of the main legal gaps is the fiscal system in Iraq, which grants married employed men tax benefits and exemptions that are not granted to working women, based on the idea that the man is the head and breadwinner of the household, while the woman is not obligated to do so, despite the fact that several women employees support their families<sup>48</sup> and that the percentage of working women who alone are providing for their family in this survey reached 37%. Therefore, these exemptions contradict the principle of equal pay.

On the other hand, the equal pay stipulated in the Labour Law is relative and not absolute, as the law ensures equality when working conditions are equal and similar. Such a condition cannot be achieved, due to employment practices that isolate women in clerical and administrative professions, while there are higher numbers of men working in production and field professions and leadership positions that are characterised by relatively higher wages. There is a difference in the nature of the professions practiced by both men and women,<sup>49</sup> which is bound to result in disparities and discrimination in wages.

The interviews confirmed that it is very difficult to achieve equality between male and female employees in terms of working conditions and their job titles and actual duties.

One of the female administrative officials in the Electricity Directorate confirms that male and female employees receive equal wages, bonuses, and incentives, but only men undertake some tasks, such as collection.<sup>50</sup>

Wage discrimination also occurs when men and women perform different jobs, but of equal value, and receive different wages. Discrimination here results from work evaluation and job classification systems.<sup>51</sup>

One of the major issues that must be monitored is that equal pay does not mean and is not limited to the basic salary or the minimum wage.

According to international labour standards, it should also include all additional benefits and compensation resulting from the worker's employment, paid by the state or the employer, such as marital allowances, travel allowances, and compensation.<sup>52</sup>

### **Equal compensation and incentives**

The answers of the surveyed working women differed regarding compensation and incentives depending on the nature of the institutions in which they work. A number of interviewees noted that their departments do not have incentives and compensation systems and that such systems have ended since 2015 due to government austerity policies.

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*"Incentives and compensation are unavailable. We work overtime but we are not compensated." - M.A.,  
an electrical engineer working at the Diyala Electricity  
Directorate*

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Receiving compensation within some institutions depends on the efforts of department directors and their ability to obtain compensation for their employees. In some institutions, compensation and incentives are distributed equally among male and female employees.

Gender discrimination is evident in productive compensation for work performed by men more than by women and in field work that is usually assigned to men, due to cultural trends that define the capabilities that women can acquire and the types of professions in which they can work.

The interviews confirmed that incentives and compensation are usually controlled by the technical departments, especially in institutions that depend on these departments to perform their tasks and provide their services, such as electricity departments. Men usually work in these departments, while women work in the administrative departments.

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*“The technical departments tend to control financial compensation and letters of acknowledgment. They are prioritised because they are often in charge, and the majority of their employees are certainly men. As for the administrative departments, they rarely receive such compensation.” - S.L., an employee at the Najibiya power station in the Basra Governorate*

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Technical departments are now accepting a number of women following the expansion in employment and appointments in public sector institutions in early 2023, which forced these institutions to hire female engineers and graduates of technical colleges in technical departments.<sup>53</sup>

### **Overtime hours**

Discrimination in wages is more evident in overtime hours. This system is applied within several institutions, but female employees rarely benefit from it, and many of them do not know how to access overtime hours or how and to whom such compensation is disbursed. Other female workers confirmed that more than 90% of the overtime hours in their departments are assigned to men, not women, even in cases where women are willing to work overtime.

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*“Financial benefits are obtained either through assuming positions or working overtime. Compensation for overtime hours is paid in our departments, but not to women, noting that there are women who work or do not mind working overtime. However, overtime hours are assigned to those close to the director-general, to relatives, and political party members.” - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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While it is true that the ability of female workers to work overtime is limited due to family responsibilities, even women who can work



overtime have very limited access to these hours in Iraq. According to studies, long working hours are generally seen as a masculine model of work and a symbol of full commitment to the organisation, even if this is not associated with productivity and efficiency.<sup>54</sup>

### **Discrimination in delegations**

Another aspect of discrimination highlighted by the study is the bias in favour of men in delegations and important training, as female workers in government institutions confirmed that women are completely excluded from key delegations, especially if they are outside the governorate or the country, as female employees are excluded and not nominated to participate, except in cases where the employee is not entitled to any privileges or benefits, for example if the delegation destination is on the outskirts of the governorate, or if there are no financial allocations, which requires the employee to bear the costs of transportation and delegation.

A female teacher at Anbar University confirms that female employees are sometimes included in delegations that lack financial allocations, without even obtaining their approval.

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*"I was assigned to participate in a delegation to the University of Al-Qadisiyah, which none of the men wanted at all, and the reason is that they had to personally bear the costs. If there had been financial allocations and benefits from the ministry or if the destination was Erbil or Amman (where some entertainment would be available), such a delegation would be directly assigned to men. Women are nominated for delegations that have no allocations. They named me and I didn't even know about it." - F.H., a teacher at Anbar University*

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Delegations are one of the key benefits and privileges in professional settings, as remuneration is allocated to the employee for each day, in

addition to other benefits such as travel, visiting new places, and improving experiences and skills.

The interviews confirm that foreign delegations are monopolised by men because they entail many privileges and are often allocated to those close to the directors and officials. In most cases, men and women have limited opportunities to participate in delegations, as the nomination criteria are usually based on nepotism and personal relationships and are limited to the director's close circle, whether men or women. The nomination for delegations is based on unannounced arrangements that lack transparency. In some cases, participants from outside the organisation are nominated, even though employee delegations are part of the organisation's plan and budget. The organisation may not benefit from the outputs of these programs if the delegates, or a number of them, are not employees.

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*"Unknown people from a certain department are sometimes nominated in delegations because they are related to the official, although there is a work plan and expenses borne by the department, and we only see this delegate at the airport during flights, i.e. she does not participate in the meetings." - S.M., an employee at a security agency not affiliated with a ministry*

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The female employees' answers during the interviews reveal that the delegation procedures and nomination criteria are part of the rampant corruption in state departments and institutions. The criteria for selecting male and female employees are based on favouritism, nepotism, as well as partisan and sectarian affiliations, rather than competence and the desire to enhance abilities. This constitutes a violation of the principle of equality and increases administrative corruption in the public sector.

### Participation in key committees

According to the interviewed female workers, preferences in selecting candidates for key committees depend on the nature of the committee's work. The key committees whose activities guarantee benefits and privileges, place the employee in a higher position and enhance their experience and qualifications are dominated by men. Women, meanwhile, are assigned to marginal committees that are time-consuming and do not generate benefits or returns to the employee, whether material or moral.

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*"Key committees are always exclusive to men, while women are assigned tedious tasks or are placed in committees that require considerable efforts. And although female employees handle most of the work, those committees are headed by men." D.S., a teaching assistant at Anbar University*

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In some institutions, women employees are denied membership in key committees, even when the committee is established to address an issue concerning women.

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*"Sometimes, men are appointed to committees specialised in women's issues. In one case, there was an appeal from women's prisons claiming that brokers were taking them out at night. We requested to go because as women we understand and know how to communicate with other women. They did not agree and appointed a man to go there. I was willing to go despite how dangerous prisons are. The man was nominated because he is close to the official." - S.M., an employee at a security agency not affiliated with a ministry*

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According to the female workers' revelations in interviews, male employees dominate the committees for selecting department and

division directors (intermediate departments), which fosters discrimination between male and female employees in assuming higher positions, especially when nomination depends on voting. A female employee that is close to the decision-making circles within one of the ministries confirms that in the event of a vacant position, the employees are divided into groups, and each group is asked to nominate an employee (usually a man is selected). The man nominated by the group usually wins, and the woman cannot compete with him, because she is unable to guarantee a sufficient number of votes, as the majority of the committee members are males.

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*"Women are represented within such committees by one female employee only, as if it were a fixed percentage." - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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### **Discrimination in access to senior administrative positions**

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, as well as the barriers and obstacles to their professional advancement, undermine the principle of equality, equal opportunities, and the prohibition of discrimination stipulated by law.

There are no legal texts or obstacles preventing women from assuming higher administrative positions such as heads of department, especially positions depending on nomination mechanisms. Both female and male employees are entitled to apply for these positions if they meet certain conditions such as certification, service duration, and performance evaluation. However, the institutions' culture and practices operate in an undeclared and invisible way to prevent women from reaching these positions.

The interviews revealed the multiple and complex methods that foster gender discrimination in women's access to higher administrative positions. These methods (stated by the female respondents) include not announcing the opening of nominations for a vacant position,

personally informing preferred candidates, and limiting the notification to men only. One of the female teachers at the University of Anbar says:

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*“For instance, when nominations are opened for the position of head of department, male teachers (male Ph.D. holders) are notified even if their academic title is teacher, and female Ph.D. holders are not notified to apply for the position.” - S.M., a teacher at Anbar University*

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Discriminatory practices may come from the female employees themselves, as they share the same views as men with regard to women’s inability to lead due to their perceived psychological weakness. Some women may be biased in favour of men when the mechanism of selecting employees is through elections.

A teacher at a middle school for boys said that she had previously run for the position of principal of a boys’ school, but she did not obtain the votes of her peers and colleagues.

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*“Everyone blamed me when I applied for the vacant position of principal. I was told that I’m a weak woman who cannot control the students. I was not elected; the teaching staff, both men and women, refused to let a woman take over the administration of a boys’ school.” - Y.N., a teacher at a school for accelerated education in the Basra Governorate*

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### **Access to opportunities and privileges: who controls access to opportunities and privileges.**

Men have greater access to the benefits and privileges granted to public sector workers compared to women.

Several female employees confirm that men easily receive letters of acknowledgment, enjoy academic leave, or obtain promotions; however, it is more difficult for women to obtain such privileges.

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***“Women rarely receive letters of acknowledgment and compensation, even though they perform most of the tasks, due to relationships, favouritism, and nepotism.” - S.M., a teacher at Anbar University***

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Another teacher who works at the same university says: “I submitted more than 25 reviews in international journals and did not receive one letter of acknowledgment, while two of my colleagues received a letter of acknowledgment one week after publishing a paper similar to my work.”

Several female respondents noted that only male employees enjoy privileges and benefits within their organisations, such as the allocation of a car to some employees, in addition to providing gasoline and maintenance. Female employees are not allocated such privileges.

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***“Private cars are provided for male employees, along with gasoline and maintenance. Such cars are not provided for female employees who have to wait in the street for transportation” - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad***

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Several interviewed female employees confirmed that the main opportunities monopolised by male employees lead to disparities and differences in qualifications and skills among employees.

Thus, men have a greater chance of accessing higher administrative positions.

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***“It is normal for male employees to be more experienced and skilled because their opportunities***

*within the organisation and the type of work they perform are greater than women's opportunities. Therefore, women engage in unfair and unjust competition with men to access senior administrative positions."*

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Major opportunities entailing financial and moral benefits are usually monopolised by male employees not female employees. An engineer in one of the departments of the Ministry of Agriculture in Dhi Qar Governorate stated that an international organisation concerned with agriculture asked a group of employees to participate in a development project in exchange for financial compensation provided by the organisation that would be added to their salaries. Although the organisation required the fair and equitable participation of women in this project, nominations were exclusively limited to male employees, especially those close to the decision-making circle, i.e. the director and his assistant. Therefore, the international organisation was forced to waive its requirement for women to be represented among the participating cadres in order to ensure the organisation's cooperation in the completion of the project.

### **1.2. Difficulties in accessing training and acquiring qualifications**

Developing abilities is a constant challenge faced by female public sector workers. Although training is essential to improve the performance of male and female employees and provide them with professional skills that can increase their experience and opportunities to reach leadership positions, they are not equally available to women and men. Further, working women's opportunities to receive training and enhance their capacities are very limited.

71% of the surveyed working women highlighted the discrimination and inequality in access to training and skills acquisition in favour of men.

The Ministry of Planning's 2018 report on the gender reality in ministries and state institutions in Iraq, which is based on data provided by ministries, indicated that there is a wide gender gap in terms of participation in training programs.

The number of male and female employees in ministries and state institutions participating in internal training totalled 165,812, and the percentage of women was approximately 30% of the total trainees, compared to 70% for men. Meanwhile, the number of participants in external training totalled 19,660 for both genders; the percentage of women was 27%, compared to 73% for men.<sup>55</sup>

Such discrimination is serious as it allows male employees to acquire experience and skills that will enable them to advance and move up the career ladder at the expense of women, who are denied training opportunities.<sup>56</sup>

### **Adequacy of the training**

To determine the opinion of female public sector workers regarding the adequacy of the training they received, the surveyed female employees were asked a specific question. The results showed that only 14% of the survey sample confirmed that female employees received training to a large extent. 27% of the sample responded that female public sector workers did not receive sufficient training to develop their skills, abilities, and qualifications, while 58% indicated that such training exists but in a limited and insufficient manner.

*Table (7): Distribution of the sample of working women based on access to adequate training.*

<b>Do female public sector workers receive adequate training to develop their skills, abilities and qualifications at work?</b>		
Yes, to a large extent	14%	36
Yes, on a limited basis	58%	146
No	27%	68

Passing training courses, called “mandatory courses,” is a condition for promotion and career progression. The Employee Salaries Law stipulates that “the employee must pass a career development training



for each job title within their competence, provided that the training period is no less than two weeks and that it includes a qualifying exam.”<sup>57</sup>

To ensure that public sector employees receive training and capacity-building programs, several ministries have established directorates or institutes for training and development. These trainings are announced annually.

The nature and topics of the trainings vary based on the job grades to which the employee is to be promoted, but they usually involve at least four courses related to occupational safety and quality, a course in the employee’s field of specialisation, and a course in the field of work of their department.

The study did not analyse the quality of training programs in which both women and men participate. It is not clear whether the training organised by training directorates is designed based on administrative needs assessment and whether there is a training plan determined in light of a national policy for capacity building. However, the interviewed female workers agreed that such sessions provide new information but are not essential for the development of their skills and qualifications.

Wafaa, an engineer at the Ministry of Science and Technology, who worked for twenty years in her department without participating in any training outside the “training institute” of the institution where she works, confirmed that participation in these courses is imposed by promotion procedures and rules. “No one would participate in these sessions if it were not for the promotion. Some even participate only to escape the long working hours, as the training period is usually short.”

As for S. M., she confirms that these courses in which female workers are forced or coerced to participate “are useless and not beneficial.”

It is clear from the workers’ answers that the training does not match their job requirements and that many government institutions do not have clear training plans for female employees in various specialisations. Therefore, these trainings do not keep pace with modern developments in the specialisations of female workers or foster their abilities to perform their work efficiently. The interviews

also showed that female employees are not given priority in training and professional development programs; they receive secondary or less important trainings. These trainings are often internal, meaning they do not exceed the boundaries of the institution they work at. Sometimes female employees participate in trainings conducted by other government institutions. Such sessions do not assist female employees in taking their careers to the next level and do not entitle them to high-level experiences and skills allowing them to compete for leadership positions.

It is unlikely for women to be nominated to participate in important and external trainings that are usually called for by international organisations or bodies. In addition, the selection criteria are often based on favouritism and nepotism and are limited to the circle of those close to the director or official, as indicated by the interview results.

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*“They only nominate men, not women. Even among men, they may nominate a new engineer and exclude an engineer who had been working for years.” – M.A., an electrical engineer working at the Diyala Electricity Directorate*

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*“I can only participate in and be nominated for sessions and training conducted within my organisation. Outside the organisation, I can participate in courses by an official letter. As for outside Iraq, it is impossible. The officials believe that only men should participate, as the institution should be represented by a man, not a woman.” - S. A., an employee in one of the security departments in Baghdad*

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### **Obstacles to accessing important training**

Regarding the obstacles preventing female public sector employees from receiving adequate training, the surveyed female employees were asked about the reasons that prevent them from accessing adequate training. Based on the survey results, 70% of the respondents agreed that such training is not available in their institutions and departments, which was confirmed by the interviews. Many departments in which women mainly work, such as the Ministry of Education, and several job titles that are attributed to women within the framework of gender stereotyping of jobs and businesses, are excluded from the training programs.

A middle school teacher in Anbar Governorate confirms that she has not been nominated to participate in any session despite her need for such training.

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*"Another obstacle is that we are not included in trainings or delegations. We need this training in order to grow and be open to the world. We learn from modern and advanced teaching methods, which are completely absent from our education. Additionally, the curricula are changing, and schools are not receiving prior training to adapt to them. The curriculum should be distributed among teachers in advance, and they should be trained on it and on how to deliver it to the students. This is currently unavailable." - S.B., a teacher in the Anbar Governorate*

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56% of the respondents agreed that male employees monopolise these trainings, as women receive less training opportunities than men.

63% of the respondents stated that female employees participate in less important training, and 69% highlighted that nepotism and favouritism, which are the main criteria for the selection of training participants, are the reason why female employees do not receive adequate training. Moreover, 55% confirmed that female employees

are prevented from participating in trainings, especially external trainings, by their husbands or families. Meanwhile, 53% of respondents agreed that directors do not wish to develop their female cadres.

The interview results explain why directors are unwilling to develop their female employees from several perspectives. One perspective refers to the reproductive role of women and family responsibilities, which officials usually mention as a pretext to justify excluding female employees from training programs, as many directors believe it is unnecessary to train women since female employees are less committed to work and enjoy pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity leaves. The organisation should invest in training its male employees, according to them.

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*“There were three delegation sessions, but the men got them. Whenever we object that we want to develop the capacities of our female employees as well, the answer is: why should we develop or train women (soon they will take maternity leaves) or (soon they'll get married and have a baby). It is better to send men because they do not take leaves.” - N.M., a municipality head of department in the Diyala Governorate*

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Table (8): Distribution of the sample of female employees based on the reasons why female employees do not receive adequate training.

What are the reasons that prevent female public sector employees from accessing adequate training and qualification?								
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
Such trainings are unavailable in our administrations	35%	74	35%	74	18%	39	13%	27

Male employees monopolise training opportunities	21%	46	25%	53	21%	45	33%	70
Female employees participate in workshops and trainings that are less important (not beneficial to them)	27%	57	36%	76	22%	48	15%	33
Few female employees receive these trainings due to nepotism and personal relationships	38%	81	31%	67	16%	35	14%	31
Due to the family or husband's refusal of women traveling or moving to receive training	26%	55	29%	63	18%	39	27%	57
Due to family responsibilities and obligations	25%	54	32%	69	22%	48	20%	43
The officials' unwillingness to develop cadres	24%	51	29%	63	26%	56	21%	44
Due to the marginal jobs assigned to female employees	27%	58	31%	67	26%	56	15%	33

### 1.3. Sectoral and professional segregation

#### Gender stereotyping of professions

Gender segregation in the labour market and the division of jobs into male-dominated and female-dominated roles are some of the key factors that hinder women from reaching leadership positions. This leads to the exclusion of women from sectors dominated by men and from decision-making positions.

The economic activities of women activists are concentrated in a small range of sectors and professions. This indicates the exclusion of women from certain activities and the linking of their work to other activities often classified as women-specific, aligning with traditional prevailing concepts about women, such as clerical jobs and departments of personnel affairs management, secretariat, and education. This phenomenon was evident at the end of the 1980s and during the war

with Iran, as highlighted by Dr. Lahaye Abdul Hussein in her book on development and war, particularly in the teaching profession. The ruling authorities in the 1980s tended to feminise education and replace men with women to work in this field by increasing the number of female students over the number of male students in teachers' institutes and colleges of education in 1988-1989. By the end of 1988, the percentage of gender segregation in state departments reached 40%, i.e. more than one-third of the female workforce was concentrated in certain departments, namely education, health, and media.<sup>58</sup>

The concentration of women in these sectors marked the beginning of gender discrimination. One aspect of this phenomenon is the assigning of traditional roles for women, i.e. it redistributes roles outside the house in a gender stereotypical manner and perpetuates the prevailing stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The stereotyping process is not random, but rather part of an ideology that undermines the status of women. It does not simply involve giving separate but roles equal to women and men; rather, it gives women a lower status. This process takes its course in social trends and values, as the roles associated with women are classified as less valuable than those associated with men.<sup>59</sup> This phenomenon became increasingly entrenched after 2003, as recruitment and hiring policies tended to exclude women from certain fields such as the Ministries of Oil, Finance, Construction, Housing, and Communications, and concentrating them in the Ministries of Labour, Social Affairs, and Education. For example, the percentage of men who were appointed to the Ministry of Oil in 2014 reached 90.6%, compared to 9.4% for women.<sup>60</sup>

### **Nature and volume of the work and tasks assigned to men and women in public sector institutions**

The interviews highlighted discrimination between male and female employees in terms of the nature and volume of the work and tasks assigned to each of them. Although there are job descriptions that specify the responsibilities, tasks, and competencies required for a

specific position, female employees are assigned additional work and tasks that overload them much more than male employees.

One female employee who has worked within governmental institutions and moved between several ministries and institutions before settling on the Ministry of Education confirms that arduous tasks are usually assigned to women, while key and non-stressful tasks that provide the employee with privileges are usually entrusted to men.

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***“Women are assigned difficult tasks, while men are assigned work that entails compensation and privileges.” - C.T.A. – an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad***

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The majority of tasks assigned to female employees are marginal, consume considerable time and effort, and do not lead to professional development or improved efficiency and performance. Further, female employees are overlooked in the assignment of key jobs, which go to male employees.

Even at the level of universities, the administrative work is assigned to female teachers, unlike their male colleagues, as female teachers are often assigned all administrative tasks related to scientific departments, which require time and effort in addition to their academic work in teaching. Female teachers are often appointed to departments that include administrative tasks, while the leadership of departments (which are honorary positions) is entrusted to men. These tasks constitute additional burdens hindering the academic advancement of female teachers, in which the effort is focused on projects, research, analysis, and participation in different scientific activities.

One of the female teachers at Anbar University states that “combining administrative and academic work (teaching) was extremely difficult, not to mention that it was psychologically, physically, and mentally consuming. This made academic tasks much more difficult, as they require focus, research, searching in libraries, finding sources, and undertaking scientific projects.”

Several female teachers are obliged to accept these tasks, and most of them do not even have the right to refuse them for fear of being antagonised and having their career path hindered if they need academic promotion or study leave.

