The Republic of IRAQ

Years of conflict and insecurity have posed significant challenges for women in Iraq. Only 13 percent of working age women in Iraq seek employment or work. This is considerably lower than the share of men who are participating in the labor market (76 percent). Unemployment rates are also higher for women (12 percent) compared to men (7 percent), with wide disparities across the country.

A range of different factors contributes to the low labor force participation of women, such as legal barriers, lack of safe and adequate transport, lack of affordable quality child care and low levels of financial inclusion. Preferences for public sector jobs and attitudes around women’s traditional role in the household prevail.

The Government of Iraq aims to increase the Female Labor Force Participation Rate by 5 percentage points over the next 5 years and has developed a Women’s Economic Empowerment Action Plan to lay out the path forward.

The Mashreq Gender Facility is supporting the implementation of the Action Plan based on a government-led 18-month country work plan developed within the context of Iraq, inclusive of the Kurdistan region. In the first period of implementation, the focus is on capacity building: of government on, among other, legal reform and gender sensitive budgeting; of female entrepreneurs through incubators; of rural women through targeted vocational training; and, of NGOs to fully participate in activities on women’s economic empowerment. Restrictive social norms is a focus across the plan, by leveraging other projects to operationalize activities.

There are five pillars of work:

⇒ Policy & legislative reform
⇒ Gender responsive public sector
⇒ Private sector employment
⇒ Entrepreneurship & access to finance
⇒ Social environment

The Mashreq Gender Facility (MGF) is a 5-year Facility (2019-2024) that provides technical assistance to Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon to enhance women’s economic empowerment and opportunities as a catalyst towards more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful societies, where economic growth benefits all. Through collaboration with the private sector, civil society organizations and development partners, the Facility supports government-led efforts, country level priorities and strategic regional activities that:

1. Strengthen the enabling environment for women’s economic participation;
2. Improve women’s access to economic opportunities.

The MGF is a World Bank Group-facilitated inter-agency initiative that works in partnership with units across the WBG, aid agencies and donors, governments, NGOs, private sector firms, and researchers. The MGF is supported through the WBG’s Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE).

At the regional level, the MGF Steering Committee is a high-level advisory group that provides overall strategic direction and guidance. It counts on two government representatives per country, regional directors of the World Bank and the IFC and selected development partners and private sector donors with strong commitment to women’s economic opportunities in the Mashreq.
The MGF is a WBG initiative in collaboration with the governments of Canada and Norway. It is supported by the Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality (UFGE) with generous contributions from the governments of Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.