

As a result of over a decade of intermittent conflict, widows and woman-headed households have long assumed a great deal of responsibility for managing families and communities in Iraq.

A representative role for women is vital to the long-term development of a peaceful democracy in Iraq. Furthermore, the social needs of women and girls, including health and education, must be met to give women the resources to support their involvement in society. USAID programs aim to develop and promote new opportunities for women in Iraqi society and work in conjunction with the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) and Iraqi organizations.



This woman participated in a USAID Local Governance Program workshop that aims to engage women in the governance process.

Overcoming Challenges

Iraqi women have **limited participation in political and civil society**, diminishing the profile of women's issues as political concerns.

More than half of Iraq's women are illiterate, presenting a challenge to efforts to improve education and political awareness.

Poor education and limited technical training has resulted in **high unemployment among women**.

Lack of basic and reproductive healthcare has caused **high maternal mortality rates**.

Iraq's fertility rate is 5.4 children per woman, one of the highest in the region, contributing to **low infant birth weight and maternal anemia**.

Public awareness of women's issues is very low, particularly as religious groups continue to advocate restrictions on women's rights.

Local Governance

Strong community-based groups such as neighborhood advisory councils and women's organizations are the foundation for citizen participation in policy-making. To encourage women's participation in these groups, USAID's Local Governance Program supports:

Workshops that provide information on **opportunities for women in education and employment** and urge involvement in the governance process.

Women's centers, such as the Fatima Zahra Center for Women's Rights in Al Hillah, which provide **educational programs, vocational training, and income-generation projects**.

Community development groups and women's committees, which **encourage women to engage in community decisions**, empowering women at a grassroots level.



Candidate Hiyaam Jassem Mohammed at the Najmeh district council selections

Breaking Down Barriers One at a Time

On January 6, English teacher Hiyaam Jassem Mohammed was selected to serve on Najmeh city council's education seat. She competed against seven men for the seat, and she is Al Muthanna Governorate's first woman candidate for office and the first to win a selection. In rural communities like Najmeh, the presence of women at public gatherings is virtually unprecedented. Previously, women were intimidated by the crowds of men and left, despite attempts to convince them to stay.

In close cooperation with Iraqi nationals and the Coalition Provisional Authority, USAID is restoring critical infrastructure, improving healthcare and education services, expanding economic opportunities, and implementing good governance.

Opportunities for Iraq's Women

"Because of the previous regime, they didn't speak, but that is changing...First, we have to rebuild a woman's self-confidence and return (her) lost pride. It is going on nicely...already democracy is being implemented."

Dr. Maha Al-Sagban, a Women's Rights Center board member

Economic Opportunity

Two major new microcredit lending institutions are **enabling women to start small enterprises**.

Community-based income generation projects developed by USAID's Community Action Program are **creating jobs and providing sustainable income** for women.

Health

USAID distributed high-protein supplementary food rations to **240,000 pregnant and nursing mothers** and malnourished children.

A referral system is being developed to transfer **high-risk pregnancies** to major hospitals.

Twenty delivery rooms serving more than 300,000 citizens of Basrah were rehabilitated.

Mobile social work teams provide **abuse intervention and critical health** services to women. Multi-ethnic teams build trust and reduce tension between ethnic groups.

Hewar Saber, 19, attends a sewing class in the village of Tewala. Hewar said, "This is the first time I am able to spend time with other women freely. We like coming here. We now feel like we can have a good future." Supported by a USAID grant, this program is sponsored by WADI, Association for Crisis Assistance and Development Cooperation and also provides resources, supplies, and equipment for literacy and hair-cutting courses.



A student from Hala Bint Khuwaylid secondary girl's school in Baghdad attends class in a school refurbished by USAID.

Education

Rehabilitated 2,299 schools with separate sanitary facilities for girls to **increase their access and enrollment in schools**.

Created Parent-Teacher Associations, which **encourage parents to send girls to school**.

The Accelerated Learning Program gives girls who have dropped out of school a **second chance at education**.

Next Steps

Although initial progress has been made for women in Iraq, this is only the beginning of substantial reforms that need to occur. Areas of concern for the future include:

- Security for women
- Educational and political opportunities
- Access to family planning options
- Equal representation under the law, including rights to property, inheritance, marriage, divorce, and children
- Job training and education on accessing financial markets
- Perceptions of women's involvement in public life through the media, education system, and government



USAID

United States Agency for International Development
www.usaid.gov/iraq