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***“If I refuse to perform an administrative task, all my work would be hindered, such as promotion, academic leave, or benefits. I would face a severe crackdown.” D.S., a teaching assistant at Anbar University***

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Assigning additional and marginal work to female employees only affects the performance of working women in general and their ability to innovate, create, and develop their skills. This further overload woman, which prevents them from practicing their activities or participating in public affairs.<sup>61</sup>

As a result, the disparity in the performance of men and women at work is deepened. This also leads to discrimination in the eligibility of working women for promotion, since marginal jobs, such as clerical jobs and handling outgoing and incoming mail, do not lead to promotion and do not grant female employees the opportunity to climb the career ladder. They act like “glass ceilings” that prevent female employees from rising to the top. On the other hand, these jobs cause immense pressure on women on top of their household responsibilities, which undermines their performance. This is then used as a pretext to justify the exclusion of women when nominating employees for middle administrative positions and giving priority to male employees instead. One of the interviewed female employees clearly stated that:

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***“Assigning women with many tasks increased the pressures imposed on them and caused tension, irritability, and intolerance. Although women carry out all their assigned tasks, male employees are given priority in administrative positions, under the pretext that they have a calmer temperament, without taking***



*into account the reasons for the female employee's outbursts, which are the numerous jobs assigned to them, stress, and fatigue." C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Studies indicate that assigning marginal tasks and additional work to working women is primarily linked to the patriarchal culture prevailing in public institutions, which underestimates women's capabilities, views them as inferior, and overloads them.<sup>62</sup>

#### **1.4. Problems and challenges related to career progression**

Career progression, which is a basic right and a major incentive that drives female employees to perform their work more effectively and grants them professional satisfaction, is one of the main problems or obstacles that hinder the administrative development of female public sector employees.<sup>1</sup> The latter are prevented from accessing senior administrative positions.

Although promotion policies are defined in accordance with the State Employees' Salaries Law and the attached Directive No. 22 of 2008 and include both male and female employees,<sup>2</sup> the latter usually face major obstacles and delays in moving from the job grade they hold to the next.

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<sup>1</sup> Public sector institutions in Iraq adopt a system of career progression referred to as "promotion." When an employee is promoted, they are transferred from the job they hold to a higher job grade, according to a specific grade scale. Their salary and job title also change according to specific conditions mentioned in the Civil Service Law and the Salary Law. Article 6 of Salary Law No. 22 of 2008 defines promotion as "the transfer of an employee from the position they holds to the grade immediately following their current grade within the career progression ladder."

See: <https://www.facebook.com/330277247330432/posts/927967550894729/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Iraqi legislator specifies ten job grades starting from the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (or 11<sup>th</sup> according to the most recent update of the career progression ladder), in addition to special grades and the higher grade. See: Guide for state employees and the public sector in Iraq.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/406054391/>.

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*“The career ladder is fixed for all employees, both men and women, in all ministries, but it is circumvented and interpreted according to the directors’ moods and whims.” - H.A., a head of a division at a government administration’s office in Baghdad*

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Government institutions have different procedures for promoting their employees. In some institutions affiliated with ministries, female employees smoothly move from one job grade to the next (especially in the lower grades), but other institutions impose obstacles to the career progression of their female employees.

The interviews revealed that the eligibility of working women for promotion based on their competence is subject to many obstacles. The first obstacle is the delay in accessing their right to promotion within the legal time period.

The second obstacle is the female employees' inability to move from the third to the second job grade and from the second to the first grade, which represent a major obstacle preventing them from accessing leadership positions. The third obstacle is grade stabilisation.

### **Obtaining promotions within designated timeframes**

Promotion policies and practices impose many barriers that prevent working women from moving up the career ladder and reaching senior administrative positions. Most of the interviewed female workers face obstacles in their promotion and career progression; many of them did not get promoted regardless of the specified period of time between grades, which is five years for those in the tenth and ninth grades, and four years for the following grades, except for the third and second grades; promotion requires five years.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Government institutions have different job descriptions related to the job grade depending on the nature of their work. Promotion in some specialisations, such as teachers and educators in the Ministry of Education, is limited to transfers from one grade to another on

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*"Progression up the career ladder and promotion do not go smoothly; we face immense difficulties and delays in promotion. I remained in the seventh grade for 6 years, and 6 years in the sixth grade. I lost a lot of time. I did not get promoted easily, but rather by practicing pressure (through fights or threatening to take legal action). Only then did I get promoted."*  
*D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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The survey results revealed that more than 35% of the surveyed female public sector employees, or 88 female employees out of the total sample, have not been promoted for more than four years, which is the specified period of time for moving up the career ladder, i.e. their transition to a higher job grade has been delayed.

Of this percentage, 25 female employees, or 10%, mentioned grade stabilisation and promotion. Grade stabilisation means the permanent freezing of the employees' position on the career ladder and preventing them from reaching a higher job grade.<sup>4</sup>

*Table (9): Distribution of the sample of female public sector workers based on the number of years they spent in the job grade.*

The number of years you spent in the job grade		
Less than four years	64.8%	162
More than four years	25.2%	63

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the career progression ladder, while the job description and title remain unchanged (teacher or educator). In other ministries, promotion leads to a change in the job description and title.

<sup>4</sup> The percentage of working women who face delays in promotion and advancement in the career ladder reached 35%. This does not mean that the remaining 65% do not face such problems or obstacles, but they have not yet passed the time period necessary to move to the next job grade. The way the question is formulated clarifies this difference, as the female employees were asked to specify the period they spent in their current job grades.

My grade was stabilised	10.0%	25
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### **Obstacles to reaching the second and first grades**

The main problem facing promotion and career progression lies in female public sector employees moving from the second to the first grade, which includes the positions of Assistant Director-General, Executive Director, Expert consultant, and Assistant Inspector General, to which the employee is supposed to move after five years spent in the second grade. These are all senior leadership positions in government administrations.

The career progression of most female public sector workers stops at the third grade. Sometimes, they cannot bypass it and access the first grade before reaching retirement age.

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*"I am currently in the ninth stage of the second grade, i.e. I have been in the second grade for nine years. All female employees, including myself, face obstacles in reaching the first grade. It is difficult to get promoted to this grade and acquire the title of Assistant Director-General, Executive Director, Expert, or Consultant" - M.F., a senior director at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Baghdad*

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Although women and men share the same problems associated with career progression, looking into the nature of these problems reveals that female employees face more obstacles in their career progression to higher grades. An employee at the Ministry of Electricity in Diyala confirms that:

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*"The majority have remained at the same job grade for years. We are told that this is our limit, although the job grades for men change often." - M. A., an*

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*electrical engineer working at the Diyala Electricity  
Directorate*

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Female employees receive financial benefits for every year they spend in the job grade after the expiry of the specified period of time to move to a higher grade. The additional years are called steps. However, the financial allocations (bonuses), which do not exceed 10 thousand dinars for each year, do not equal the amount of the raise that the employee can get if she is promoted to the next grade, which amounts to 300,000 dinars when moving from the second to the first grade.

Sometimes, the employee is not entitled to this raise in the event that a vacant position becomes available and she moves to the higher level, considering that she received annual bonuses or raises, and she is thus denied the raise resulting from her promotion.

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*"I did not receive three promotions, i.e. I missed three job grades. After I filed a complaint, justice was served; my job title was changed, but my salary remained the same under the pretext that I was receiving an annual bonus for each year, but the promotion entails a greater pay raise, amounting to 150 thousand dinars or more. Injustice continues to this day," - J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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### **Job grade stabilisation**

One of the obstacles preventing working women from moving up the career ladder and assuming senior administrative positions, which was revealed the interviews and the survey results, is that the right to promotion stops at certain job grades on the employees' salary scale, and employees can't be promoted when they reach those grades. This phenomenon is referred to as job grade stabilisation.

10% of the total sample of female public sector workers stated that their job grade had been stabilised.

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*"I am currently in the third grade; I am entitled to a higher grade since I hold a diploma from an institute. I demanded justice; when it was delivered, I was only granted bonuses and not promotions. I have been a director since 2011, and I will be entitled to two promotions in 2023, since I get a promotion every four years, and I have not received nearly three promotions.: - J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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The grade stabilisation system is defined as halting the promotion of the employee at a certain job grade while continuing to grant them annual bonuses.<sup>63</sup> There are two types of grade stabilisation.

The first type of stabilisation is related to the employee's academic qualification, as the right to promotion stops for holders of some academic qualifications, such as a diploma, middle school certificate, or lower, and it is impossible for employees to be promoted to a higher job grade on the career ladder that requires further academic qualifications.

The second type of stabilisation is related to assuming administrative positions, as it requires the employee to be in the third job grade and hold the job title of director or assistant director (or their equivalent job titles falling within the third grade) in order to manage one of the middle administrative structures at the level of (directorate, department, or division). Accordingly, the job description guide issued by the Ministry of Planning requires that any employee holding some positions and job grades should have previously managed one of the departments stipulated in the organisational structure of their administration. For instance, getting promoted to the position of third-grade director requires that the employee manage one of the departments in their administration. Such conditions violate the principle of equality and equal opportunities stipulated by the Labour Law.<sup>64</sup>

The job grade of many female employees is stabilised and their promotions are halted because they are denied the opportunity to

manage one of the structures within their department. Further, they are excluded from administrative positions within their departments for several reasons, some of which are related to the culture of public sector institutions that prefer males to fill these positions and believe that women are less committed to work and less efficient, and also because less important tasks are assigned to women. This makes it difficult for female employees to reach the third or second grade as they do not meet the condition of assuming management of one of the divisions or departments.

In this case, the stabilisation is linked to the organisational structure. It is similar to job grade stabilisation, except that the latter prevents female employees from being promoted to a higher job grade on the career ladder, while the former prevents female employees from assuming certain positions within the administrative structures of their departments.

Engineering and technical jobs were excluded based on a judicial decision from the requirement that the employee must hold an administrative position to move up to the third grade. The judicial decision stated that the employee's grade cannot be stabilised for not assuming the position of (director of an engineering or technical department).

Thus, the employee who meets the conditions to be promoted to the third grade within the technical and engineering positions is entitled to promotion. As for employees having administrative job titles, i.e. non-engineering or technical positions (director, senior director), they are still required to manage one of the departments in order to be promoted. Such an exception constitutes a violation of the principle of equal opportunities and a form of discrimination against female public sector workers, because the majority of working women are concentrated in administrative departments and work in administrative rather than technical or engineering jobs. This means that they cannot be promoted to director or senior director in the third grade.

Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the applicable job description guide by separating the link between the job position and promotion to job grades within the titles of director and senior director, as is the case

of engineering and technical jobs, to achieve justice among employees subject to the civil service law.<sup>65</sup>

### **Reasons for delay in career progression from the perspective of female public sector workers**

To learn the reasons behind delays in promotions, a question was directed to a sample of surveyed women (88 female employees) facing difficulties and delays in promotion and progression on the career ladder, as shown in the table below.

*Table (10): Distribution of the sample of female public sector workers based on the reasons hindering their promotion.*

<b>If you are facing a delay in your promotion or if your promotion not proceeding according to the specified timelines, what are the reasons?</b>								
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
The human resources employees are incompetent	20.5%	18	20.5%	18	19.3%	17	39.8%	35
I did not know about the job grade scale and did not demand a promotion	17.0%	15	22.7%	20	14.8%	13	45.5%	40
Because the career ladder stops at the second grade	26.1%	23	23.9%	21	14.8%	13	35.2%	31
Due to the obstacles set by the Ministry of Finance	43.2%	38	33.0%	29	11.4%	10	12.5%	11
Higher grades are granted to male employees	13.6%	12	17.0%	15	30.7%	27	38.6%	34
Failure to pass the trainings and meet the conditions required for promotion	10.2%	9	10.2%	9	13.6%	12	65.9%	58



40% of the surveyed female workers facing delayed promotion noted that the reason for the delay is due to the poor efficiency of human resources employees, their poor knowledge of the civil service law and the salary law, their lack of experience in this field, and their bias when nominating or submitting lists of employees for promotion at the expense of others. An employee in one of the departments affiliated with the Ministry of Culture says:

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*"The delay is due to incompetent administrative or human resources employees. They do not know how to calculate the period or promote employees who are backed by officials or pay bribes. Such people move up the career ladder smoothly every four years, but promotion for people like me, who are not backed by any party, is usually delayed." - D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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An employee at another department confirms the complicity of state officials and the circumvention of the job grades regulated by law:

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*"The law is supposed to apply to all employees. However, it is circumvented. Employees in human resources departments do not understand their job and interpret the law and regulations according to their whims." U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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Multiple female employees in various institutions stated that human resources employees commit errors in calculating their job grade, and several women indicated that years of work were lost due to these errors and that they deserved a higher grade than the one they are currently in.

The level of awareness among female workers at public sector institutions of their rights stipulated in laws and regulations is another

factor that delays their progression and moving up the career ladder. 40% of the surveyed female employees facing delayed promotions indicated that they did not demand to be promoted, did not know about the grade scale, and were unaware of the career ladder system under the State Employees Law and the Salary Law, which hindered their ability to claim their rights to promotion. This represents an obstacle to their career development and progression and creates a climate in which the employee feels that she is unable to access her right to promotion or assume senior administrative positions. Even if they are aware of these laws, female employees, especially those who are in the third or second grade and have had their grades stabilised, will not be able to hold accountable the authorities responsible for delaying or stopping their promotion, despite the existence of the laws.

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*“The laws exist, but those in higher administrative positions circumvent the law, obstructing and delaying its implementation. Filing a complaint does not solve the problem, as we could face procrastination and lose large sums of money due to submitting letters and requests in vain, and we may be further antagonised. Therefore, female workers who are entitled to promotion are forced to remain silent, as speaking up would lead to nowhere” - S.M., an employee at a security agency not affiliated with a ministry*

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More than 76% of female employees facing obstacles and delays in their promotion believe that the reasons for this delay and the main obstacle to their access to their right to promotion within the legal period are the Ministry of Finance's policies and procedures. The Ministry of Finance is responsible for determining the number of employees who occupy each job grade in each administration or institution. It is also responsible for determining financial allocations, i.e., pay raises.

Promoting a female employee from the fourth to the third grade and from the third to the second grade needs vacant positions in the higher grades, which is one of the promotion conditions according to the law.

Several interviewed female employees highlighted the Ministry of Finance's refusal to create new job grades and its reliance on grades that were previously held by an employee and then became vacant for different reasons (the employee's death, resignation, or retirement). In the event that employees remain in their grades and jobs are not vacated, the promotion period of the female employee will be extended and sometimes she would remain in her grade until retirement, which deprives her of benefits and wage increases that would certainly result in an increased pension if she reached the legal retirement age.

What further complicates progression to the higher grades, especially to the second and first grades, is that the job titles falling within these grades are limited to (assistant director and expert) for the first grade. The institutions and ministries cannot create grades and job titles other than those dictated by the Ministry of Finance. For example, the Ministry of Finance created only 4 grades with the title of expert in the Ministry of Labour and its affiliated structures. It also created one or two assistant director-general titles in each administration. These grades and titles are very few compared to the number of employees entitled to promotion.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the fact that these grades are very limited, the informal policies of public sector institutions limit competition for these jobs to male employees.

Wafaa, a female employee at the Ministry of Science and Technology, which was merged with the Ministry of Education, confirms that "all employees holding the title of expert in her institution are men."

30.6% of the surveyed female employees confirmed that the vacant higher grades which they were denied were granted to male employees.

The Ministry of Planning's official data confirms that the highest job grades (first grade) are occupied by male employees, as the number of men holding the position of director-general (i.e. the highest grade of

the career ladder) totaled 983, compared to 89 women holding this position and this grade.<sup>67</sup>

Linking promotion and financial allocations is another barrier that delays promotions for female employees and prevents them from accessing this right, as promotion is linked to the availability of financial allocations by the state in the budget.

Some of the interviewed female employees whose promotion stopped at the second grade and who were unable to advance to the first grade believe that the Ministry of Finance's policies tend to limit these grades (second and first) and are reluctant to grant them due to the resulting increase in salaries and the significant increase operational expenditures. According to the law, promotion is linked to the availability of funds and requires financial allocations by the state in the public budget. A female employee stated:

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*“My promotion stopped at the second grade and I could not reach the first grade due to the Ministry of Finance. When we reach an advanced grade, the salary increases by approximately 300 to 500 thousand dinars, and the Ministry is unable to provide these cash allocations for fear of inflation and due to the economic situation in the country. Therefore, grades are limited, and only those recommended by the director receive them.”*

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Additionally, a number of female employees stated during the interviews that another reason for their delayed promotion is the delay in the issuance of the public budget and the problems associated with its approval.

Female public sector employees consider their delayed promotion and their inability to assume leadership positions as one of the key injustices affecting employees in general and female employees in particular, which makes them feel frustrated and at a disadvantage, reducing their sense of initiative. This was expressed by one of the employees at the Ministry of Labour, whose promotion to the second

grade was halted nine years ago and she is now on the verge of retirement: “I felt disadvantaged; my work and efforts throughout those years were unappreciated, as if the Ministry was waiting for me to leave and retire.”

### **1.5. Institutional barriers to women’s access to leadership positions**

Women in Iraq constitute almost one-third of the public sector workforce, yet they are clearly underrepresented in senior positions and have limited access to leadership positions.<sup>5</sup>

In public sector institutions, women mainly hold administrative positions that rank lowest in the hierarchy of responsibilities such as head of a division, department, or unit. Interviews conducted with female employees in the public sector confirmed that the highest administrative position held by women in the administrations where they work is a head of division or head of department, and such positions provide no advantages or development in a woman’s career.

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*“The highest position a female employee can reach is head of department. In a security administration such as this, women cannot hold positions higher than that due to the prevailing patriarchal mindset.”*

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*“At the administration I work in, women cannot hold the position of head of department. They can only assume the position of head of division.”*

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<sup>5</sup> The percentage of women in the position of Director-General does not exceed 7.3% while the percentage of women in the position of Assistant Director-General does not exceed 8.7%.

The interviewed female workers identified a set of barriers related to the nature and work environment of public sector institutions which impede and prevent women's access to senior administrative positions. This was further confirmed by the survey results as clarified in the table below.

*Table (11): Distribution of the sample of female public sector workers based on the challenges related to the institution's policies that limit female workers' access to senior administrative positions.*

<b>What are the barriers and challenges related to the institution and its employment, assessment and promotion policies that impede and limit professional development and career advancement as well as prevent women's access to senior administrative positions?</b>								
	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
The absence of clear criteria for promotion to senior positions	31%	77	41%	102	20%	49	9%	22
The lack of support from senior leadership and its disregard for the characteristics of distinguished female workers	34%	86	45%	113	15%	37	6%	14
Directors are appointed from outside the administration, and the same directors are basically transferred between the ministry's administrations	38%	96	36%	90	18%	44	8%	20
The quota system related to partisan loyalties	50%	125	27%	68	16%	39	7%	18
Nepotism, favouritism and personal relationships are the main factors considered when appointing directors	56%	141	28%	71	12%	31	3%	7

Directors are transferred from one administration to another and remain in their positions, and subordinates remain in their positions as well	48%	121	31%	77	16%	41	4%	11
The ministry does not favour appointing women in leadership positions	28%	69	23%	58	32%	79	18%	44
Women's inability to build personal relationships with directors and officials as compared to men	19%	47	25%	62	28%	69	29%	72

The results of this survey revealed that nepotism and favouritism constituted the most prominent barrier to women's access to administrative positions or women's exercise of their rights granted by law. According to the survey, 84% of the surveyed female workers indicated that these factors hinder their career advancement, ranking highest among other organisational factors. Similarly, the interviewed female workers considered nepotism and personal relationships the most important criteria for candidacy and appointments, and they also mentioned unfair practices in promotions, training and delegation.

Furthermore, 72% of the surveyed sample agreed on the absence of clear criteria for promotion to senior positions, which constitutes a barrier to female workers' access to such positions in the public sector. According to the interviews, the appointment to senior positions is subject to special criteria not pertaining to administrative competences and qualifications. Women are prevented from assuming leadership positions in their institutions, and candidacy for such positions is subject to the quota system, nepotism and favouritism, as well as the impact of influential political parties.

The quota system is considered one of the most crucial barriers to women's access to leadership positions whereby 77% of the surveyed sample emphasised the role of quotas based on partisan loyalties in

creating an institutional climate that doesn't allow female workers access to promotions and senior positions.

Moreover, 79% of the surveyed female workers indicated another barrier to women's access to decision-making and leadership positions, represented by retention policies adopted towards directors whereby no changes are made to their positions, and directors are rotated between the institutions of the ministry. The interviews further emphasised that such policies aim to keep directors and subordinates in their respective positions.

Half of the surveyed participants (51%) confirmed the existence of discrimination against women and an institutional culture that doesn't favour appointing women to leadership positions, which impedes women's access to such positions. In addition, 44% of the surveyed sample pointed out that women, unlike men, are incapable of building relations with directors and officials, which hinders their access to senior administrative positions.

### **Quotas**

Understanding the link between quotas, corruption, nepotism, and women's career development requires a review of the history of the quota system in Iraq.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, it became necessary to take into account the ethnic and sectarian differences within Iraqi society and the need to represent its political elites to form a government that includes Iraqis of all backgrounds.

This imposed consensual arrangements that manifested in the formation of the Iraqi Governing Council which included figures representing all sects and ethnicities. These consensual arrangements aimed at guaranteeing ethnic and sectarian representation at all state levels through an informal quota system.<sup>68</sup>

After 2003, successive Iraqi governments were formed based on this quota system. Political positions and state institutions were divided between the Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish communities, based on the (estimated) number of each, to guarantee these groups' representation



in the Iraqi government in accordance with implicit agreements (which are not stipulated by the Constitution and have no legal grounds).<sup>69</sup>

The quota system gave political parties power over state institutions, whereby senior administrative and decision-making positions in these institutions turned into political shares without regard for experience, competence, and administrative entitlements.<sup>70</sup> Senior administrative positions and special grades are distributed among parties based on the number of elected MPs. These parties nominate their loyal figures to fill such positions, including ambassadors, directors-general, deputy ministers, etc., regardless of experience and despite their failure to meet legal requirements.<sup>71</sup>

Although higher and special grades are appointed by the Council of Ministers based on the candidates proposed by a ministry or a body not affiliated with any ministry,<sup>6</sup> political parties have the upper hand in specifying the names of candidates, whether directors, advisors, or deputy ministers, given the political power granted by such positions and their importance in advancing the interests of these parties.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> With regard to the position of deputy minister, the concerned ministry proposes the (name of the candidate) to the Council of Ministers which, in turn, recommends the appointment to the Council of Representatives, by virtue of a decision, in accordance with the provision of Article 80(5) of the Constitution. The Council of Representatives either approves or rejects the proposed candidate based on the provisions of Article 61(5)(b) of the Constitution, after which a presidential decree is issued on the appointment by the President of the Republic (Presidential Office).

The appointment of directors-general in state institutions and administrations and the review of their transfer applications and referrals to retirement falls within the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister, in accordance with Circular 8/1/1983 issued by the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers / Ministries' Affairs Department on 29/6/2006. The concerned ministry or the body not affiliated with any ministry proposes its candidate to the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, to be decided upon by the Prime Minister (whether to appoint, transfer or retire said candidate).

The types of special grades are specified by the Revolutionary Command Council Decision No. (1077) dated [16] 1981 along with the terms of service and relevant laws and regulations. These grades include Personal Secretary to the President of the Republic, University President, Advisor to the Presidential Office, etc. The Iraqi Constitution in force stipulated in Article 61(5)(b) that the approval of the appointment of special grades falls under the jurisdiction of the Council of Representatives based on the proposal of the Council of Ministers. See: <https://iraq-law.hooxs.com/t93-topic>.

Interviews conducted with female workers emphasised that public sector institutions are politicised and that there is a link between government agencies and institutions and the ruling political parties that have not only become part of these institutions but also control all employee affairs in terms of their appointment and their assumption of higher positions. Thus, employees in senior or leadership positions must have political support to remain in their positions, exercise their rights, or assume higher positions.

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*“Most state administrations are politicised and run by political parties. These parties lead the ministry and have the final say in decision-making. If you aren’t supported by any party, you might as well forget about promotions or transfers to better places as this is all dependent on parties. This issue is impeding my promotion.” S.A., a national security advisor in Baghdad*

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Some interviews indicated that the female worker’s status within the institution is determined by her affiliation with a certain party or official. This relationship is the source of support and power granted to female workers and the basis for any benefits they receive.

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*“Employees, whether men or women are not regarded as individuals but rather as belonging to a certain party and whether they are supported by such party. The first question we are asked is through whom we were appointed. That’s how they determine the source and extent of an employee’s power and strength or their weakness if they aren’t supported by any party or do not have any strong relations, which in turn makes them vulnerable and deprives them of opportunities.” N.K., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Some interviewed female workers confirmed that the support provided to an employee by a political party is more important than competence, experience, and academic qualifications when it comes to administrative positions.

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*“The quota system has greatly impacted us today. If we are not supported by any party or are not affiliated with any party, we are vulnerable and easily dismissed from our position, whatever it may be, in favour of someone who doesn’t have the necessary qualifications but is supported by a certain party.”*

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Qualified female public sector workers seeking to assume leadership positions have little chance of succeeding. In terms of employment and appointment of directors-general, particularly in public sector institutions, female workers have no chance at all.

According to quota mechanisms, directors-general can neither be dismissed nor changed. This gives such positions great importance in the eyes of dominant parties, making them a priority even over the appointment of party-affiliated ministers. The service period in such positions is longer than that of a minister’s mandate and extends beyond electoral terms and the appointment of new ministers, as they are unaffected by any ministerial changes,<sup>73</sup> Neither the new minister nor the new Prime Minister has the power to dismiss individuals assuming such positions. These individuals may only be moved from one institution to another within the ministry.<sup>74</sup> As such, directors are rotated among administrations based on retention policies that keep them in their positions and limit women’s chances to hold such positions.

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*“Over the past 20 years, not once was the position of director general held by someone from within the administration. The position was always filled by someone from outside of the administration. They are the same people who rotated from one*

*administration to another. (Once a director, always a director, and the same goes for average employees)."*

*– D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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The appointed or rotated directors are usually from outside of the administration and institutions to which they are assigned. Seldom are such positions assigned to employees who come from within the administration and have the necessary qualifications, competence and experience. One female worker said:

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*"There are competent women in our administration who have assumed positions such as heads of departments or centres, but none of them have ever been appointed as director-general or assistant director. The names of the directors are proposed by the Ministry or the Council of Ministers, and we have no say in proposing candidates for the positions of director, assistant director or even head of a centre, but rather people we don't know are imposed on us in these positions. The quota system has a great impact in our administrations." – U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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Access to senior and leadership positions, based on the quota system, is linked to the quota mechanisms themselves. This system excludes women from leadership positions because women do not represent the sect, ethnicity or party; only men are representatives of these groups.<sup>75</sup>

Within the quota system itself, a woman who is qualified to be promoted for a position and is not chosen by the sect, party, or ethnicity to represent it may be ruled out, only because she is a woman. Women do not represent or speak for the sect or party; only men are representatives of these groups. For instance, a female Iraqi Turkmen employee, Y.N., was excluded from running for the position of director-general despite having the necessary qualifications and the fact that

this position is part of the Turkmen component's share of power. The Turkmen component itself neither selected her nor accepted her candidacy because she is a woman, and women do not represent or speak for the component in the quota system.

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*"I served for 36 years straight in the public sector and didn't take any leaves. I was head of one of the departments in my administration. Upon the retirement of the director-general of the institution where I work and given that the position was the right of the component I belong to, according to the quota system, I submitted my CV to the governorate to run for the position of director-general along with a group of other candidates. At that time, the governor was responsible for appointing the director-general. However, it was later made clear that they had excluded me and that my CV wasn't even submitted for voting. My name wasn't even on the list of candidates since my CV wasn't submitted in the first place. I understood that they excluded me simply because I am a woman. They told me that I already had a good and suitable position and that it just wasn't meant to be and I should believe in my fate. I was also rejected because I am an independent employee, I am not supported by any party, and I do not curry favour with anyone. We were also denied promotions for such reasons; not just me, but also many other female employees are denied certain positions and opposed simply because they are women."*

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Azza Charara presents an important analysis to understand the exclusion of women from quota mechanisms and rules. She believes that "belonging to a sect or ethnicity is inherited in patriarchal societies through the male line of kinship. This means that such an inheritance, whether for men or women, is passed through the father and remains throughout the male lineage. However, the female lineage is

transferred by marriage to other families, regions, and sects." Women are therefore not the official representatives of sects and ethnicities.<sup>76</sup>

Based on quota mechanisms, women are excluded from leadership positions as they lack the network of connections required by parties to gain votes in elections to lobby for the passage of a certain policy, law, or project, and to mobilise protesters in support of their interests.

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*"They prefer men because they can benefit more from them. Men can take to the streets in protests organised by the party, while women are of no use in this regard."*

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Women are also excluded because most of the parties that control government bodies through the quota system are of a religious background (Islamist parties). Appointing women to leadership positions contradicts the orientations of such parties as they do not believe in women working or leaving their homes to work.

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*"Islamist parties control institutions in general. The administration where I work is namely controlled by the Islamic Virtue Party, an extremist party that prevents women from working, imposes specific clothing for women (abaya and niqab), and doesn't believe women should assume leadership positions." – U.R, an employee at the Agriculture Department in Nasiriyah*

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The present study revealed many obstacles that hinder women's access to leadership positions due to the quota system. Even when women are selected to represent their sect, ethnicity, or party that controls the ministry, the selection mechanism for senior positions aims to achieve a quota balance and isn't based on the candidate's professional or academic qualifications. The selected women are often related by kinship to the officials and politicians in other sectors or the same

sector. Consequently, female workers qualified to assume a leadership position in a ministry or institution face complex discrimination given that, even in cases where a woman is to be appointed for such positions, the basis of selection is inequitable.

### **Corruption**

The quota system that was applied to all government bodies has worsened corruption. The institutions and ministries allocated to a specific political party are considered by the party as its own property, to be exploited for the party's interests<sup>77</sup> rather than that of the state. This facilitated the spread of corruption.

Since 2003, Iraq has ranked among the most corrupt nations on the Corruption Perceptions Index. In 2022, Iraq received a score of 23 index points out of 100 and ranked 157<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the Corruption Index. Corruption in Iraq takes systematic forms. Among the most significant indicators and manifestations of corruption covered by corruption data are the lack of clear and objective standards during staff selection, especially senior officials, the absence of the principle of equal opportunities in filling vacancies, and the prevalence of cases of officials who exploit public positions for personal and partisan gains, not to mention bribery and embezzlement of public funds.<sup>78</sup> This is one of the reasons for the persistence and spread of corruption. Corruption in filling a position reinforces the dominance of those who are appointed in this position and strengthens their influence.

The parties that control ministries or institutions determine the criteria for employment and promotion within these governmental bodies. They also decide on the names of candidates for senior administrative positions because of the significance of such positions in providing funds for these parties (illicit funding), by ensuring that the party and its loyalists obtain ministerial contracts, projects, and tenders that only individuals appointed to senior positions may control, or by impeding the signing of any contracts that don't serve the interests of their parties.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, there are no clear criteria for selecting candidates for these positions. Parties control the selection based on loyalty or the ability to buy out the position.

Many interviewed female public sector workers confirmed that the director of the administration must belong to the party that controls the ministry and must be loyal to this party and serve its interests. Such individuals are often prominent figures in the party, close to the party, or have a written pledge of loyalty to this party.<sup>80</sup>

Corruption and women's exclusion from senior administrative positions are tightly linked. A UN study on corruption and criminal accountability indicated that corrupt and unaccountable networks are mostly male dominated. Such corrupt networks draft decisions regarding promotions within administrative bodies. In cases of widespread corruption, men are in positions of power.<sup>81</sup>

Practices such as bribery and kickbacks at the level of senior positions in public sector institutions are common. One woman paid USD 5,000 to be appointed to a position at one of the Ministry of Electricity administrations. Bribes are paid in exchange for such positions, and appointments are made based on who pays the highest. According to one of the interviewed female workers, this price could amount to USD 5,000, which can later be compensated by profiting from public funds through tenders and contracts, which have become a gateway for political enrichment.<sup>82</sup> Taking into account such criteria, it isn't surprising that women's chances are non-existent and that their opportunities are limited in accessing these positions.

One of the interviewees spoke of paying money to gain a position:

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*"A while ago, I heard that the newly appointed director had paid 500,000 USD to get the position. Individuals could pay money to get a position or could commit to a party and gain their support such that no one could stand against them. These individuals infringe upon other employees and order them around as they like. Parties have power within the administration; with a simple phone call, they could keep, transfer, or appoint employees, and their say goes without discussion."*

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Corruption, encompassing bribery and kickbacks, extends beyond senior roles to permeate the entire recruitment process. The likelihood of paying a bribe or paying money to get a job is heightened among job seekers lacking strong political connections.<sup>83</sup> One of the participants in the study paid a sum of USD 5,000 to secure a position within a department.

Although the law has clearly defined the conditions for occupying administrative positions, obtaining a third-grade director position, for example, requires applicants to meet specific criteria. The regulations stipulate that candidates for the position must hold a master's degree with a minimum of 10 years of work experience; a university degree with no less than 14 years of experience; or a diploma with a minimum of 18 years of experience. However, the dominant political parties within the ministry and the ruling elite can bypass or amend these laws in a manner that serves their interests, enabling them to issue decisions that override previous ones and benefit themselves or their male relatives.

On August 25, 2003, ABC Arabic reported on an administrative violation within the Ministry of Education involving the appointment of Ahmed. Despite not having completed eight years since his initial appointment and not yet reaching the third grade, he was assigned as the director of the Student Affairs Department at the Directorate-General of Vocational Education. This appointment was orchestrated under the influence of a certain MP. The report suggested that the purpose behind appointing this director was to manipulate vocational education results and facilitate favours for close associates of the mentioned MP. On top of that, this employee was originally assigned to a different directorate and was later reassigned.

Corruption not only paves the way for specific individuals to ascend to leadership and senior positions but also fortifies their grip on power, ensuring a sustained presence at the helm of authority. By contrast, the prospects for women to attain senior positions within institutions controlled by corrupt networks are severely restricted. This limitation stems from the fact that the criteria for selecting individuals for these roles frequently hinge on loyalty to a political party, and at times, such

appointments are susceptible to those who engage in pay-to-play practices.

This restriction is further exacerbated by the pivotal role these positions play as sources of financial influx for the parties that control ministries, serving as an illicit funding source for these parties. Individuals appointed to these influential roles have considerable power in controlling ministerial contracts, projects, and tenders. Hence, this control ensures that businesspeople with close affiliations to the political party secure these projects, subsequently sharing profits and funds with the political entity. Moreover, 51% of the sample of women workers participating in the survey affirmed that ministries do not favour appointing women to leadership positions. The interviews indicated that reaching the position of Director-General in some institutions is deemed "impossible" for women.

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***"Yes, a woman may reach some positions, but there is no possibility whatsoever for a woman to be nominated for the position of Director-General. Even though the director position is technically filled through a nomination process, these procedures are merely formalities because the position is preassigned to a specific individual selected by authorities in Baghdad, leaving us with no choice but to accept their decision." – M.A., an engineer working at the Diyala Electricity Directorate***

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In certain public sector institutions, corruption occasionally manifests itself as sexual extortion, as female employees are promised to be appointed to important positions or granted some privileges and exceptions in exchange for certain "relations." However, the responses did not specify whether these relations involve sexual services, given the sensitivity of this matter within Iraqi culture.

One of the employees who was deprived of the position of director-general, despite her job grade implying that she should hold such a position, affirms that personal relationships with director dictate the

nomination process for certain administrative positions. Some female employees build close relations with officials as a mechanism to gain undeserved privileges, depriving qualified female workers of their rightful opportunities based on experience and academic qualifications. Additionally, one of the interviewed female employees revealed that she had actually been subjected to coercion by her immediate supervisor to obtain certain privileges, including keeping her at the institution to which she was appointed. Upon her refusal, her employment was terminated.<sup>84</sup>

### **Nepotism, favouritism, and personal relationships**

Nepotism, favouritism, and loyalty, rather than eligibility and competency, are some of the most common forms of corruption in senior positions within public sector institutions in Iraq. Networks of nepotism and clientelism associated with personal or partisan loyalties have played a significant role in the expansion of the public sector. Each minister, official, or party works to appoint their relatives, acquaintances, and supporters within the party or potential voters, leading to a massive increase in the number of employees in the public sector.

Researcher Ali Mawla emphasises the scarcity of concrete evidence to support claims of nepotism and expose its mechanisms in Iraq. These operations are conducted discreetly, and a culture of impunity further complicates efforts to unveil them. However, many of these practices have become widely known due to their common occurrence.<sup>85</sup>

Securing a position in the public sector is now viewed as a privilege exclusively accessible to individuals with close connections to government officials and influential figures within the state. A participant in the interview notes that:

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*"While most of our officials are women, those selected based on their competencies constitute a minority. The majority secure their nominations through their connections to higher-ranking officials"*

*or relatives of those in power. The better the relationship with the higher-ups, the greater and more favourable the opportunities." D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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A teacher in one of the western provinces emphasises that the selection process for a school principal occurs after submitting a nomination request for the position. However, the person who ultimately secures the position is often the one benefiting from favouritism, meaning they receives a recommendation from an influential figure or official to obtain this job title. Another worker in the same sector emphasises that female teachers benefit from the relationships of their male relatives with influential authorities and higher-ups or with relatives of those in higher authority:

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*"The appointment of a school principal is susceptible to nepotism and favouritism. We have female teachers whose brothers have relatives and acquaintances in the higher authorities, and it is through these connections that they secure the desired position."*

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Discussions with interviewed female workers focused on the unfair competition imposed by nepotism and favouritism among women themselves rather than between women and men.

Most of the respondents agreed that women do not attain high-ranking positions or senior job roles, even within intermediate positions, unless they have close connections with officials and directors, whether within or outside the organisation. One of the female employees in a small department led by women emphasises that: "Most of our officials are women, but only a small percentage of them were nominated based on their competencies. The majority were selected based on their relationships with higher-ups or with those in power."<sup>86</sup>

This reflects the complex discrimination encountered by female workers, which is not solely based on gender. In addition to women engaging in unfair competition with men in accessing opportunities, which often ends in favour of males, they find themselves competing against their female colleagues, as career advancement criteria now rely on party affiliations, loyalties, personal relationships, and nepotism rather than administrative competencies and qualifications.

Patronage relationships, along with nepotism, wield significant influence within organisational dynamics. Employees who benefit from these connections—be it through familial ties, personal acquaintances, or recommendations from influential figures in the state—enjoy distinct privileges. Their ability to provide services and advantages is derived from the positions they hold in various institutions, be they governmental or private.

For women seeking advancement in the professional hierarchy and aspiring to attain higher positions, the landscape becomes challenging when criteria hinge on personal connections and clientelist considerations. Women often face hurdles as they lack social capital—a broad network of connections—that could otherwise assist them in delivering benefits to officials and directors within the framework of patronage relationships.

Moreover, a woman's affiliation with a clan, even if present, does not sufficiently empower her within the tribal structure to leverage clan or tribal connections for electoral support.

The existence of informal male networks and the lack of access for women to these networks also contribute to the exclusion of women from high-ranking positions. Notably, one of the major obstacles faced by women is the male-centric network, as senior officials and directors often consolidate power among their relatives and close associates.<sup>87</sup>

In-depth conversations with female workers during interviews brought attention to the emerging challenges introduced by nepotism and favouritism. These dialogues shed light on the difficulties women encounter in their professional spheres due to the widespread prevalence of these practices within state institutions.

The practice of appointing unqualified individuals without experience to administrative positions based on family relationships or recommendations obtained through influential political parties and officials leads to many challenges and consequences.

More than two respondents described during their interview how the imposition of an employee (through favouritism) who took charge of one of the departments, despite lacking the requisite expertise for the role and holding no academic qualification beyond a secondary school certificate, deprived them of their rights and introduced considerable turmoil into the administrative workflow.<sup>88</sup>

Women in the workforce endure a situation where officials and directors overlook the errors and transgressions of both male and female colleagues who have obtained their positions through nepotism and favouritism. This lack of accountability is driven by either a bias in favour of the individuals' connections or a fear of potential repercussions from the affiliated party.

N.K. asserts that concern she raised about the inadequacies or mistakes made by a female employee, who obtained a temporary employment contract in her department through the endorsement and recommendation of a superior, went unanswered by the director. The director refused to take any measures to hold her accountable.

In a work setting characterised by favouritism and nepotism, the majority of interviewed female employees voice complaints about the lack of justice, unequal treatment, and the lack of fairness in the assessment of performance.

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*“Preference is given to those with connections and appointments based on nepotism, even if their performance is unsatisfactory and they lack any notable achievements. Despite the presence of capable and creative women among us, the director unjustly accuses them of making excuses and procrastinating when they request leave for valid reasons. By contrast, the director's relatives receive*

*preferential treatment, regardless of their lack of productivity and notable accomplishments.”*

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The quota system, corruption, and nepotism have introduced significant and daunting challenges for women working in the public sector. These practices have resulted in substantial injustices, leading to major obstacles hindering women from accessing their rights and performing their job duties effectively.

## **2. Family challenges**

### **2.1 Balancing work and personal life**

Women bear the greater responsibility in managing family affairs and household chores. Globally, women undertake over two-thirds of care work, which is three times more than the time men spend on these tasks.

The gender gap in unpaid care work<sup>7</sup> is wider in the Arab region compared to other parts of the world. Women in this region spend approximately five times (4.7) more time performing household chores compared to men.<sup>89</sup>

At the national level in Iraq, data from the International Labour Organisation indicates that women undertake 86% of household chores. They spend at least 6 hours daily caring for children and the elderly, as well as managing household affairs. In contrast, men dedicate less than one hour to such tasks.<sup>90</sup>

Care work and domestic work often act as obstacles to women's participation in the workforce. According to the Poverty Monitoring and Assessment Survey in Iraq for the years 2017 and 2018, 79% of women

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<sup>7</sup> Unpaid care work refers to care provided within the family without financial compensation. It encompasses both direct care work, such as feeding children, caring for the elderly, and tending to individuals with special needs, as well as indirect care work. Indirect care work includes all activities and responsibilities that maintain the prerequisites for personal care, encompassing chores like cleaning, cooking, and household maintenance (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, page 8, Economic Empowerment of Women).

surveyed reported refraining from engaging in economic activities or working outside the house due to care work and domestic responsibilities.<sup>91</sup>

While working women face a compounded burden resulting from having to perform professional and domestic responsibilities concurrently, the fact that a woman works outside the home does not exempt her from unpaid care work within the household. Many working women encounter significant challenges in balancing and reconciling their roles and responsibilities at home and in the workplace. They contend with a significant lack of time, resulting from the time spent on household tasks, which hinders their opportunities for personal development and professional advancement. This time constraint also impacts their efficiency and performance at work and influences their career decisions.

The issue of achieving work-life balance has gained significant attention today due to its importance in promoting gender equality in the workplace and its impact on the professional development of working women. Facilitating the reconciliation between professional and personal life is now seen as part of social protection programs aimed at enhancing social and economic security and family well-being,<sup>92</sup> especially for the families of working women. Many countries have implemented essential measures to facilitate the balance between family and professional life. These include flexible working arrangements, the adoption or review of social protection policies and the provision of financial allowances for day-care centres or caregivers, the promotion of family-friendly workplaces, and the provision of quality care services and facilities for children. All these initiatives aim to reduce the time spent on unpaid care work.<sup>93</sup>

## **2.2 The challenges of unpaid care work and domestic work**

The juggling of family responsibilities, domestic work, and the attempt to reconcile them with work outside the home are among the most significant challenges faced by working women in the public sector, especially those who are married. The results of the current survey, focusing on the time spent on household chores, reveal that 55% of the



surveyed sample, comprising 148 female workers, dedicate more than 5 hours daily to care work and domestic work. Meanwhile, 34% of them spend 3-4 hours daily to accomplish these tasks.

*Table (12): A sample of working women distributed according to the number of hours they spend on household chores.*

<b>How much time do you spend on household chores and childcare?</b>		
Less than an hour	5%	12
1 – 2 hours	6%	15
3 – 4	34%	85
5 and more	55%	138

The fact that women have to carry out these tasks is linked to cultural and social patterns that have assigned women the responsibilities of caregiving and managing household affairs. Women are assigned the burden of handling all tasks both within and outside the family, as the prevailing values still view men as providers and women as caregivers, despite women taking on the responsibilities of providing and contributing to the household income.

Within the surveyed sample, 54% of working women face significant challenges in balancing their professional work and family responsibilities, while 20% encounter such difficulties to a lesser extent. This indicates that more than three-quarters of the sample struggle with balancing their professional and personal lives. The intensity of these challenges varies based on marital status, whether they are married or not, and also based on the ages of their children.

*Table (13): Sample of working women distributed based on whether they find difficulty in balancing professional work and family life.*

**Do you face difficulties in balancing your professional work and family duties?**

Yes	54%	134
To some extent	20%	50
No	26%	66

In comparison to unmarried women, those who are married, especially those with young children, spend a longer time on domestic work and household responsibilities. They also face greater challenges in reconciling work and family life. It is also worth noting that more than two-thirds of women in the public sector are married, accounting for 73% of the current survey sample.

In addition to the survey results, all interviews conducted with women workers of various ages highlighted the difficulty of balancing and reconciling domestic work with paid employment. This challenge acts as a significant barrier to their career advancement and becomes a source of both psychological and physical stress for them.

Female employees in the public sector suffer from time constraints, as the time available to them is insufficient to fulfil both their professional and household duties. Women take on the majority of tasks and responsibilities essential for daily life within the home environment, which include organising and arranging the house, preparing meals, shopping, washing dishes, childcare, and sometimes caring for elderly family members or those with special needs, among other daily routine tasks.

Working women who are widowed or divorced, constituting 15% of the surveyed female employees, face greater challenges in achieving a balance between care and domestic work and their work outside the home. They bear the sole responsibilities for providing for their families and managing various family affairs, ranging from grocery shopping to paying utility bills and ensuring the transportation of their children to school.

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***"I became a widow at an early age. I must do everything on my own, from grocery shopping to paying utility bills, cooking, helping the children with their studies, and getting them to school. This depletes my health, time, and mental energy." - D.S., a teaching assistant at Anbar University***

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Most of those interviewed make significant efforts to meet the demands of social life in response to societal expectations related to women's duties within the family and for fear of being accused of falling short in household affairs.

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***"It's never easy for me to balance between my responsibilities at home and my work outside. Any shortfall leads to problems with my husband and his family. No one appreciates the efforts of a working woman." - S., an employee at the Ministry of Electricity in the Anbar Governorate***

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S. dedicates herself to various tasks throughout the day upon returning from work. Residing with her husband's family, she assumes responsibilities such as cleaning the entire household, washing dishes, cooking dinner, and tutoring the children, which can extend into late hours during exam periods.

Likewise, U.A. carries out domestic work after coming home from her job, for fear of being accused of negligence. This concern is particularly heightened when the husband is not employed in the public sector. Consequently, she believes he may not fully understand the challenges encountered by a working wife.

Women of all ages share and experience the same struggle in attempting to balance household chores, family demands, and paid work outside the home. Many of them are forced to wake up very early in the morning to prepare their children and accompany them to school before heading to their jobs. Jinan, who now holds the position of a

municipal department director at the Ministry of Construction, Housing, Municipalities and Public Works after her children have grown up, shares her experience:

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*"I used to wake up at dawn, enduring the challenge of getting my children ready for school and kindergarten, especially during the cold winter months, so that I could then go to work." J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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The burdens and responsibilities are intensified when the working woman is also a mother to a child with special needs. H., who had to resign from her administrative position as a supervisor at the Ministry of Health, shares her experience of stepping away to provide care for her autistic son:

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*"My son goes to the autism centre; I wait for the bus, and if it doesn't come, I have to drive him myself. Time always feels insufficient, as I have to plan everything for them. When my son comes back from the centre, he needs to eat, and I need to set aside time for specific exercises that need to be done at home. Even though my husband is around, he offers no help, which makes it even harder to manage the situation."*

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In addition to handling care work and household tasks, working mothers also assume the responsibility of overseeing their children's lessons, which is a routine task that they must find time for amid their busy schedules.

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*"My children are now grown, but they attend distinguished schools, and their English studies require continuous attention, a task that cannot be*

*overlooked. After preparing lunch for the next day, I spend the evening cleaning the house, and I constantly feel pressed for time. Balancing work and home responsibilities is very challenging. There are nights when I stay awake until morning, especially during exam periods, which is very exhausting." - Anonymous, an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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The challenges of balancing life-work responsibilities are heightened by prolonged working hours, presenting a significant hurdle for women who undertake family responsibilities. Consequently, this exposes them to pressures exceeding those faced by men, limiting their aspirations, and potentially leading to their resignation from work.<sup>94</sup>

The challenge of time constraints faced by working women is intensified by the poor infrastructure and deteriorating services in the country. Issues such as road congestion, overcrowding, power outages, deficient water, and sewage networks, as well as shortcomings in healthcare and education services collectively contribute to an increased time commitment outside the home. Women find themselves juggling household chores on one hand and undertaking unpaid care work on the other. This reality takes a toll on women, impacting them physically, mentally, and emotionally.

### **2.3. Assistance and support that a working woman receives**

In the cultural context of Iraq, household chores are often perceived as exclusively women's responsibilities, with minimal or no involvement from men. These domestic tasks, conducted in the private sphere, are frequently undervalued and place a significant physical, mental, and emotional burden on women. According to a comprehensive survey on the social and health conditions of women in Iraq conducted in 2011, a mere 5.9% of married men actively engage in household chores. Furthermore, 42.8% of men refrain from sharing domestic duties with their wives under any circumstances, and this percentage rises to 58.5% in rural areas.<sup>95</sup>

The current survey findings reveal that 50% of the surveyed women manage household chores and family care independently, without any assistance. Meanwhile, 20% of the participants said they received assistance from their husbands. However, interviews revealed that this assistance is often limited to occasional tasks like transporting children to and from school or helping with household chores. And yet, the primary burden of these responsibilities still falls on the working wife.

*Table (14): Distribution of the sample of working women based on whether they receive assistance in household chores.*

<b>Do you receive assistance in completing household chores and taking care of the children?</b>		
No, I don't receive any assistance	50%	125
Yes, my family members rely on themselves	27%	67
Yes, I am excused from household chores	3%	7
Yes, my husband assists me with some tasks	20%	51

It appears that the burdens of domestic work and care duties become lighter for working women and gradually decrease as their children grow older and begin to rely on themselves. According to the survey, 27% of the women mentioned that their children becoming self-reliant has lessened their care work and household responsibilities. However, this typically occurs only after the working woman has surpassed the early stages of her career, approaches retirement age, and has missed out on many opportunities. Reflecting on her situation, one woman states: "I now consider myself somewhat relieved but with very few years left until retirement." This implies that women may not find relief until their children have grown up, and by then, many opportunities may have passed them by.

An expert at the Ministry of Planning divides the career path of a working woman in the public sector into two stages. The first stage is the youth and childbearing phase, where a woman's commitments are

numerous due to direct childcare responsibilities, hindering her progress and development. The second stage begins when children grow older, and female employees are relatively liberated from family commitments that had previously burdened them mentally, physically, and emotionally, consuming the majority of their time, and leading to challenges in finding sufficient time for their professional development.

Many women have developed various mechanisms to adapt and adopted multiple strategies to reconcile their work and reproductive roles within the family.

Some working women rely on their relatives, including sisters and parents, to help with certain caregiving tasks, such as looking after children after they return from school until their mother finishes work. Some have become more flexible in managing household tasks and cleaning duties, previously carried out daily but now scaled back to just two days a week.

Meanwhile, others have embraced modern technology, opting for online shopping or purchasing ready-made products, a trend that some women have increasingly adopted through internet platforms. This has proven to be a significant help for many working women.

Additionally, some employees have been compelled to take extended, half-pay leaves to dedicate themselves to caring for children and individuals with special needs.

#### **2.4. Family responsibilities and female workers' chances of attaining senior administrative positions**

Family responsibilities hinder and impede working women from advancing in their careers, limiting their ability to develop their skills and enhance their performance. The contrast between leadership roles and reproductive responsibilities makes it extremely challenging for women to compete with men for senior administrative positions or progress in their professional lives. However, exceptions exist for women liberated from family commitments or those without such responsibilities. In addition, the scarcity and absence of low-cost care services provided by the state, along with the unequal distribution of

household chores between genders, place the primary responsibility for caregiving and domestic work on women. This situation exacerbates their time poverty, thereby impeding their professional development.

In general, most women who have been able to assume leadership positions in various sectors are those who managed to free themselves from family commitments or those who sacrificed family life.

Interviews confirmed that the lives of female employees revolve around their families, and all working women, especially mothers, strive to align with the expectations of their reproductive roles. They prioritise family and express a willingness to leave their jobs or roles outside the home if these prove to be impediments to fulfilling their responsibilities toward their family, caring for their children, or if they lead to issues with their spouses due to shortcomings in managing these tasks.

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*"Personally, if I were to choose between work and family, I would definitely choose my family, especially if I feel that my job would lead to issues at home with my husband or if I sense that I would be neglecting my family responsibilities. Although I was offered a good position before, but I couldn't accept it due to the long working hours, as my time was already stretched thin, dedicated to fulfilling crucial household tasks, and I didn't want to fall short of my responsibilities towards my family. Naturally, women tend to prioritise their families, so if I were to choose, I would always choose my family over work." - H.A., a head of a division at a government administration's office in Baghdad*

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To understand the relationship between household responsibilities and the professional advancement of working women, a question was directed to the research sample about how caregiving and domestic work affect the professional development of working women.

Among the surveyed employees, 63%, equivalent to 158 individuals, reported that family commitments hinder women from participating in



training sessions and acquiring the necessary skills for their professional development. Additionally, 51% of the respondents confirmed that the time dedicated to household chores limits their professional development. Moreover, 57% of the sample acknowledged that family commitments hinder numerous female employees from taking on administrative roles and responsibilities. A significant 55% attributed the delayed professional development of female employees to the impact of caregiving responsibilities on their work commitment and frequent leave requests. Furthermore, 61% of the surveyed individuals believe that family duties and the multiplicity of roles impose psychological pressures affecting the performance of working women, making them less focused on their work compared to men. Consequently, this perception hampers their suitability for leadership roles.

*Table (15): Distribution of the study sample based on the impact of family responsibilities on the professional development of working women.*

<b>How do family duties and commitments affect the professional development of working women in the public sector?</b>								
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
Family commitments hinder participation in courses and training that require travel or staying away from home for an extended period	27%	67	36%	91	19%	48	18%	44
The time spent by working women on household chores and family responsibilities limits their professional development	20%	51	31%	77	24%	61	24%	61
Family commitments prevent some female employees from accepting important positions or	24%	61	33%	83	20%	51	22%	55

tasks that would qualify them for such roles								
Family commitments lead to frequent absences and an increased number of leaves	19%	47	36%	90	24%	61	21%	52
Family duties and the multiplicity of roles impose psychological pressures that impact the performance of working women	24%	60	37%	92	22%	54	18%	44

### **Impact of family responsibilities on women's participation in courses and training**

Many of the working women who have been interviewed miss out on significant career development opportunities because they struggle to balance family responsibilities with the time and effort needed for professional growth. The acquisition of new skills and essential experiences, crucial for enhancing competitiveness in leadership roles, usually requires time that is scarce for women juggling work and family care responsibilities. Particularly, mothers with young or school-aged children often choose to disregard or decline participation in valuable workshops and training courses because of their family commitments.

Jinan, the director of a municipal department within the Ministry of Housing, emphasises during her interview that she has declined participation in numerous training opportunities that could have brought her both financial and moral benefits. This decision was driven by the absence of someone to care for her children in her absence. She also points out that many female employees find it challenging to go beyond the confines of their offices within their organisations due to their family responsibilities. Additionally, some female employees avoid participating in developmental workshops and specific training sessions to avoid problems with their spouses, who are unwilling to take on family responsibilities during their long absences. Consequently, these women find themselves compelled to miss out on these opportunities,

fearing for the cohesion of their families and marital lives. A division supervisor, who prefers not to be identified, adds:

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*"I have received multiple offers for training opportunities, but I consistently decline them right away to avoid potential issues, as I am aware that my husband is likely to object."*

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Many women in the workforce sacrifice numerous opportunities that could greatly enhance their careers and boost their income because of caregiving responsibilities. A case in point is a holder of a master's degree working at a government hospital laboratory who cannot participate in a crucial training course. Through this course, she could obtain certification to open her medical diagnostic clinic. The constraints on her time, caught between work and the care of two young children, one being an infant, prevent her from undertaking the necessary preparations for the examination associated with the course that she hasn't been able to join in the first place.

The permission for women to work outside the home, driven by economic necessity, has not been accompanied by a significant change in social expectations or the traditional perception of women's roles. In addition, a woman's decision to work outside the home is often determined by her capability to handle all family duties alongside her career, without any neglect or shortcomings, and it is subject to specific working hours. One of the employees stated: "The husband expects his wife to go to work, do her job, and then head straight home. He would rather she not get involved in anything beyond taking care of household duties." This perspective was shared by S.A., a security consultant at the National Security Advisor's Office in Baghdad.

Several interviewees mentioned significant problems arising between them and their spouses due to their professional commitments, with two of the cases resulting in divorce.

**Regular absences and prolonged leaves**

Many working mothers are often forced to take time off or temporarily suspend work to fulfil their family responsibilities, especially during school exam periods. Concerns arise among directors and officials regarding women's recurrent and sometimes extended leaves, leading to missed opportunities for training and professional development.

Frequent leaves are viewed as a factor that slows down the professional progress of women, as one of the key criteria for nomination to middle administrative positions is discipline and commitment to uninterrupted working hours.

An expert at the Ministry of Planning's National Centre for Administrative Development highlighted that succeeding in job or promotion competitions typically demands a certain level of discipline. Hence, excessive leaves can act as an obstacle to career advancement.

The expert also noted that many female employees decline taking on administrative responsibilities because their domestic circumstances require them to take frequent leaves.

**Family commitments and assuming significant positions**

Family commitments and the difficulty of reconciling or balancing them with professional life largely determine the choices and decisions of working women. Many female employees refrain from taking on administrative responsibilities within their organisations, which could potentially prepare them for higher leadership roles, due to their family duties and commitments. This is because such roles demand full commitment to work and may even entail additional working hours.

One of the interviewees declined a nomination for a director position, recommending her unmarried colleague as a more suitable replacement. She had to miss out on such a great opportunity due to her caregiving responsibilities for her wheelchair-bound aunt, who resides with her at home, as well as managing household duties and helping her children with their studies.

The young employee and mother of two, working at a government hospital, underscored her decision to refrain from taking on the

responsibility of an administrative unit, which requires a full work commitment. This stemmed from her need to take leave to care for her two small children, one of whom is an infant, thereby hindering her from taking on the administrative role.

Employed mothers often find themselves obligated to take on insignificant tasks, occasionally falling short of their academic qualifications. This sacrifice is made to relieve work-related stress and facilitate her ability to manage family tasks.

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*"Despite holding a master's degree, my role as a nurse involves minor tasks such as blood withdrawal, which is below my qualifications. However, it is a necessity to save time for taking care of my daughter." – T.H., an employee at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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Many working women abandon their aspirations or lower their professional ambitions due to the additional burdens imposed by family responsibilities.

One of the employees mentioned that she received high grades in her Diploma of Peace Studies at the university, ranking first in her class. This accomplishment qualified her for a scholarship to pursue a master's degree at a university in Austria. However, she was unable to seize this opportunity due to her family commitments.

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*"My children were in their baccalaureate year, and I couldn't leave them to pursue my studies. In fact, a woman's aspirations are very often interrupted due to the demands and responsibilities of her family."*

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Family responsibilities prevent working women from running for higher positions, and most of them prioritise caring for their children over taking up an administrative role that requires more time commitment.

"An administrative position requires dedication. As women, we have responsibilities towards our families. And to be honest, I am against taking on work or a position that compromises my primary mission of building a stable family."

A survey study revealed that 57% of female employees in the public sector in Iraq who participated in the study are not interested in taking on administrative responsibilities. They attribute this reluctance to the multiplied tasks associated with administrative work, which could potentially interfere with their familial responsibilities.<sup>96</sup>

A considerable number of female workers resign from administrative positions due to their inability to balance their caregiving and household duties with the demands and responsibilities of their administrative roles.

H., who oversaw an administrative unit in the health sector, requested to be dismissed from this duty or position and replaced with a substitute to devote her entire time to caring for her special-needs son.

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*"I asked my director to be dismissed. I need to devote myself to my child and attend his medical appointments. I am always compelled to request a leave of absence."*

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### **The impact that the amount of time female workers dedicate to domestic duties has on their performance and attainment**

The additional burdens imposed on women prevent not only their mental and academic development but also their career prospects, which in turn hinders their ability to compete with men in terms of performance and efficiency.

"Women make considerable efforts to accomplish the numerous tasks assigned to them, both inside and outside their homes. Their exhaustion leads to a sense of helplessness and a lack of productivity, and family responsibilities limit their ambition and potential."

According to a female professor at Anbar University, female workers in this field face numerous challenges and obstacles, as evidenced by the interviews with doctorate-holding female educators, which showed their inability to finish the research required to advance and obtain academic titles in comparison to men.

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*"I am incapable of reading or even writing research papers. I have to visit my family's house so that my mother can look after my kids while I get on the computer and work on my research. It's impossible to find the time to do so at my home. While male educators now hold the title of professor, I continue to work as a teacher."*

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### **The pressures resulting from multiple roles and their impact on efficiency standards**

Interviewees reported experiencing intense psychological stress due to fulfilling numerous, sometimes contradictory roles, in addition to physical weariness and exhaustion from exerting extra effort to prevent feelings of negligence.

According to U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry, some of her coworkers cry out of exhaustion from trying to balance between their jobs and domestic responsibilities.

Another worker who was interviewed attests to the fact that she frequently jeopardises her health in an effort to do everything and complete every task given to her at home.

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*"By the end of the day, I'm at the end of my rope, and because of the heavy workload and burdens I bear, I suffer from joint and nerve diseases."*

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Female workers experience higher levels of guilt and neglect towards their families and children. Over four researchers who have been

interviewed expressed feeling neglectful for leaving their children while sick; for not meeting their needs and wants due to being pressed for time and having to get everything done quickly; for waking them up way ahead of time to get them ready for school; and for being unable to set aside enough time to play and spend time with them due to their busy schedules with work and house chores.

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*"I always feel guilty and break down in tears because of my failure to take better care of my children. Whether I go to wake them up at dawn and deprive them of sleep or leave them while they're sick to go to work." - J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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*"I feel that by always rushing home to get things done, I'm being neglectful towards my family. I often apologise to the girls when they ask me to prepare certain meals for them, as I don't have enough time to cook them." - H., an administrative manager in the healthcare sector in Baghdad*

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*"I feel that I'm being neglectful towards my children, especially my little daughter, as I've failed to devote enough time for her education after I committed to work." - T.H., an employee at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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An employed woman's attempt to balance her work outside her home and her family obligations frequently comes at her own expense, as she no longer has the time to rest or participate in activities that help her grow professionally and develop her skills and capabilities.



One of the Ministry of Culture's female employees said she felt bad about herself and had to see a psychiatrist because she couldn't stop feeling like she was always giving without receiving anything in return.

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*"To be honest, I feel like I am not taking care of myself, and while I was seeing a psychiatrist, I felt like I was giving more than I was receiving." – Anonymous, an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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Studies have concluded that the demands imposed on working mothers affect their work, resulting in a drop in their performance at work, which is the standard by which their efficiency is measured.<sup>97</sup>

Certain views categorise household work and the uneven distribution of domestic chores among spouses as a type of indirect discrimination against women. Such behavior may have similar repercussions to discrimination and is a contributing factor to women's stress levels. Moreover, some studies indicate that working women are increasingly developing severe depression. This is related to the fact that they bear sole responsibility for raising their children while the husband fails to contribute to the household burdens.<sup>98</sup>

## **2.5. Social protection measures for female workers in the public sector**

Juggling work and household chores is considered one of the major barriers preventing women from getting involved in public life, making decisions, and rising to leadership positions. As a result, many countries are being compelled to enact laws and implement policies aimed at assisting female workers in balancing work and family duties to safeguard working women's careers and reduce the burden of unpaid caregiving and household duties.<sup>99</sup>

The Iraqi public sector labour laws still make it impossible for working women to reconcile their personal and professional lives. Moreover, the state fails to offer working women a full range of services aimed

at reducing the amount of unpaid care they must provide, including daycare, elderly care, and other care-related services.

The state's capacity to provide services has significantly decreased in the past decades, especially since the 1980s, due to wars and economic sanctions. Women have also lost access to many state-provided services and facilities which reduced the burden of caregiving on families in general and working women in particular, such as transportation networks, good nurseries, and land plots allotted to state employees to address the housing crisis.

While the Iraqi government has implemented several measures focused on leaves, both paid and unpaid, measures that could significantly affect women's working and professional lives, such as flexible work schedules or reduced working hours, are still absent from public sector departments.<sup>8</sup>

This section focuses on reviewing labour policies and procedures that can reduce unpaid caregiving and household burdens on working mothers.

### **Leave of absence**

Leave of absence is an essential policy that can help achieve harmony between work and family life. It is designed to help working women effectively manage the obligations associated with both reproductive and productive activities.<sup>100</sup>

Important provisions regarding leave of absence and other factors allowing working women to work and care for their families have been provided by labour laws and regulations. The most important leaves for maternity protection<sup>9</sup> are probably those related

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<sup>8</sup> Article 12 of the Unified Pension Law No. 9 of 2014 has allowed working women who have three or more children to enjoy early retirement, provided that their service period is not less than 15 years. Some find that this article encourages women to leave work and return to their private sphere by considering them economically dependent and encouraging them to take this role instead of advancing at work.

<sup>9</sup> A pregnant employee is entitled to a period of 72 days of pregnancy and childbirth leave before and after giving birth, with full salary, provided that she takes no less than 21 days

to childbirth, maternity leave, and the nursing break, in which the breastfeeding worker is allowed two breastfeeding breaks during the work day, not exceeding one hour. Women also benefit from sabbatical leave to support a sick person or a disabled child, with a full salary, for a full year, renewable. Additionally, there is the newly implemented six-month "iddah" leave, which is granted to working women upon their husband's death to enable them to adhere to the customs of mourning for the deceased husband. During the waiting "iddah" period, the woman refrains from communicating with the outside world and only interacts with men if they are related to her. Such leave, as described by an expert at the Ministry of Planning, is unique to Iraqi legislation and has no equivalent in the world.

However, many female workers face immense difficulties and problems that prevent them from enjoying such leave.

During her interview, one of the employees pointed out several flaws in the leave system, including the limitation of regular leave to three days per month, extendable to five days in the event of sickness proved by medical report. Female workers find that three days are insufficient to care for a sick child who was injured during an accident. They believe that the period of leave should be determined more flexibly to respond to life events and care requirements.

Additionally, some female employees state that officials are reluctant to approve leave requests in some institutions, and they justify their refusals with the excuse of a shortage of workers to complete the tasks at hand. These employees perceive this as a lack of appreciation and

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before giving birth. This type of leave is stipulated in the Civil Service Law No. 24 of 1960, amended M/43/6. A year of maternity leave, split into two six-month periods, is granted to employed mothers in order to care for their children who are less than one year old. During this time, the mother is paid her full salary for the first half and half the salary for the other. When it comes to mothers of twins, they receive a year of fully paid leave. Despite not being specifically mentioned in the civil service law, this last leave is still in force as it was outlined in the now-dissolved Revolutionary Command Council Resolution No. (882) of 1987. It is evident that the political will behind this decision is to encourage births and enable women to raise children during times of war. See: <https://www.facebook.com/2105299303133169/photos/a.>

consideration for their situations, circumstances, and needs as people in charge and caregivers within the family.

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*"We are burdened with children and responsibilities, which is why we need a leave of absence. However, getting them is often difficult, and officials frequently make up reasons not to grant them, which negatively impacts our mental health and productivity at work."*  
- U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad

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Another female employee mentioned in the interview that her department's leave policy requires having a replacement, and that replacement is often another female employee rather than a male employee, which means that she would probably refuse to be a substitute because, among other things, she is a mother with obligations and needs time off as well.

As for maternity and childbirth leave, in many cases breastfeeding mothers cannot benefit from them, and there are many gaps when applying for and granting such leaves.

T.H., a Ministry of Health employee, states that she was unable to take advantage of the full-year maternity leave after giving birth, which hindered her ability to recuperate and care for her newborn daughter. This had a significant impact on her capacity to perform her responsibilities towards her family and career. The reason for that is that regulations require her to return to the original department from which she had requested a placement to a hospital close to her place of residence due to the long commute. According to the regulations, she is not permitted to request maternity leave from the department to which she was assigned (to which she was transferred), and she must return to her previous department to enjoy maternity leave. In such a case, regulations fail to guarantee the right for the employee to return to the same position after taking maternity leave. While the law must guarantee the protection of the employee from transfer and dismissal for reasons related to maternity and family responsibilities, some

female employees are surprised when they return to work after taking maternity leave to find themselves transferred to a different position.

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*“It was difficult for me to end the placement, as the hospital was pretty far from my house. I had to give up my right to maternity leave to avoid going back to where I was. Thus, I haven’t enjoyed my maternity leave.” T.H., an employee at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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According to a female employee who was interviewed, certain department officials discriminate against working women. They often complain and refuse to hire pregnant workers due to their reproductive role.

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*“Hiring mothers and married women is a frequent source of complaints. There’s often an unwillingness to hire them due to their right to take maternity leave.” - D.S., a teaching assistant at Anbar University*

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*“Indeed. I had sensed that even before beginning. During my initial meeting with the director at Baghdad Teaching Hospital, I was pregnant, but it wasn’t showing yet. Before me, there were two other pregnant women, but theirs were noticeable, as they were in the eighth or ninth month of their pregnancy, nearing the end of it. The three of us went together into the director’s office. Upon our entrance, the assistant director immediately grumbled, ‘Oh, what is it today with all of them being pregnant women going straight into maternity leave?’ He carelessly said that in our presence. The secretary replied ‘It is true that two of them are pregnant, but the third’, meaning me,*

*'is not.' As I've mentioned previously, my pregnancy was not yet noticeable, so he directed his words to me, saying 'Be careful not to get pregnant.' I responded 'Whoever told you that I'm not pregnant?' He was taken aback and shocked, wondering how the three of us could be newly hired pregnant women. We had this conversation even before officially beginning our duties." - T. H., an analyst at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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To ensure that maternity leave does not hinder the woman's career, advancement arose it was necessary to guarantee that working women do not lose their seniority as a result of maternity.<sup>101</sup> Many women, however, are unable to take advantage of maternity leave, as it leads to disregarding full years of service under the University Service Law or the Civil Service Law, and it delays the employee's promotion for a minimum of two years.

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*"The duration of leave, if given, is not counted towards bonuses and promotions, just as the duration of maternity leave is not counted towards academic promotion, even if that leave is limited to six months only. Female teaching staff are compelled to give a compensatory period, despite having to undergo a performance evaluation within the same year of taking the maternity leave. Since the University of Baghdad's guidelines require that performance evaluations be consecutive from the date of the last academic promotion, this requires compensating for the duration of maternity leave by two years or more, while men do not suffer from such repercussions. As a result, many of them perform better than women and seize early opportunities for academic advancement. Women's creativity and potential are undermined by this discrimination, which also weakens their confidence in the academic institution. Furthermore, women are deprived of their full salary benefits when granted maternity leave to care for their children,*

***while men bear no such consequences.” – D.F., a teacher at the University of Baghdad***

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Female employees in other departments attested to the unfairness of the law when it comes to maternity leave, stating that a female employee loses three months of pay upon taking such leave.

***“The duration of the leave is a full year, the first half of which is paid in full while in the other half the woman receives half her salary. Only three months of service are counted, and the last three months are not counted as service for the employee.” - D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad***

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As for the nursing break, it is one of the policies designed to support working mothers who wish to continue nursing their children or expressing milk at work for a brief period after going back to work. This way, the mother has the opportunity to nurse her child in or near the workplace.<sup>102</sup>

Paragraph (1) of Article 91 of the Labour Law permits a breastfeeding worker to nurse her child twice for up to one hour during the workday and considers the nursing period as part of the working hours.<sup>103</sup> However, a female employee who was interviewed stated that such measures are not acknowledged by officials in public sector departments.

Most departments also lack designated areas for breastfeeding. T.H. is forced to give various excuses to her colleagues and director in order to be able to breastfeed her daughter inside her husband's car, as the latter usually brings the child because she refuses to take baby formula. In situations where her husband is unable to bring up the child, she finds herself having no choice but to request time off.

***“I prefer natural breastfeeding for my children. I used to breastfeed my daughter in the morning before***

*leaving to work, as she was not accustomed to baby formula and refused to take it. Her father would bring her to work at 10:00, so I would ask permission for a little while to breastfeed her in the car, and then I would return to work, and her father would take her back home. In cases where my husband was unable to bring her, I would pretend that I was going to buy something and leave quickly. If I knew I would be late, I would request permission to go home for a brief period so that I could nurse her before hurrying back to work.” - T. H., an analyst at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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Even though leaves are paid in full for female employees, the allowances given for transportation, hazards, and other situations that add value to wages and salaries are deducted. As a result, many female employees are forced to forfeit their right to this leave due to a pressing need for financial allowances that increase the value of the salary.

This applies to sabbatical leave to care for a sick person<sup>10</sup> or a disabled child. Although the leave is granted to the female employee with full pay, allowances are deducted upon its application.

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*“A law granting full pay for sabbatical leave to support a sick or disabled child was enacted in 2013, applying to any sick family member, which means that I have the legal right to a year of fully paid sabbatical leave under this law. However, only the nominal, marital, and child allowances were given to me during the law’s implementation; the remaining allowances for hazards and transportation were deducted, which are the ones that add value to the salary. A friend of mine has a disabled son. She applied for leave based on this law and then filed a*

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<sup>10</sup> Such leave serves as a tool to mitigate the costs imposed by the market on people who spend their time caring for others. Instead of paying them, they are entitled to take leave. In this case, the time granted is a substitute for cash compensation. See: Women’s Economic Empowerment, p. 31.



*complaint to the ministry, asking why the allowances were being deducted. Although the law mentions a full salary, my nominal allowance is 400 thousand IQD), the marital allowance is 50 thousand IQD, and the children's allowances are 10 thousand IQD for each child. The total is approximately 500 thousand IQD, which is not enough. The autism centre where my son was placed alone charges me 450 thousand IQD. Even though the law permits me to take a second year of leave, I will not be able to enjoy it because I need my entire salary."*

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However, the processes to request sabbatical leave are very complicated and involve medical committees and appointments. Many female employees are forced to forfeit this leave as the sick or disabled person in need of care cannot accompany the caregiver to undergo these procedures.

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*"Another employee at our department needed time off to tend to her sick mother. They informed her that to get it, she would have to go through a complex procedure that involved submitting a request to the ministry and medical committees and that even though her mother was ill and couldn't do it, she would still need to attend before these committees. Upon becoming aware of these procedures, she decided not to pursue this leave and instead settled for occasionally taking unpaid leave to care for her sick mother." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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Sabbatical leave is exclusively designated for working women and does not apply to male employees. Other leave arrangements that are now regarded as family-friendly measures are not included in Iraqi labour laws, such as parental leave that is taken by either parent or both parents successively or simultaneously after the end of maternity leave

and paternity leave, which could enhance equality between women and men in unpaid care work and dispel stereotypes about gender roles concerning child care.<sup>104</sup>

### **Flexible working hours**

Working women in Iraq encounter significant challenges in maintaining consistent work schedules due to their family obligations. The government sector lacks flexible policies regarding working hours, which would allow employees to work part-time or specify a weekly work schedule to abide by, regardless of when they arrive and depart from work.

Studies have demonstrated that allowing for flexibility in scheduling work hours and duration to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life can significantly boost performance, efficiency and productivity.<sup>105</sup>

Even though their actual working hours may end at least an hour earlier, female public sector employees suffer from lengthy workdays and are often required to stay at their places of employment until 2:00 or 3:00 pm. Female workers described the last hour as difficult, as many family responsibilities await them at home.

Many of the interviewed female employees discussed the unequal impact of long working hours on men and women who work in the public sector. They also compared the tasks that men and women perform and described how discrimination in the distribution of household chores between men and women affects their lives.

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*“When a man gets home, his food is ready, so he eats lunch and goes to bed. A working woman, on the other hand, gets up at 6:00 am and leaves work after 3:00 pm to prepare lunch, finish household chores, prepare food for the next day, and follow up on the children’s lessons.”*

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Female employees believe that this unfair distribution of duties and responsibilities is a significant burden on working women. Another issue that befalls female employees who are mothers of school-aged children is the clash in their schedules, as they often don't end at the same time. This leaves them worried about where their children could go after school or kindergarten. This compels many female employees to bring their children to work from school until the end of the workday. These employees find this to be an exhausting and demanding process for both the kids and the working mother. From their perspective, this can easily be prevented, either by providing designated childcare areas and rooms within the departments or by unifying all institutions' working hours so that the workday of working mothers ends at the same time as their kids' school day.

One of the biggest issues and sources of pressure for women employed in the public sector is fingerprinting; an electronic system that requires taking employees' thumbprints when they enter and exit the workplace, which completely contradicts the calls to adopt flexible working hours and times.

Many female employees find the idea of fingerprinting to be very humiliating.

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*“Fingerprinting is also an issue, and we are treated as if we were children, (...) There is no exemption. We must arrive on time and give our fingerprints at 7:00 am. We live in an unstable country, so being there on time is quite challenging, and there is no tolerance for delay. For instance, how can a woman who has commitments and children arrive this early in the morning?” - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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The fingerprint forces working women to stay until the end of the workday, even in exceptional cases in which the employed mother must bring her children from school when they finish before the end of the working day.

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*“I enrolled my son in a private school that best fits his needs because of his medical condition. I met with the former director-general as a humanitarian case and requested to leave an hour earlier because my son who has a health condition needs me when his schedule ends, as he will remain alone at school if I don’t go. They allowed me a certain time, but a new director-general came, he no longer allowed it.” - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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The fingerprinting procedure has also resulted in an extension of working hours for female employees who must wait in queues after work hours.

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*“The fingerprinting procedure was scheduled for 8:30 am, but our director requested that we arrive at least fifteen minutes early. They treat me as if I were a soldier at work, expecting me to perform my duties without any exceptions. There must be exceptions at work for certain situations. For instance, I used to leave my house at 6:45 am, but the Bab Al-Moatham area has a traffic issue. Eventually, I had to hire a cab to get me there on time, which used to come at 6:40. At the end of the workday, I used to have to wait in line for my fingerprint, as the fingerprint office opened at 2:15 pm. I arrived home after a very long time. Due to traffic, I didn’t get home until around 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. The location was quite distant, and I felt that the commute was exhausting.” - T. H., an analyst at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad*

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### **3. Cultural challenges**

Cultural and historical stereotypes about women’s capacity for holding leadership positions pose numerous obstacles to working women’s

career advancement and have a significant impact on the representation of women in senior administrative positions.

Customs and traditions impose further restrictions that hinder women's ability to advance in their careers and acquire the necessary expertise in basic fields to become competitive candidates for leadership roles at all levels.

Cultural challenges reveal how predominate perceptions of women affect the professional advancement of female public sector employees. They also highlight the extent to which societal perceptions of leadership as a male attribute—that is, that men are more capable and efficient than women—hinder female employees' ability to access leadership roles in the public sector. Furthermore, they demonstrate how these theories account for the hostile attitudes that women encounter when they hold senior administrative positions and how cultural customs and traditions create pressure and obstacles that exacerbate the issues faced by working women.

### **3.1. The culture of patriarchal institutions**

Institutional culture is a reflection of the values and beliefs that establish the rules for behavior within an institution. It takes into account the prevalent public perceptions of women's skills and qualifications as well as the stereotypical ideas about the traits that men and women should possess and the roles they should play. This frequently results in negative attitudes towards female employees and the rejection of women in leadership positions.

Some studies assume that all institutions have a patriarchal culture, even if it varies from one country to another. This stems from the fact that these institutions, along with their administrative frameworks, were initially formed by men, given that the workforce was exclusively composed of men. This leads to the implicit assumption that the common culture prevailing within institutions is shaped by men. Given that these institutions were founded by men, the organisational and administrative structures are tailored more to the needs of men. This can result in biases against women in positions of authority and

increase the likelihood that men will lead these institutions more successfully than women.<sup>106</sup>

Working women’s professional advancement is significantly impacted by historical views and preconceptions persisting in the public sector, which perceive women as weak and lacking the necessary expertise and knowledge to hold leadership positions.

Over 50% of the female participants in the survey confirmed that the dominant culture in their organisations holds the belief that women are less dedicated than men and less capable of performing tasks. 27% of the participants acknowledged that this view was present but limited, while 23% said these views were not present.

Table (16): Distribution of the sample of working women based on their views regarding the organisation’s assessment of their abilities.

Are female employees seen as less dedicated and less capable of performing tasks properly at work?		
Yes, considerably	50%	125
Yes, somewhat	27%	67
No	23%	58

Interviews revealed that working women face negative attitudes towards their work and constant scepticism about their abilities and qualifications within their institutions.

A female respondent attested to the fact that over her ten years at work, she was subject to a patriarchal authority that attempted to limit her work and performance. This is due to her performance posing a threat to the patriarchal authority at work and its monopoly on decisions within the organisation.

*“Throughout my ten years of service, I was subjected to patriarchal authority. Men feared that I would outperform them. They were uncomfortable working*

*with me, as I work with seriousness and dedication, and they believed that by holding the highest authority, they should be the ones making final decisions, not women. Of course, the higher leadership supported them in this matter by their kinship or family relations with the leaders, so they had priority in everything.” - D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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Several respondents attested during the interviews to the existence of hostile attitudes in the workplace. Such attitudes view women as rivals to men in their source of livelihoods and accuse working women of taking over men’s job opportunities, thus pushing them out of the workplace, while leaving their primary responsibility of raising their children to daycare centres. This is often spoken outright or jokingly, but it expresses and reflects the misogynistic culture that permeates institutions as an intellectual and ideological system that pushes women to the margins and restricts their opportunities to hold decision-making positions or assume high responsibilities.

One of the female employees said that she often heard the phrase ‘Stay at home, what are you working for?’. “It is frequently said, whether seriously, in jest, or when requesting a leave of absence. It is something we hear from directors and some coworkers all the time; they say it directly to us, particularly when we request leave.”

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*“We constantly hear from some people expressions like ‘Stay at home, what are you working for?’ especially when asking for leave ‘If you’re asking for leave, why do you come to work in the first place? Why do you work? Just stay at home. They always say this to us, sometimes as a joke, but they mean it, thinking that we are taking their place and that they are more deserving since they are men. Of course, this doesn’t apply to everyone. Some respectable people appreciate women.” - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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According to an interviewee from the Basra Governorate, male colleagues frequently remind women that they should stay at home and care for the children, giving men the right to guardianship and financial responsibility.

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*“During every session held at school, the men often say, whether directly or indirectly, that we have children, we have responsibilities, and that they are our guardians. ‘We are the ones who take care of you financially. You women are supposed to stay at home. This is your place.’” - Y.N., a teacher at a school for accelerated education in the Basra Governorate*

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### **Acceptance of women’s leadership in public sector institutions from female workers’ perspectives**

The discrimination and animosity faced by women in administrative roles stem from entrenched cultural attitudes and beliefs associating women with domestic responsibilities and casting doubt on their ability to handle professional duties. Moreover, the prevailing perception that leadership is a quality inherently belonging to men rather than women exacerbates the challenges encountered by women assuming administrative positions. In the interviews, three female employees occupying mid-level administrative roles cited the initial hurdle of subordinates resisting female leadership as a prominent issue they encountered.

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*“Women in the workplace often encounter resistance from employees or subordinates who may not be comfortable with having a woman in a leadership position. They may perceive women as insignificant, expecting them to simply comply with tasks without expressing any objections, regardless of the nature or quality of their work. Any objection on the woman’s*



*part may result in reassigning her to a different role.”*  
*- J. A, a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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Some women compare the situation to a battle, where they often encounter challenges and barriers aimed at eliminating or removing them from their positions, particularly if these roles come with financial or moral benefits, as stated by an official in the security division at one of the electricity departments.

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*“For example, I am the only woman to hold a security position within the electricity directorate. I fought hard to seize this opportunity, as colleagues argued that the role was unsuitable for a woman, and several men attempted to take over the position, all the while wanting the financial gains it generated. Attempts were made to discredit my abilities, falsely claiming that the director had instructed my removal on the grounds of incompetence. They believed that women were incapable of managing this position and that it was made for men. Such attitudes stemmed from their patriarchal mentalities, rather than a genuine assessment of my skills.” - S.L., an employee at the Najibiya power station in the Basra Governorate*

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Over half of the sample, i.e. 51% of female employees in the current survey, indicated that their subordinates, namely men, struggle to accept a woman as their boss at work. Meanwhile, 24% acknowledged this issue to a lesser extent, and only 26% of female workers believe that male employees are fully accepting of a female boss.

*Table (17) Distribution of the sample of working women based on their views regarding accepting a woman as their boss.*

Do employees accept having a woman as their boss?		
Yes, they accept	26%	65

No, somewhat	24%	59
No, not at all	51%	126

### **Ignoring female workers' contributions and initiatives**

The patriarchal administrative culture within public sector institutions, combined with the perception of female workers as less capable and unsuitable for higher administrative roles, results in the disregard of female employees' contributions, expertise, and initiatives. This prevents their suggestions and recommendations from being considered in developing work processes, ultimately constraining their ambition and dampening their sense of innovation and initiative. The majority of female employees interviewed stated that their employers do not give serious consideration to their suggestions and often overlook their contributions, based on the perception that women lack the qualifications to take the lead due to their limited experience.

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*"He doesn't even listen to our proposals, and he believes his opinion is always correct. He directly objects to my proposals and tells me that they are wrong. This approach breaks my spirit, knowing that I am dedicated, skilled, and exceptional in my work compared to others, and yet I am treated in this manner. This fosters a sense of frustration within me. At times, it compels me to retreat or underperform, and occasionally I even find myself bored with my work environment." - S.A., a national security advisor in Baghdad*

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Women employed in male-dominated sectors and institutions, such as the security sector, face more significant hurdles in having their perspectives taken into consideration, participating in decision-making processes within the institution, and pushing their ideas and viewpoints. They are further underestimated in their capacity to innovate, create, and make decisions.

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*“In the public sector, particularly within security services, women face challenges due to societal and workplace patriarchy. For instance, male colleagues with high military ranks would dismiss the input of their female colleagues, although they are often right, and express scepticism towards the opinions of women. Their mindset is programmed to believe that men inherently have a superior understanding than women. You rarely find men that support and appreciate women’s perspectives and contributions, with perhaps only one out of ten individuals truly valuing our work and decisions and everything we have to offer.” - S.A., a national security advisor in Baghdad*

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Even in cases where women’s achievements and creativity are recognised, their efforts are often stolen and credited to others. Numerous female employees interviewed expressed dissatisfaction with the confiscation, concealment, and stealing of their efforts and proposals, and crediting them to others, often directors. At least two female workers reported that their research intended for patent applications or reports submitted to international organisations were appropriated by male directors or officials, who then represented these efforts as their own without acknowledging the female employees who had prepared the report.

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*“I was distinguished in submitting recommendations and reports among men and women. Even the international conferences that I was prohibited from participating in, which were organised by international organisations, used to present my work and videos despite my lack of participation. That’s why the director used to accept my ideas and proposals, only so he could give himself credit for them.” - N.K., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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A female researcher at the Ministry of Industry said she needed to include the director's name in her experiments and research, for which she might obtain a "patent" from the Ministry of Planning, even without him having any involvement in it.

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*"Even when I propose an idea that would benefit our work, approval would depend on his mood. If he approves of the idea, his name takes precedence over mine, which is standard practice in the department. For instance, a patent should be submitted to the Ministry of Planning, and despite personally drafting the entire patent myself, the director's name is still listed before mine, despite his lack of involvement or knowledge in the matter." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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Another employee confirmed:

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*"Our ideas and efforts are often stolen, and upon submission, we are often surprised to find other names listed on them. Yet, we find ourselves powerless to object for fear of repercussions (because he would fight us and we would lose). As a result, we remain silent. Women are tired in any case, and they have no recourse for justice." - J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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The results of the current survey reveal that 34% of the female workers reported a lack of sufficient authority to make decisions that would benefit their work. Additionally, 50% of female workers experienced direct interference from senior staff, while the percentage of women involved in decision-making processes did not exceed 36%. Moreover, 36% of female workers reported facing difficulties due to not being given the freedom to complete their work as they see fit.

Table (18) Distribution of the sample of working women based on their views regarding ignoring their contributions and initiatives.

To what extent are female workers' contributions and initiatives ignored?						
	Yes		Somewhat		No	
Do you have sufficient authority to make decisions that would benefit work?	27%	67	39%	98	34%	85
Does your direct supervisor interfere with your work?	50%	125	35%	89	14%	36
Are you involved in decisions related to your work?	36%	90	37%	93	27%	67
Do your directors approve the suggestions and ideas you present to develop the work?	34%	86	42%	106	23%	58
Are female workers given the freedom to complete tasks as they deem fit?	20%	50	44%	111	36%	89

The biased personal views of certain directors, shaped by their cultural norms and beliefs regarding women's capabilities and readiness to take on significant roles, obstruct women's chances of advancing to leadership positions, receiving training, or obtaining higher administrative roles.

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***"My director harboured a bias against women, believing that they were unfit for high-level positions or success. He held an unnatural animosity toward them. When I was nominated for the role of regional director, he made every effort to obstruct my appointment, the last of which was issuing a letter declaring me as surplus staff, effectively using his***

*authority to prevent my advancement. When the International Federation sought a replacement for a program director who was taking a leave of absence, I was nominated to fill the role, and she recommended Inaam to serve as a coordinator between the Federation and the Red Crescent. Although she proposed my name, the director rejected my nomination. I was also nominated to train trainers in Sweden, and he rejected that nomination as well.” – Anonymous, a former employee at the Red Crescent (a quasi-governmental organisation)*

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The institutional patriarchal culture and the belief that women lack the qualifications and capabilities necessary to perform technical work, particularly fieldwork, hinder many female professionals from pursuing their specialised fields and utilising their academic qualifications, particularly when their roles involve on-site work or site supervision.

One female employee has confirmed that female engineers at the Ministry of Electricity are tasked with office-based assignments and are not permitted to engage in fieldwork, despite the majority of tasks in the sector being conducted on-site. As a result, they are primarily carried out by male employees. Typically, male technicians hold administrative roles within these departments based on their technical or trade background, even when their educational qualifications are lower than those of female engineers.

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*“Most of the Ministry of Electricity’s departments work on-site. Such tasks are assigned to men, while female engineers are assigned to office work only. Women don’t receive these assignments due to their gender, as well as the influence of societal norms and traditions. Instead, a technician of lower academic standing assumes these responsibilities. Individuals who graduated from middle school are deemed craftsmen or technicians and are granted higher roles than engineers purely for being men, which reflects the patriarchal mentality within the departments.” –*

### **3.2. Impact of customs and traditions on female workers**

#### **Changes in attitudes towards women's employment**

During the interviews, many female workers said that the barriers imposed by customs and traditions, which restricted women's ability to work outside their homes and determined the professions they could pursue, have started to gradually ease off.

Among the women surveyed, 56% (the highest percentage in the sample) said that the impact of customs and traditions is declining compared to before. By contrast, 24% said that this impact is still strong, while 20% acknowledged a limited but still impactful role of customs and traditions.

*Table (19): Distribution of the sample of working women based on the impact of customs and traditions on women's work.*

<b>To what extent do customs and traditions affect women working in the public sector?</b>		
The impact of traditions has declined	56%	141
The impact of traditions remains high	24%	59
Customs and traditions are somewhat impactful	20%	50

Interviewees have identified several areas demonstrating a noticeable shift in attitudes towards women's employment. These areas signal the start of a new phase in which longstanding customs and traditions no longer hinder women's ability to pursue new roles beyond those traditionally associated with managing household affairs as housewives.

An important area that has undergone significant transformation in terms of women's employment is the increasing acceptance within families who are now allowing their daughters to pursue professions

that were previously prohibited for women and girls. Examples of such professions include sales roles in major commercial centers (malls), sales representatives, waitresses in cafes, and other occupations that involve long and late working hours. Initially, engaging in such professions diminished women's prospects of marriage, leading potential suitors to reject them.

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*“There has been a significant shift in Iraqi society's attitude towards women's employment, with a notable 50% change in perspective. It is now acceptable for girls to be employed in malls or stores, as opposed to the previous societal norms where such employment opportunities were frowned upon and subject to criticism. This change has led to a decrease in societal pressure. There are still situations where young men, upon discovering that a prospective female partner works in a mall, retract their marriage proposals due to concerns about her being visible to everyone.” - M.A., an electrical engineer working at the Diyala Electricity Directorate*

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Two female employees in the security sector affirmed that the previous resistance and lack of support for women pursuing demanding careers involving hazardous conditions that contradict the “feminine nature” of women and impact their roles as wives and mothers, such as in the security forces, has changed, as society has now become more receptive to women's participation in this field.

One interviewee confirmed that the absolute rejection of women's employment in the security service has become a source of pride and a reason for bragging. Moreover, the look of disdain towards female workers in this field has turned into appreciation.

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*“Over the past decade, I've noticed a significant evolution in attitudes towards women working in defense, national security, and counterterrorism.*



*Previously, families couldn't accept this, but now it seems to be more widely embraced. In fact, there is even a sense of pride associated with it. For instance, a relative of mine recently attained a position in defense. Initially, my mother expressed disapproval of a woman holding such a position, but her perspective shifted when she met a female brigadier general in the defense forces. It was clear that she was genuinely impressed, leading to a positive change in her attitude." - N.K., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Other participants perceive the increasing involvement of women in high-ranking roles and political candidacy, along with their participation in provincial councils without familial constraints, as a significant sign of a shifting perspective toward women's employment. This trend provides further evidence of the declining impact of traditional cultural legacies and ideologies.

The impact of customs and traditions on women in Iraq differs by region. Women in urban areas, particularly in the capital city of Baghdad, experience fewer constraints on their mobility and benefit from relatively more workplace freedom.

Moreover, the situation in governorates with traditional tribal structures is completely different, as the clan and family still impose restrictions on women based on legacies, customs, and traditions.

This study reveals the transformations and changes with regard to women and employment in areas with tribal structures, which exhibit a conservative and closed outlook on women's employment beyond the home and family farm.

This is especially true in the regions of western Iraq, whose residents, up until recently, had resisted women going out to work, and the customs and traditions of these regions determine certain professions that are believed to suit the nature of women. These professions ensure fewer interactions with men, such as teaching and education.

Participants in the study from the regions of Anbar, Kubaisa Hit, and Ramadi confirmed that the major transformation their regions witnessed about women's employment was clearly reflected in the amount of participation in the labour market in their region, the type of participation, and the nature of the work they practice.

The shift in perception towards women's employment and the traditional cultural system's condoning of women going out to work is linked to the conflicts witnessed by these areas. Participants from the areas of Hit, Ramadi, and Kubaisa in Anbar Governorate identified ISIS's invasion of their areas as a turning point between two eras about women and work (pre-ISIS and post-ISIS).

The participants confirm that the customs and traditions of their community (before ISIS entered their areas) did not allow or encourage women to work. It was not acceptable for a woman to leave the house for any reason without the company of one of her relatives (husband, father, or older sisters).

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*"In the past, women were only permitted to go out accompanied by their husbands. When they went to the store, the husband would accompany them, and if the woman wished to make a purchase, the husband would speak on her behalf to the store owner. However, this has all changed, and now women have the freedom to go out alone. There has been a noticeable increase in "openness" within the community." - F.H., a teacher at Anbar University*

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Regarding the nature of work, women were only allowed to work in certain sectors, often in the field of education. It was rare for women to work in professions such as nursing or hospitals, for example. Their participation in the workforce was subject to specific conditions and regulations to ensure segregation from men. For instance, "a strange man is not allowed to transport her to school." However, this situation has witnessed evident changes, and there is now a (relative) acceptance of women working in institutions and departments where it was

previously prohibited (such as the governorate, electricity, and hospitals). Some women have been allowed to work without pay while waiting to obtain a contract.

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*“Women were rarely employed as nurses in the governorate’s hospitals, with a preference for hiring nurses from outside the governorate. Most public sector service departments and institutions were predominantly (90%) male staffed. However, over the past decade, there has been a notable shift in societal attitudes, with an increasing number of local women now working as nurses. Additionally, there has been a significant change in the employment landscape, with women now being able to work in government departments such as irrigation, Qaimqamiya, and other previously male-dominated areas. Female graduates in engineering are now able to secure positions in various departments, marking a significant societal shift. Despite this transformation, teaching positions are still commonly preferred for female graduates.” - S.B., a teacher in the Anbar Governorate*

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S. confirms that she comes from a district in Anbar Governorate and was recently employed in a department in which men constitute the majority of workers.

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*“My colleague and I are the first two female employees to be appointed in the Electricity Department, which had previously been limited to male employees. Due to societal norms and customs, women were typically only permitted to work in education, rather than in our field. However, there has been a significant shift in the perception of women’s employment in these areas, leading to a positive development in attitudes towards women’s*

*work.” - S., an employee at the Ministry of Electricity  
in the Anbar Governorate*

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*“Prior to the rise of ISIS, societal customs and traditions imposed significant challenges. Women were prohibited from working or venturing outside their homes unaccompanied. Even when attending girls’ colleges, my sisters-in-law were prevented from pursuing employment by their husbands, saying it was “shameful for a wife to be employed”. Furthermore, women were constrained from leaving their homes to attend school, with restrictions even extending to interactions with unrelated men, such as taxi drivers. Upon returning to Anbar, my sisters-in-law offered their services to educational institutions, uncompensated, to carry out meaningful work, while awaiting formal contracts. It is now widely acceptable for women to be employed outside their homes in places of employment where females were not commonly found. In Ramadi, the number of women driving cars has increased significantly, with only three women driving previously, whereas now the majority of women are behind the wheel.” - F.H., a teacher at Anbar University*

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Nevertheless, enabling women to work in these areas remains subject to restrictions and challenges aimed at limiting their mobility and preventing interactions with men. Interviewees in the study cited requirements such as wearing the niqab (Boshiya) and refraining from using cosmetics while at work.

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*“I was asked not to come into contact with men and to wear the Boshiya at work because all the employees I have to deal with are men. I was asked to*

*wear it only at the department, but not outside. I wore the niqab at work, and the same applies to my female colleagues, whose husbands obliged them to wear the Boshiya and prevented them from wearing makeup at work.” - S., an employee at the Ministry of Electricity in the Anbar Governorate*

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The three female employees at the Electricity Directorate in one of Anbar’s districts were isolated in a separate room, even though they had different specialisations. They were prohibited from accessing the departments, units, and divisions related to their respective job descriptions and majors, as a measure to ensure compliance with the societal traditions and customs prevailing in those areas.

#### **Factors influencing attitudes toward women’s employment from respondents’ perspectives**

The respondents indicated various factors as reasons for the shift, namely the economic factor, disruption of livelihoods, and families’ reliance on the financial contributions from women’s employment. This shift was prompted by rising unemployment rates, financial inflation, and the increasing prevalence of a consumer-driven culture. More than one employee confirmed that the harsh living conditions have pushed families to accept women's work.

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*“The real reason is the livelihood challenges, with the husband’s salary no longer being sufficient to meet the family’s needs. Life now requires more than one resource of income and more than one person to work.” - S., an employee at the Ministry of Electricity in the Anbar Governorate*

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The current survey results support the need for families to rely on the income generated from women's work to meet living conditions. When asked about the significance of a female employee's salary and how it is perceived, 47% of the women surveyed indicated that their salaries are

seen as the main source of family income. Meanwhile, 26% stated that it contributes equally to the husband's income, and 25% agreed that their income is considered as additional income that only meets the needs of the woman.

Female employees in Baghdad who had previously engaged in civil society endeavours hold the belief that civil society organisations play a significant role in promoting awareness of women's rights, including access to resources and opportunities. The impact of these organisations in the capital appears to be more profound compared to their influence in other regions when it comes to advocating for the importance of women's involvement in public affairs and economic participation in particular.

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*"Since 2003, there has been a noticeable shift in society's perception of women's work and employment, marked by increasing acceptance. This shift can be attributed to the efforts of civil society organisations as well as well-educated and successful women who directly engage with society to raise awareness about women's roles and rights. Such endeavours have significantly contributed to a positive evolution in societal attitudes towards women. As a result, some men have become willing to work under the leadership of successful women." - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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In the governorates affected by conflict and ISIS invasion, such as Anbar, Diyala, Salah al-Din, and Mosul, there has been a notable shift in attitudes towards women's employment. Study participants affirmed that displacement, particularly into Baghdad and the Kurdistan regions, has had a positive effect on women's empowerment. Furthermore, the influence of traditions and customs in limiting women's mobility and isolating them has diminished.

During the interviews, three participants attested to the fact that displacement played a notable role in fostering a more open and accepting society for women to venture out independently, as well as in enabling them to pursue employment outside the household and in new professional domains that had been inaccessible to women.

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*“Upon moving to Erbil following the ISIS invasion, our community became more open upon witnessing life in Erbil. The displacement had a positive impact, leading to greater social openness and a shift in various beliefs and ideals.” - F.H., a teacher at Anbar University*

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S. believes that the displacement resulting from ISIS’s control over these regions significantly contributed to this shift, as it presented residents with an opportunity to acquaint themselves with different cultures and adapt to new, more open attitudes toward women’s employment in the areas where they were relocated.

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*“This shift has accompanied the generational transformation. There is now a sense of openness, and it’s like living in a small, closed city. Without this newly embraced openness, we would still be suffering like we did in the past. However, the widespread availability of the means of communication and the Internet has ultimately led to greater awareness among the generations.” - S.B., a teacher in the Anbar Governorate*

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The experience of displacement alone was insufficient to lead to a significant shift in the acceptance of women’s employment in conservative and closed cultural settings. It cannot be definitively stated that conservative societies in these regions witnessed a shift in their attitudes towards women’s engagement in the workforce for reasons other than the economic situation. However, the experience of displacement and exposure to the cultures of host communities is not

sufficient to explain this significant shift in accepting women's work in conservative and closed cultural environments<sup>11</sup>. Rather, the harsh living conditions that the residents of these areas suffered during their displacement and upon their return to their devastated regions, and the loss of livelihood sources for many of them, played a role in weakening the dominance of customs and traditions related to women's work outside the home and interacting with strangers. Families were forced to accept the idea of women's economic participation, especially after losing their sources of livelihood. S., who became engaged in work after returning from a long period of displacement during the control of ISIS, says, "The real reason is the living difficulties, where the husband's salary is no longer sufficient to meet the family's needs, and my work represents an additional resource that can be important. Life requires more than one working individual.

The acceptance of women in fields and professions previously prohibited to them in all major cities of Iraq, particularly young women entering new career paths, stemmed from a combination of factors. First, the public sector ceased hiring. Additionally, the politicisation of the public sector and the prevalence of party affiliations made it difficult for women to secure job opportunities, as they had to be close to the political party leading the relevant ministry or institution. Moreover, Iraq's economic challenges, along with its fragmentation and political instability, severely weakened the private sector's ability to offer employment opportunities for women. The percentage of female

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<sup>11</sup> According to the results of another study conducted by the researcher on women returning to villages that were under the control of ISIS, 18.4% of the survey sample indicated their inability to work due to societal perceptions and the male-dominated barriers that prevent women from making decisions to work. Many women still face imposed restrictions on their movement, limiting their ability to work and participate in activities carried out by women's organisations in their areas. This information is cited from Asmaa Jameel Rashid's analysis of the needs of women and girls affected by the conflict in a study titled "The Situation of Returning Women in Sinnasal Villages," an unpublished research prepared for the benefit of the HAWA Relief and Development Organization, 2022.



employees in the private sector declined from 32% in 2012 to 29% in 2014.<sup>107</sup>

### **Customs and traditions hinder the professional advancement of female employees**

Despite shifts in attitudes and trends surrounding women's employment and permissible professions, entrenched customs, traditions, and stereotypical notions continue to present obstacles to the professional advancement of female workers in the public sector. These factors still impose tangible restrictions on many women, hindering their ability to receive the required training, participate in international delegations, or pursue careers aligned with their academic specialisations. Consequently, these barriers impede their access to significant administrative roles. This confirms that allowing women to work outside the home does not reflect a genuine shift in the social values pertaining to women or recognition of their right to access resources and opportunities. Rather, it is driven by the families' need for additional resources under the pressure of economic circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

One of the employees from Thi Qar Governorate confirms that working women do not have the freedom of choice, whether in their employment or in managing their resources if they are allowed to work. There are restrictions and pressures exerted by male authority that limit their ability to progress professionally:

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***"By going out to work, a woman is considered to be breaking customs and traditions, but they are forced to allow her to go out to work for financial needs rather than their belief in women's right to work."***

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<sup>12</sup> The interviews also confirmed that working wives do not have the right to dispose of their own salaries. Ultimately, it is the husband's and the family's right. "Even though she works, the woman's salary belongs to the man. She goes to work, gets tired, and ultimately the salary is for him or for the children." Y.N., a teacher at an accelerated learning school in Basra Governorate.

*That's why women are only allowed to go from home to the office and from the office back home without any deviation from this routine. If she is invited to a training or conference, she cannot participate for fear of her family or husband, as they would not agree to her participation. This applies to delegations as well, as she would only be allowed to participate in case of material benefit. Otherwise, due to her lack of freedom, she would be prohibited from participating. Unfortunately, this indicates the double standards on the part of the family, which only allows breaking of traditions in case of material gain." - U.R, an employee at the Agriculture Department in Nasiriyah*

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In this context, the results of the current survey show the importance given to female employees' salaries, as 47% of the sample of women participating in the study indicated that their salaries are viewed as a primary source of family income. 26% reported that their income contributes equally to the husband's income, and 25% agreed that their income is viewed as additional income that only meets the woman's own needs.

*Table (20): Distribution of the sample of female employees according to the way their income is viewed.*

<b>How is your salary viewed?</b>		
The husband's rights must be handed over to him	2%	6
Additional income that only meets the woman's own needs	25%	62
Income that contributes equally to the husband's income	26%	65
Primary source of income	47%	117

The interviews further confirmed that an employed wife has no right to decide how to dispose of her salary, as it is ultimately the right of the

husband and the family. “Even though she does the work, the woman’s salary goes to the man. She goes to her job and works hard, yet she ends up giving her salary to him or his children.” Y.N., teacher at an accelerated education school in the Basra Governorate.

The current survey results revealed numerous barriers and obstacles associated with societal customs and traditions that limit the opportunities for women workers to develop their skills and qualify for high-level managerial positions. 53% of the participating women in the survey indicated that their community's customs and traditions do not allow female employees to participate in committees where the majority of members are men. Additionally, 36% of the sample stated that female employees are not allowed to stay overnight outside their homes when their work requires it. This includes participation in delegations and training courses held outside the governorate that may require several days of overnight stays. Furthermore, 62% of the participating female workers in the survey confirmed that societal traditions prevent them from working in field professions that require being on the streets or occupying roles predominantly held by men. Moreover, 64% of the sample agreed that societal traditions do not permit them to work in professions that require direct interaction with men.

The results of the current survey revealed barriers and obstacles related to customs and traditions that prevent female public sector employees from developing their capabilities to qualify them to assume senior administrative positions.

*Table (21) Distribution of the sample of female public sector workers based on their view regarding customs, traditions, and perceptions of women’s employment affect their professional advancement and development in the public sector.*

**How do customs, traditions, and perceptions of women’s employment affect their professional advancement and development in the public sector?**

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
Our societal customs and traditions prevent female employees from participating in committees mostly consisting of men	17%	42	36%	90	26%	66	21%	52
A female employee may not spend the night outside her home or travel even if her job requires her to do so	14%	36	22%	55	27%	68	36%	91
The traditions of the society in which I live do not accept women working in the field and taking on work that is done by men	28%	70	34%	84	22%	54	17%	42
Our societal traditions do not allow women to work in professions that require direct interaction with men	35%	82	29%	72	20%	50	16%	41

The interviews confirmed that some female employees decline to participate in committees that do not include women as members, and the assigned female employee becomes the only woman among male employees. In some cases, institutions are forced to appoint more than one female employee to the committees to respect customs and traditions, even if the committee lacks only one specialisation or one female specialist. This sometimes results in additional economic costs for the institution, which may lead to the institution having to forgo the presence of these female employees.

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*“For example, when I pair a woman and a man to conduct cultural activities in college, she would tell me (I can’t go alone with a man, my husband does not agree unless there is a second woman). Thus, I am*

*forced to assign a second woman to go with them, because I know that she has the right capabilities and the potential to develop them. Therefore, in reality, I have to send out three people, while two would have been sufficient to get the job done.” - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Some female employees refrain from participating in the training because they are certain that their family or husband will prevent them from doing so in compliance with societal customs and traditions, and to avoid harsh comments casting doubt on a woman’s behavior when she is absent from her home, even if she is presented with an important opportunity.

*“Multiple times, I have been offered internal or external assignments that I immediately decline to avoid problems because I already know that my husband will not agree. The problem is that there might be overnight stays involved, possibly for days, or even if there is no overnight stay, just delaying returning home late at night would also create difficulties in the matter.” - H.A., a head of a division at a government administration’s office in Baghdad*

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Challenges of this nature are exacerbated in governorates with influential traditional structures (tribal/religious), such as Basra. An official at the Security Clearance Division in one of the departments within this governorate confirmed that the majority of female employees, particularly young women, are unable to participate in delegations requiring overnight stays or travel beyond the governorate due to the family’s refusal and disapproval. The official further mentions instances where employees are compelled to take leave from their department to attend training workshops within the governorate, returning to the department at leaving times to make it seem to their families that they have not gone beyond their work obligations within the department. Sometimes, female employees may have to take a

family member or their husband with them if they are asked to travel outside the governorate by their employer.<sup>108</sup>

As for women who bypass customs and traditions in such cultural settings and are allowed to travel and participate in training on their own, they face criticism from their male and female colleagues along with defamatory insinuations.

A teacher in Basra Governorate, who is an active member of civil society organisations, which provide her with opportunities to participate in workshops, seminars, and trainings outside the governorate, confirms that some people hold harsh views of her due to her travels outside the governorate on her own. At school, her colleagues, both male and female, have subjected her to disgraceful insinuations.

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*“The customs and traditions are very powerful and restricting in Basra, so any openness shown by a woman will be marked with an (X).”*

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*“Upon my return to the school from Erbil, where I was participating in a delegation of female teachers, I noticed that women were expressing opinions even before men did. Some regarded my traveling alone as shameful, suggesting that it might lead to inappropriate behavior rather than engaging in productive activities such as studying, learning, self-improvement, and pursuing my ambitions. A fellow teacher considers me inferior due to my travels and involvement in civil society. Unfortunately, women like me are looked down upon.” - Y.N., a teacher at a school for accelerated education in the Basra Governorate*

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Another female employee based in Baghdad, the largest urban center in Iraq, attested to the suspicions surrounding female employees

involved in assignments that require travel and overnight stays away from home. Female employees have voiced concerns for having to endure inappropriate speech, accusations, and unwarranted suspicions about their behaviours.

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*“Society holds a negative view of these women. Unfortunately, we always hear things like, ‘This employee comes and goes as she wishes,’ disregarding the fact that she is also a human being who needs to seize the opportunities available to her. Some talk in an inappropriate manner and say rude and inappropriate things. They make inappropriate comments, not towards me, but other girls. They might say things like ‘She’s out of control. She accompanies directors to delegations,’ even when the woman in question is known to be a respectable person.” - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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As for female workers whose job requires them to go out at night or spend the night outside the home, such as health workers at hospitals, they face negative perceptions and inappropriate social classifications, accusing them of suspicious behaviour.

One of the administrative employees at the Ministry of Health spoke about the suffering of her colleagues whose work requires spending the night at the hospital (emergency department).

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*“Healthcare personnel are especially subject to an unfavourable view when assigned emergency duty, which they are compelled to take once or twice. It is true that these duties offer better benefits and count as overtime. But that is not the issue. My friend’s husband drives her to and from work whenever she has emergency duty, but even when accompanied by her spouse, she still faces disapproving attitudes, as society fails to realise that she is only fulfilling her*

*duty. Another woman living in my area is an operating room supervisor. The nature of her job requires working late hours with the emergency team. Yet, there's always inappropriate talk about her in the area, even though she is a respectable, married woman and dresses modestly." - H., an administrative manager in the healthcare sector in Baghdad*

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Female employees have reported experiencing harassment and unwarranted accusations regarding their attire, indicating an intensive monitoring of employed women and a culture of suspicion. Some dress code restrictions are explicitly outlined in guidelines and regulations, imposing limitations on the attire of female teaching staff. This points to an effort to integrate the realities of social power into legal measures, which presents a significant obstacle to women's rights. Customs reflecting male dominance are thus codified into laws and regulations. When customs reflecting male dominance are enforced by laws and regulations, restrictions on dress and strict control over female employees become more pronounced in provinces with traditional cultural structures (tribal and religious). Even in the capital city of Baghdad, society is not immune to derogatory accusations against women based on their attire or concern for appearance. One of the employees confirms that the public service community monitors and holds employees accountable for their appearance and dress, imposing physical austerity on female employees.

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*"The first challenge I encountered at school was related to the way I dressed. I am accustomed to wearing a formal and modest blazer with trousers, which I believe is suitable attire for a teacher. However, the school principal objected to my choice of clothing, citing an official regulation that prohibits female teachers from wearing trousers on school premises. This dress is one in which I feel comfortable and confident. Any change from this attire would cause me discomfort, as it is not what I am*



*accustomed to. I believe that the regulation is based on customs, traditions, and subjugation to dominant parties and tribes, or rather fear of them.” - Y.N., a teacher at a school for accelerated education in the Basra Governorate*

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Restrictions on clothing and strict control over female employees are more evident in governorates with traditional cultural structures (tribal and religious). A female interviewee from Mosul says:

*“In Mosul, regardless of a woman’s marital status, if she displays care towards her appearance and attire, she becomes the subject of inappropriate remarks, whether they personally know her or not. She is often criticised for her choice of clothing, with comments such as ‘How can she leave her house dressed like that?’ or ‘I refuse to propose to her because of her attire.’ If she works outside the home, her conduct is directly linked to morals. Consequently, her father or husband may impose restrictions on her attire and freedom to go out to shield her from gossip, which in turn causes her distress. As a result, she may feel compelled to adopt certain behaviors to evade judgment, solely due to her employment status.” - R.L., an educational counsellor at a school for displaced persons in Nineveh*

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Another of the female employees confirms that the public employees observe women, hold them accountable for their appearance and dress, and impose modesty on female employees.

*“We have girls who dress elegantly and are tidy and very respectable. However, they still hear inappropriate remarks, even though they come from respectable families. Unfortunately, just because they look elegant and take care of their appearance, and*

*they go to delegations, they hear disrespectful remarks.” - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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#### **4. Sexual harassment in the workplace and its impact on the professional development of female workers in the public sector**

Sexual harassment and its effect on the professional development of female workers in the public sector constitute one of the major barriers to women's economic participation and hinder their career advancement. It diminishes women's ability to progress in their jobs, as they are forced to either leave their jobs and constantly change them, resulting in a lack of accumulated experience, or miss out on the training that qualifies them for competing for higher administrative positions. This, in turn, deprives working women of many economic opportunities and reduces their chances of promotion.

##### **4.1. Protection against harassment in the workplace in Iraqi legislation**

The Iraqi Labour Law No. 37 of 2015, for the first time in Iraq, includes a specific provision on sexual harassment in the workplace. Article 42 of this law guarantees workers the right to a work environment free from any harassment. The article explicitly defines sexual harassment in employment and occupation, whether in job search, vocational training, employment, or work conditions. The third paragraph of this article defines sexual violence, while the second paragraph of Article 10 prohibits any other behavior that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive work environment for those targeted by such behavior<sup>109</sup>.

Although legislation is the first and crucial step in combating harassment in the workplace, as well as being an indicator of Iraq's commitment to laws and international agreements to end violence against women, it alone was insufficient in curbing sexual harassment against female workers in the private sector. There is no clear and effective strategy or action plan for implementing the provisions related to harassment in the Iraqi Labour Law No. 37 of 2015. Moreover, the collection and provision of data on workplace harassment is extremely

weak in Iraq, and there is no system for registering harassment complaints. As a result, there are no statistics on incidents of harassment in the workplace, which is the first and most important step in implementing legislation related to sexual violence in the workplace<sup>110</sup>.

Although the Labour Law specifies in Article (41) the responsibility of the employer to ensure healthy conditions at work and obliges him to take safety measures to protect workers during the performance of their work and obliges him to provide a system for workers' complaints, the legislation does not oblige officials and managers to guarantee the rights of victims, nor does it specify the penalty for dereliction of duty against managers and officials who fail to provide a quick response to victims of sexual harassment at work<sup>111</sup>.

It is worth noting that this law applies only to workers in the private sector and excludes public sector employees, instead, employees in the public sector are subject to the Civil Service Law.

As of the preparation of this report<sup>13</sup>, Iraq has not ratified International Labour Organisation Convention No. 190 on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, adopted on June 21, 2019. The convention aims to provide broad protection for workers in the public and private sectors, organised and unorganised economies, in urban and rural areas. It recognises the right of every individual to a workplace free from violence and harassment. The convention defines violence and harassment as a wide range of unacceptable behaviours and associated threats, whether occurring once or repeatedly, that may result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. It includes gender-based violence and harassment, which encompasses bullying, harassment, and other forms.

The convention provides several examples of sexual harassment, including insults such as inappropriate remarks, hints, unwelcome invitations, and demands, whether implicit or explicit, and any

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<sup>13</sup> The Council of Ministers approved in its regular session held on Tuesday 9th Jan 2024 the draft accession of Iraq to this agreement, which was prepared by the state council in 2021

behaviour that is indecent or has sexual implications. It also includes physical contact, touching, fondling, pinching, and assault. The ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment sets minimum obligations on governments to prevent and respond to violence and harassment in the workplace. It emphasises preventive measures, including policies and mandatory training programs in the workplace. Governments should adopt a "comprehensive, integrated and gender-sensitive approach", including through laws on labour, occupational health, and safety, equality and non-discrimination, as well as criminal law.

#### **4.2 Experiencing sexual harassment in public sector institutions**

It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of sexual violence in public sector institutions due to the lack of a system for registering complaints and the underreporting of harassment cases by victims.

To gather data on cases of sexual harassment experienced by female employees in public sector institutions, indirect questions were directed to respondents regarding whether female workers face sexually harassing behaviors in the workplace. This allows for estimates that can reveal cases of unreported sexual harassment and violence, which are often kept hidden and fall into the category of unreported crimes.

The results showed that 19% of the participating female workers in the survey denied the existence of such harassment, while 29% of the sample indicated that they were unaware of such cases. 18% of the survey participants confirmed the presence of such harassment, particularly in public sector institutions. Meanwhile, the highest percentage, 34%, affirmed that female workers in the public sector are subjected to harassment, but in a limited and narrow scope. This means that 52% of the female workers surveyed confirm the existence of cases where employees are subjected to sexually harassing behaviors, although they differ in estimating the extent and prevalence of such cases. Their estimates varied between widespread and limited occurrence, indicating that public sector institutions do not provide safe and harassment-free work environments and misuse of authority.

Table (22): Relative distribution of the sample of female workers according to whether they experience sexual harassment and harassment in the public sector.

Do female workers in the public sector face issues related to sexual harassment and harassment?		
No	19%	47
Yes, but to a limited extent	34%	84
Yes, frequently	18%	46
I don't know	29%	73

The interviewed employees spoke about various types of harassment that their colleagues face, and it is highly likely that the employee herself is a victim but cannot directly declare it, so the act of harassment falls on her colleagues to divert suspicion from her.

Among these types of exposure are bargaining, harassment, and blackmail in exchange for obtaining certain rights or services, such as leave or transfer to another department or division.

Three employees mentioned during interviews that they witnessed multiple incidents in which their colleagues were subjected to harassment or blackmail by supervisors.

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*"For women, they are blackmailed or traded for certain personal things, and they are given positions. We suffer greatly from this issue. If an employee wants to leave, for example, the manager or supervisor will grant it to her (but after returning at 2 p.m.) in exchange for certain things. Of course, this harassment is done by some supervisors and not everyone." - M.A., an electrical engineer working at the Diyala Electricity Directorate*

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*"There was a lot of talk about cases of blackmailing female employees to obtain leave, a job, or a position. It used to happen frequently." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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*"Yes, I hear about harassment in hospitals or health centers. For example, when an employee requests leave, her supervisor blackmails her by giving her his number and asking her to call him or asking her to go out with him to approve her leave." - H., an administrative manager in the healthcare sector in Baghdad*

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Harassment can take the form of inappropriate behavior and unwanted remarks with sexual connotations, creating a fearful and offensive environment for the employee, resulting in suffering for the employees.

One of the employees, who holds a middle management position, mentioned three incidents in which she had to intervene to protect the victims from the harassment of administrative officials. Among these cases were the unwanted hints and remarks made by the direct supervisor to a subordinate employee (among these cases are the insinuations and unwanted phrases uttered by the direct supervisor of an employee under authority), as well as an attempt to inappropriately touch another employee who was in a vulnerable state of unconsciousness.

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*"Recently, one of the employees came to me crying. I asked her why she was crying, and she said that the engineer (department manager) told her, 'For your sake, I will come to you in the morning, so be ready.' She didn't know exactly what he wanted from her."*

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*“Years ago, when someone needed to use a mobile phone, they sometimes had to go up to the roof to secure the network and get a clear signal. One of the employees went up to the roof of the building to receive an important call. While she was there, an engineer followed her and assaulted her. We also have another employee who is poor and quiet. She fainted in the office due to low blood pressure. Her supervisor offered to take her to the hospital, and he tried to go alone, but I went with them based on her request. In the car, he started harassing her by touching her body.”*

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The interviewed female employees reported that some officials and managers are keen on selecting young, elegant, and beautiful women to work in their offices to exploit them and approach them for sexual purposes. They mentioned that these women face retaliation from the officials if they resist or refuse their advances.

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*“When young, beautiful, and elegant female employees directly, they are placed with the officials, the official either expects to establish a relationship with him, go out with him, and be under his control, or they face resistance and are accused of causing trouble at work and are treated as slaves if they don't submit to their demands, to the point where they despise the workplace and working there.” – J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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In most of the harassment incidents mentioned by the employees during the interviews, the harassment is often perpetrated by direct supervisors and managers. However, in less frequent cases, harassment may also come from superiors and colleagues. The security permits officer in one of the departments mentioned receiving

unwanted messages from one of her subordinates, who intended to get close to her to obtain leaves and overlook his shortcomings at work.

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*"Despite my age, I have not been spared from these harassments. I have received messages more than once that contain inappropriate flirtatious words and mobile phone credit, and I don't know who they are from. In the end, it turned out to be one of the staff in my department, who is younger, and it became clear that he uses this method to flatter and get close to me to obtain leaves and other things. The young people spoke to him and scolded him for his behavior, and he came seeking forgiveness and apologised, but I refused that." – a security permits officer in one of the departments*

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Harassment is not limited to the work environment. Female employees are also subjected to harassment in transportation and in the streets surrounding their institutions. An employee in one of the departments affiliated with the Ministry of Culture confirmed that she often faces harassment in transportation due to the lack of effective and safe public transportation in Iraq. The nature of her work, her workplace, and her working hours are factors of danger that increase the likelihood of being harassed in the street. Taysir, who works night shifts as a guard at a hospital in Baghdad, is subjected to continuous harassment and annoyance when she leaves the hospital during her night shift, whether to buy something or go home. The nature of her work played an important factor in her vulnerability and being targeted with offensive words and insinuations.

#### **4.3 Reactions and coping mechanisms when experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace**

The victims in the incidents mentioned by the participants during the interviews showed varying reactions to the harassment they experienced. Some chose to approach the department or section head



personally, seeking help and intervention to solve the issue without involving any formal procedures. Others submitted requests for transfer to another department or division to escape the harassment they experienced from their direct manager. At least two employees mentioned during the interviews that transferring to another workplace was the most they could do to rid themselves of the harassment from officials, without exposing the harassment and the reasons behind the transfer for fear of their reputation being harmed.

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*"I requested a transfer to get rid of it and at the same time show everyone that it was a normal transfer to protect my reputation." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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However, the procedures for transfer are not easy in the public sector and require the approval of the manager, who may be the source of the harassment. Additionally, transferring the victim, as requested by some employees, does not represent a fair solution. It would allow the perpetrators to escape punishment, making it impossible to stop or reduce harassment in the workplace.

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*"We need higher-level leadership to understand this issue and establish a method for dealing with such cases. For example, transferring the employee to another place without involving the current manager. In the transfer administration, the manager should write that they have no objection to the transfer, and based on that, the employee would be moved. When the harassed employee is transferred secretly and without anyone knowing about it, we can argue that the second place needs female employees, thus keeping her away from the harasser and maintaining the woman's confidentiality." - S.T.A., in Baghdad*

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One of the responses mentioned during the interviews is the personal confrontation of the victim and responding to the assault directly against the perpetrator, putting an end to the harassment. This type of response occurred when the source of the assault was a colleague at work. It is unlikely that such responses would be repeated when the manager or supervisor is the source of the harassment. Many female employees avoid directly confronting the harasser and are forced to remain silent and endure, keeping the harassment secret, especially when the source of this harassment is the supervisor. They try to avoid confrontation, especially if they are not ready to change their workplace. N.K. spoke about the pressures and bargaining that she was subjected to by her manager who forced her to remain silent and (evasive) for the manager not to end her placement and dispense with her services and be forced her to return to her former department, which was attributed to her, and in which she does not find privileges that suit the level of her ambitions.

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*"Honestly, he bargained with me. My initial reaction was hesitation because I didn't want to confront him since I knew that refusing his offer and confronting him could make me lose this position, and I didn't want to lose it. So, I used evasive tactics to navigate the situation because I wanted to stay in this job. However, over time, once he realised that I was avoiding him, he ended my assignment." – N.K., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Most of the methods for confronting cases of harassment mentioned during the interviews were informal, and official channels or filing complaints against the perpetrators were rarely used, except in very few cases.

The answers of most of the interviewees agreed that female workers generally remain silent and avoid taking any actions that could expose the harassment they are facing or hold the perpetrators accountable. This is especially true when their direct supervisor is the source of the

harassment, out of fear of retaliatory reactions, fear for their reputation, or fear of being forced to leave their job by their spouse or family, unless they are explicitly encouraged to do so.

*Honestly, 10% might report while the rest stay silent. Being married and fearing the exposure of her reputation within the community, or the fear of her husband or family forcing her to quit her job and adhere to customs and traditions, makes a woman prioritise her reputation. Many cases are not believed. Most harassers are religious, so if she were to complain, they wouldn't believe that someone like him could harass her, and she would be accused of lying. S.A., a national security advisor in Baghdad*

**4.4. Reporting harassment and bullying in the workplace**

The survey results revealed that a small percentage of women are likely to report incidents of harassment and bullying in the workplace. 58% of the female employees sampled in the survey indicated that they do not report incidents of harassment and sexual harassment when they occur. Meanwhile, 30% mentioned that a female employee might report the incidents sometimes, and only 12% believed that the employee would report incidents of harassment.

*Table (23) Distribution of the sample of female public sector workers regarding reporting harassment.*

Do women and girls report harassment and assault in the workplace?		
No	57%	147
Yes, but to a limited extent	29%	75
Yes	12%	33

To identify the restrictions that limit the ability of female employees to report harassment in the work environment, another question was asked during the survey about the reasons that prevent female employees from reporting sexual harassment.

*Tabel (24) Distribution of the sample of female workers on their thoughts on reasons for not reporting sexual harassment.*

<b>What do you think are the reasons for not reporting sexual harassment?</b>								
	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree	
Family and society blame and punish the victim	37%	48	30%	39	18%	24	15%	19
Fear of reputation	25%	33	42%	54	19%	25	14%	18
Fear of problem development and causing bigger problems	34%	44	24%	31	27%	35	15%	20
The economic dependence of the victim and her family on the perpetrator	39%	51	20%	26	22%	29	18%	24
Reporting doesn't work and change anything	38%	49	31%	40	21%	27	11%	14
Fear of retaliatory reactions (job loss or loss of benefits and privileges)	40%	52	28%	36	18%	24	14%	18
Lack of an entity or place to receive complaints and maintain confidentiality	35%	45	30%	39	23%	30	12%	16
Difficulty in proving incidents of sexual harassment through traditional means (witnesses)	28%	36	38%	49	25%	33	9%	12
Lack of legal protection for women	35%	45	38%	50	14%	18	13%	17

The results showed that 73% of the surveyed female workers believe that there is no legal protection for employees who are victims of harassment, which is the primary reason explaining the lack of reporting incidents of harassment. Additionally, 69% of the sample expressed a lack of trust in the justice procedures and the perpetrators' ability to escape punishment, which renders reporting futile. In the same context, 65% of the sample indicated a lack of knowledge about the methods of filing complaints and the reception of grievances. Furthermore, 68% agreed that fear of retaliatory reactions, including potential harm to their job position or the benefits and privileges associated with their current workplace, hinder their ability to report cases of harassment.

The answers of 67% of the surveyed female workers agreed that fear of reputation damage is a reason that prevents women from exposing harassment and filing complaints, while 67% also mentioned that victim-blaming and shifting responsibility onto the victim when she experiences harassment is what prevents women from exposing the harassers and staying silent about the incidents.

Fear of the problem escalating was another reason mentioned by 58% of the sample. Additionally, 16% pointed out the difficulty of proving harassment incidents as reasons that prevent women from reporting and filing complaints when they experience harassment.

The interviews revealed a set of constraints that hinder the ability of female workers to take legal action to expose and report harassment to the official authorities when they experience it. Among the most significant of these constraints are:

### **Justice systems do not protect women from harassment**

Public sector institutions do not provide an environment that encourages reporting harassment without exacerbating the problem. In terms of including legal provisions criminalising workplace harassment, there is a legislative gap regarding the criminalisation of sexual harassment in the public sector. Law No. 24 of 1960, which is still in

effect, does not contain any provisions specifically addressing sexual harassment or workplace harassment in the public service<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, the State Employees Discipline Law does not include any paragraphs related to this issue, which can be considered a legislative loophole and deficiency. Experts attribute this to the outdated Civil Service Law and the lack of updates or amendments to keep up with recent legislative developments that have recognised the dangers of harassment and its impact on creating an unfavourable work environment, leading to the issuance of legislation to criminalise such acts<sup>112</sup>.

On the other hand, the criminal law provisions related to the work environment in the Iraqi Penal Code<sup>15</sup> do not criminalise sexual harassment in public service. It can be said that the Iraqi legislator neglected the right of public employees to job protection and did not establish criminal protection in the work environment. There are no provisions that ensure a legal framework for the protection of subordinates<sup>113</sup>.

Additionally, public sector institutions lack clear policies or mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment and managing complaints. The participants pointed out a lack of knowledge about the reporting process, the authority that receives complaints, and the investigation procedures and many of them do not know where female employees can go to file complaints in cases of sexual harassment.

On the other hand, many female employees expressed during interviews their lack of trust in the complaint system. Most of the channels through which complaints can be filed do not guarantee

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<sup>14</sup> The legal expert, Dr. Esraa Saeed Assi, stated that if the employee submits a complaint stating that she has been harassed, a committee is formed and the harassing employee is administratively punished or the committee requests to refer him to the courts if it is proven that he committed this act as long as harassment is a criminal act in the Iraqi Penal Code

<sup>15</sup> Harassment as a single item is not mentioned in the Iraqi Penal Code, and the judiciary deals with it under the title "indecent crimes Article 400 of the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969, as amended, stipulates that whoever commits with a person, male or female, an indecent act without his or her consent, shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine not exceeding one hundred Iraqi dinars, or by one of these two penalties.

confidentiality in the procedures and do not consider the privacy and sensitivity of the matter. This can lead to the disclosure of the complainant's identity and expose her to scandal once the issue spreads among all employees.

The head of the Women Empowerment Department in one of the departments confirms that it is very difficult to assist the complainant in cases of sexual harassment while ensuring confidentiality. Taking any action will inevitably lead to the spread of harassment among all employees, and it is extremely challenging to strike a balance between taking legal measures and maintaining confidentiality.

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*“An incident occurred with a female employee who was harassed by her immediate supervisor. She was a beautiful woman and she approached us in the women's department. The director's response to her was that we could not do anything because we could not guarantee confidentiality. Any definitive action will be known to everyone, and she does not want that. So, the options were either to speak up and take action, and it would be reported to the minister and then everyone would know, or to keep the complaint confidential and take action, which is impossible. There is no way to protect women from harassment. Even if the minister intervenes, he cannot do anything regarding this official. Therefore, women have to bear it and remain silent.” - C.T.A., an employee at the Ministry of Education in Baghdad*

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Some employees confirm that reporting harassment through the complaints box exposes the complainant to scandal, as they are under surveillance which makes it easier to identify the complainant. Filing a complaint through the legal departments within the department is also unsafe and subject to the authority of the director, who may be the source of the harassment. Submitting a complaint to the ministry's office can lead to the leakage of information about the report to the accused.

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*"Yes, the complaints box exists, but it is monitored, so it is known who filed the complaint directly, which is why it is not used. Even if you complain within the ministry, they have their eyes there, so they will know who the complainant is. If you complain to the legal department, you will find that the news spreads within seconds. That's why the majority don't complain; they endure and remain silent, especially when it comes to matters of honor. It is difficult to complain because everyone will know, and the complaint will be turned against the employee, and she will be seen as the guilty party who allowed the harassment to happen." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad*

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### **Impunity for perpetrators**

There is a lack of trust in the independence of the authorities to which complaints are submitted, and there are doubts that the investigative processes will lead to justice for the victims and hold the offenders accountable. There is a prevailing belief among women that reporting is futile. They believe that the entity to which the complaint is submitted will side with the perpetrator if they hold a managerial or influential position within the department. They may try to influence that entity using their power and influence, especially when that entity is within the same institution. As a result, they avoid supporting the complainant out of fear of retaliation, as there is no protection for the victim or witnesses from revenge.

One of the officials in the central administrative offices confirms that no one dares to help the victims or condemn their (the offender's) manager out of fear of retaliation and facing consequences.

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*"There are legal committees that the employee can report to, but can we trust the individuals within those committees? If you consider resorting to the legal committee, the legal employees can be threatened by the manager, and if they take action, it*



*is possible to be relocated from his position. or the harassed employee may fight and know in advance that no action will be taken, so she remains silent or blames herself.” - R.L., an educational counsellor at a school for displaced persons in Nineveh*

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This also applies to finding witnesses for the victim. The fear of retaliation makes it difficult for the victim to find someone who will testify with her to prove the harassment incident.

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*“She can complain legally, but there must be witnesses, so who can testify to her? No one, even if they are present witnesses do not testify to her, while if she resorts to the clans, the woman believes without witnesses according to her words only, considering that the woman fears for her reputation, it is not possible to resort to the clan and present her reputation, so she is certainly honest in her words. Therefore, the majority remains silent, because they are fully aware that there is no point in doing so and they may hear the words that they are the reason and others.” - U.R, an employee at the Agriculture Department in Nasiriyah*

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In cases where the entity to which the complaint is submitted is from outside the institution, department, or directorate, the manager (if he is the aggressor) will not be held accountable and will use his network of relationships to influence the entities to whom the complaint was filed in his favour, either by using his network to close this file or by providing a negative image of the complainant that directs the investigation procedures to its disadvantage and makes believing her complaint very difficult.

N.K. confirms that she filed a complaint with higher authorities after her director terminated her assignment for refusing to respond to his unwanted offers. However, he managed to convince these authorities

that she committed job-related violations that contradicted labour laws and was able to escape accountability.

Several employees have spoken about collusion between the director (if they are the harasser) and other managers in the ministry, who often have servile relationships that lead them to adopt supportive positions for the responsible parties (the offenders) against the victims, allowing them to escape punishment.

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*"The directors are connected, they have mutual and shared interests. When an employee comes to complain about the director, it is natural for them to side with the director and not support the employee. That's why most employees do not report harassment cases because they will be ostracised and will be considered guilty (and it's not good for their reputation to be associated with everyone). This phrase directly tells the story: 'She was harassed, and most of the cases of harassment come from those in authority.'" - J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate*

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The problem worsens with the difficulty of proving the incident of harassment and the fear of victims not being believed, especially when the perpetrators are known for their religiousness.

S.M., who works in a security department dominated by Islamic parties, pointed out that the harassers in her department are mostly known for their religiousness, making it difficult to believe that such individuals could be offenders. A manager in a department in Basra also mentioned an incident where one of the employees was harassed by a department official. She filed a complaint with the department director, but her claims were not believed despite providing evidence of the harassment.

In contrast to the unofficial tribal law, where women are usually believed when they claim harassment without the need to provide evidence, as women would not risk their reputation and falsely accuse someone of an act that threatens their dignity. Therefore, their

complaints are taken seriously, and the punishment is directed towards the perpetrator<sup>114</sup> without any evidence being presented.

### **Ways in which harassment cases have been dealt with**

In many incidents mentioned by the employees during interviews, the harassers were not held accountable, and no disciplinary or punitive actions were taken against them, except in three cases where the offending employee was transferred to another department and terminated in two cases. In the third case, the victim's husband filed a complaint with the ministry, leveraging his influence after discovering that his wife was being harassed by her direct supervisor.

One employee mentioned that the perpetrator was terminated after she filed a complaint with the union/syndicate, which subsequently filed a lawsuit against him. However, this lawsuit took place in 2004, and it is unlikely that the union would have such an impact after its role significantly diminished, according to the employee during the interview. In most cases, officials tend to ignore or attempt to resolve such issues unofficially.

An official in one of the departments mentioned that she scolded an employee when she caught him attempting an unwanted touch on one of the employees who had fainted. The same employee mentioned that she intervened in a case of sexual harassment and assault but did not take any legal action against the perpetrator.

### **A cultural environment that is not supportive of women**

Women are forced to resort to silence and not report harassment due to the unsupportive social and cultural environment that blames the victims and holds them responsible. The culture tends to condemn women and girls and attribute the responsibility of assault and harassment to the victims rather than the perpetrators. Fear has contributed to the absence of reporting mechanisms, allowing the phenomenon to spread and recur.

The employees confirm that reporting and filing complaints cause harm to the victimised employee rather than the harasser. Everyone will

accuse her of engaging in wrongful behavior that led to the harassment or that it wouldn't have happened if she hadn't allowed it (blaming her for allowing them to harass her).

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***"Most of them do not report because if they do, they will be blamed and seen as the ones who allowed the harassment to happen. They bear it and remain silent, especially because speaking about honor is difficult; the complaint will turn against the employee, and she will be seen by others as the one to blame." - U.A., an employee at the Ministry of Industry in Baghdad***

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Harassment from the point of view of society inflicts stigma on the victim and puts her reputation at risk. The workers mentioned during the interview that fear of scandal and a woman's concern for her reputation are the main reasons behind women's silence about sexual harassment in the workplace and their reluctance to expose and report it. They also mentioned that the younger generation is more capable of exposing violence.

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***"Based on my experience, younger girls are bolder in reporting harassment and can take action and assert their rights more courageously than previous generations, who are afraid to report and remain silent out of fear of scandal or blame themselves for being the cause. so they remain silent " - D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad***

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Victims are blamed by colleagues who accuse them of being the cause of harassment. However, the victims are condemned by their female coworkers, who hold them responsible for the assault they have experienced. They justify the harassment by pointing to the victim's way of dressing or her use of makeup, which, from their perspective, leads others to harass her. Working women who are victims of harassment

are also condemned by their families, who may impose severe punishments on them if they discover that they are being harassed, even to the extent of forcing them to leave their jobs.

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*"Yes, there are women who provide the opportunity for harassment through their dress, laughter, and conversations with men. Even the second group of committed and respectable girls are also subjected to harassment." - D.M., an employee at the Ministry of Culture in Baghdad*

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## FOOT NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Promotion restrictions in the Civil Service Law, p. 807.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ma/GEPA-Global-report.pdf>, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson: 'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing, in the "Gender Study" (Man and Woman) and Social Sciences. Edited by Hania Shalgami. Translated by Siham bint Saniya Abdul-Salam. Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2015, p. 203.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, United Nations Development Programme, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization: A diagnostic of the informal economy in Iraq. 2021. p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Hassan, Hussein Ajlan / The public sector in Iraq between challenges and development requirements (القطاع العام في العراق بين ضرورات التطوير والتحديات), Journal of Baghdad College of Economic sciences University, Issue 11, no date.

<sup>7</sup> Hassan, Hussein Ajlan, ibid, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Iraq 7,000 years of civilization (العراق 7000 سنة من الحضارة), National Human Development Report 2008, p. 116

<sup>9</sup> Hassan, Hussein Ajlan, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Team of researchers: State-building in Iraq, political visions towards a sustainable democracy (بناء الدولة في العراق رؤى سياسية نحو ديمقراطية مستدامة), Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, 2020, p. 21

<sup>11</sup> Ali Mawla, Higher Salaries in the Public Sector: Causes and results (زيادة الرواتب), Middle East Center 2021, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Nabil Jaafar Abdel Reda and Marwa Abdel Rahim: Iraqi women's participation in the labour market: Al-Hiwar Al-Mutamadden Magazine, March 2015. <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=461161>

<sup>13</sup> Hamza Jaber Sultan Al-Asadi, The Role of Iraqi Women in Social Development (في التنمية الاجتماعية دور المرأة العراقية), op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Amal Rassam: op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Karim Muhammad Hamza, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>16</sup> National Human Development Report 2000, p. 138. Quoted by Nabil Jassim, p. 177

<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Planning. Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistics of women and men. Iraq. Central Bureau of Statistics Press, Baghdad 2013, p. 34.

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<sup>18</sup> Iraqi laws hinder women's economic participation, by considering them economically dependent and encouraging them to take on traditional roles and abandoning career advancement plans. Article 12 of Law No. 9 of 2014 on Unified Retirement allows a mother of three children to retire.

<sup>19</sup> Nabil Jaafar Abdel Reda and Marwa Abdel Rahim: Iraqi women's participation in the labour market: Al-Hiwar Al-Mutamadden Magazine, March 2015. <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=461161>

<sup>20</sup> UNICEF: The Cost and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An analysis of the education sector and strategies to maximize the benefits of education: 2017. p. 47

<sup>21</sup> Ibtisam Aziz and Salam Jabbar Shihab: Economic empowerment of Iraqi women: challenges, strategic directions, and initiatives ( التمكين الاقتصادي للمرأة العراقية ) (التحديات والتوجهات الاستراتيجية والمبادرات). Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> On the eve of the millennium: Social development report in Iraq ( على عتاف الألفية: ) (تقرير التنمية الاجتماعية في العراق). p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> National Development Plan 2018 in Iraq. p. 234.

<sup>24</sup> According to data from the Ministry of Planning, the percentage of women legislators, presidents, and administrators did not exceed 0.4% before 2003. See the Central Statistical and Information Technology Organization, Annual Statistical Survey for 2004, p. 51. While the number of women in decision-making positions after 2003 reached approximately 342 in various ministries, the number of women in the position of Director-General amounted to 86, and the number of those with the rank of Advisor and Inspector General was 33. The number of female deputy ministers was 8, and women represented 2% of the judges. They also held the position of minister in six ministries in the transitional government (the ministries of labour, environment, municipalities, women, and immigrants). This number decreased in the subsequent government to 5 female ministers ( ). National Development Plan for the years 2010-2014, op. cit., p. 139

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization, and the Gender Reality in Ministries and State Institutions in Iraq report, pp. 15, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Summary of Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021, Ministry of Planning, Media Office.

<sup>28</sup> Nour Faraj: Only one out of every ten Iraqi women actually gets a job. <https://www.meri-k.org/iraqopendata/produced-data-driven-stories/9-out-of-10-iraqi-women-stay-out-of-the-job-market/>

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- <sup>29</sup> Muwafaq 2015, pp. 246, 247, citing Nour: The Effect of the Glass Ceiling Determinants, p. 5.
- <sup>30</sup> Balaras Maham Waheed, p. 562.
- <sup>31</sup> Iman Badr Ismail, Relationship between Transformational Leadership and the Glass Ceiling for Women: An applied study on Ministry of Finance employees in the Gaza Strip. Master's thesis submitted to the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Al-Azhar University, Gaza, 2019.
- <sup>32</sup> Siham's stance. p. 245.
- <sup>33</sup> Plaintiff Adel Abdel Moneim and Radwan Tarek Mohammad, p. 2
- <sup>34</sup> Siham Samir's stance, p. 247.
- <sup>35</sup> Quoted from Iman Badr Ismail, Relationship between Transformational Leadership and the Glass Ceiling for Women, op. cit.
- <sup>36</sup> Adel Abdel Moneim and Radwan Tarek Radwan Mohammad: Effect of the Glass Ceiling on Women in Leadership Positions and their Motivation to Work at the National Press Institutions in Egypt. Journal of the Faculty of Commerce for Scientific Research, Alexandria University, Issue I, 56, January 2019, p. 7.
- <sup>37</sup> Women's Empowerment Directorate "Monitoring Report on the Implementation of Strategies for Women in Iraq," December 2021.
- <sup>38</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, op. cit., p. 20.
- <sup>39</sup> International Labour Organization: Diagnosis of the informal economy in Iraq. 2021. p. 27.
- <sup>40</sup> Labour Inspection, Gender Equality and Non-discrimination in Arab States.
- <sup>41</sup> Group of researchers, American University, p. 15.
- <sup>42</sup> Quoting the National Strategy for Women.
- <sup>43</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): The Cost and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An analysis of the education sector and strategies to maximize the benefits of education: 2017. p. 47.
- <sup>44</sup> Daa Kazem Salem: The Gender Gap, Digital Evidence. Central Statistical Organization, 2017.
- <sup>45</sup> Citing Nabil Jassim, p. 177.
- <sup>46</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF): The Cost and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An analysis of the education sector and strategies to maximize the benefits of education: 2017. p. 47.
- <sup>47</sup> Ministry of Planning. Central Statistical Organization: Statistics on women and men. Iraq. Central Statistical Organization Press, Baghdad 2013, p. 8.
- <sup>48</sup> United Nations Development Programme: Women's Economic Empowerment: Integrating Women into the Iraqi Economy, p. 7.



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- <sup>49</sup> According to a group of researchers at the American University, p. 10, Nabil Jaafar.
- <sup>50</sup> Interview with J.A., a director in the Diyala Governorate.
- <sup>51</sup> ILO, p. 101.
- <sup>52</sup> ILO, Labour Inspection, Gender Equality and Non-discrimination in Arab States, ILO Manual, Beirut 2014. p. 31.
- <sup>53</sup> S. L., employee at the Najibiya power station in Basra.
- <sup>54</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, op. cit., p. 23
- <sup>55</sup> Ministry of Planning, The gender reality in ministries and state institutions, ibid, p. 13/2018
- <sup>56</sup> Nadia Halim (ed.), ibid, p. 83.
- <sup>57</sup> Farah Jihad Abdel Salam, Obstacles to Promotion for a Civil Service Employee, Madad Al-Adab Magazine / Iraqi University, Issue 49, Part 1, p. 798.
- <sup>58</sup> Lahaye Abdul Hussein 2006. The impact of development and war on Iraqi women: 1968-1988. Baghdad: Department of General Cultural Affairs. p. 145
- <sup>59</sup> Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson: 'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing, in the "Gender Study" (Man and Woman) and Social Sciences. Edited by Hania Shalgami. Translated by Siham bint Saniya Abdul-Salam. Women and Memory Forum, Cairo, 2015, p. 203.
- <sup>60</sup> Daa Kazem Salem: op. cit.
- <sup>61</sup> Nadia Halim (ed.), Women's Work Conditions in the Formal and Informal Sectors in Cairo Governorate, National Center for Social and Criminological Research, 2011, p. 84.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid p. 83.
- <sup>63</sup> Jinan Abdel Razzaq Fattah, Grade stabilization and its applications in the Iraqi judiciary, Iraqi University Journal, No. 49, Part 1, pp. 294-300.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 297
- <sup>66</sup> Interview with M.F., Senior Director from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, BA in Business Administration.
- <sup>67</sup> The gender reality in ministries and state institutions in Iraq, 2018, p. 16
- <sup>68</sup> Ali Mawla: Higher Salaries in the Public Sector: Causes and results (زيادة الرواتب في القطاع العام ، الاسباب والنتائج), Middle East Center 2021, p. 7.
- <sup>69</sup> Musab Al-Aloosy: With Iraq's Quota System, the New Government is More of the Same. The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington

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<https://agsiw.org/ar/with-iraqs-quota-system-the-new-government-is-more-of-the-same-arabic/>.

<sup>70</sup> Mohammed Sabah Ali: Women's Right to Assume the Position of Director-General in Iraq: Between Lack of Empowerment and Politicization: Modern Discussion – Issue 7090 – 28/11/2021 – 13:42: <https://www.ahewar.org/debat/show.art.asp?aid=739172>.

<sup>71</sup> Musab Al-Aloosy, Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ali Mawla, op. cit., p.14.

<sup>73</sup> Musab Al-Aloosy, Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ali Mawla, op. cit., p.14

<sup>75</sup> Azza Charara Baydoun, "Gender: What are you saying? What is real and what is fake in women's conditions," Dar Al Saqi, Beirut 2012, p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Musab Al-Aloosy, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Basim Ali Khresan, Iraq in the Corruption Perceptions Index, Al-Bayan Center, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> See Ali Mawla p.14 and Musab Al-Aloosy.

<sup>80</sup> Umm Roua, Ministry of Agriculture, Nasiriyah.

<sup>81</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>82</sup> Ahmed Mosbah, ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ali Mawla, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Inaam.

<sup>85</sup> Ali Mawla, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>86</sup> S. M., Ministry of Culture - House of Books and Documents.

<sup>87</sup> Iman Badr Ismail, the relationship of transformative leadership with the glass ceiling phenomenon for women: An applied study on employees in the Ministry of Finance in the Gaza Strip. A master's thesis submitted to the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Al-Azhar University, Gaza, 2019, p. 46.

<sup>88</sup> S. M., Ministry of Culture.

<sup>89</sup> Economic Commission for Western Asia, Economic Empowerment of Women in the Arab Region, Guidelines, ESCWA Publications, Beirut, 2012, p. 8-9.

<sup>90</sup> Noor Faraj: Only one in every ten Iraqi women directors to secure actual employment.

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- <sup>91</sup> Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization: Poverty Monitoring and Assessment Survey in Iraq for the years 2017-2018, p. 46.
- <sup>92</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Empowering Women in Public Administration, Op. cit., Page 40
- <sup>93</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-Seventh Session, 4-15 March 2013, Gender norms and stereotypes, socialization and unequal power relations, p. 5.
- <sup>94</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, Op. cit., p. 23
- <sup>95</sup> Asmaa Jameel Rashid and others, Violence Against Women in Iraq: Reality and Choices
- <sup>96</sup> Nabil Jaafar and Marwa Abdel Reda, op. cit.
- <sup>97</sup> Work Pressure on The Working Mother and its Impact on Job Performance: Exploratory Study on the Opinions of a Number of Female Workers at the Kirkuk Technical Institute, Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference (Effective Empowerment of Women and its Role in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals for Arab Countries) (Baghdad, Al Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, 2022, pp. 287-391).
- <sup>98</sup> Citing Zahraa Magdy, Al Jazeera.
- <sup>99</sup> International Labour Organization, Women at Work Trends 2016 (International Labour Office, p. 100).
- <sup>100</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Women Economic Empowerment in the Arab Region: Guidelines, ibid, p. 53.
- <sup>101</sup> International Labour Organization Labour inspection, gender equality and non-discrimination in Arab countries ILO Guide Beirut 2014 p. 46.
- <sup>102</sup> International Labour Organization Labour inspection, gender equality and non-discrimination in Arab countries ILO Guide Beirut 2014 p. 46.
- <sup>103</sup> Labour Law.
- <sup>104</sup> The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Women Economic Empowerment in the Arab Region: Guidelines, ibid, p. 54.
- <sup>105</sup> Julia Stewart (ed.), Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Public Administration, op. cit., p. 23
- Peninah Thomson et al, A Woman's Place is in the Boardroom, Arab Scientific Publishers, Beirut 2010, p. 64. 59
- <sup>107</sup> Development Plan 2018, p. 234.
- <sup>108</sup> Interview with S. L., an employee at the Ministry of Electricity and, an official at the Security Clearance Division / Basra.

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<sup>109</sup> Iraqi Labour Law 2015

<sup>110</sup> World Partners and Al-Hakam Company, Gender Equality in Iraqi Labour Law and Employment Policy in Iraq, n.d., pp. 34, 35

<sup>111</sup> World Partners and Al-Hakam Company, Gender Equality in Iraqi Labour Law and Employment Policy in Iraq, n.d., pp. 34, 35

<sup>112</sup> interviewed Dr. Isra a'id Assi, a legal expert, a researcher at the Center for Women's Studies, University of Baghdad,

<sup>113</sup> Alaa A. Hasan Al Sylawi, The crime of moral harassment in the workplace, page 287

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Um Ru'aa, Department of Agriculture, Thi Qar Governorate.