UNFPA IRAQ
Quarterly Update

ISSUE #3
October, November, December 2018
Meetings with Iraqi Officials

Dr Oluremi Sogunro, UNFPA Representative to Iraq, held high-level meetings with Mr Mohammed Al-Halbousi, Speaker of the House, Dr Mahdi Al-Allak, Secretary-General of the Prime Minister’s office, and Dhiaa Khadum, Head of the Central Statistical Organization, respectively.

With Mr Al-Halbousi, Dr Sogunro discussed the cooperation between the Parliament and UNFPA in regards to the National Strategy for Combatting Violence Against Women in Iraq and the importance of endorsing the law protecting women and girls from domestic violence.

The talks with Dr Mahdi Al Allak focused on the establishment of two new Women Shelters in Iraq; one in Basra and one in Anbar with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The two officials also went over the Census planned for Iraq in 2020 and the implementation process.

To underline the importance of the strategic partnership with Ministry of Planning, the UNFPA Representative visited the Head of the Central Statistical Organization with whom he discussed population related-projects, mainly the National Adolescents and Youth Survey and the upcoming Census for Iraq.

UNFPA has committed to providing technical support and external expertise to organise specialized workshops for decision makers in Baghdad and KRI on the implementation and various preparatory stages required to conduct a census.

New UNFPA Representative to Iraq Assumes Office

Dr Oluremi Sogunro, a Nigerian-American national, has assumed official duties as UNFPA Representative to Iraq in October 2018.

“I look forward to working with the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government to help improve the reproductive health and gender-based violence services provided to women and girls across the country. Together with partners, we will conduct population-related studies in order to guide programming of international and national organisations, as well as policy making in the country,” he said.

Dr Sogunro brings more than 35 years of international experience working in the medical and humanitarian sectors.
Adolescent Girls Toolkit roll-out in Diyala

On the International Day of the Girl Child, 11 October, UNFPA and its partners in Duhok, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, organised recreational activities and awareness sessions on girls and women’s rights to 400 girls in 18 Women centres and two Youth centres supported by UNFPA in the area. During the activities, the girls discussed their aspirations, their fears, and the challenges they face in their communities and how to overcome them. The ceremonies also included balloon release.

Training Implementing Partners in Iraq to Become Better Communicators

To provide governmental and non-governmental organisations with skills for developing coherent and compelling messaging in order to communicate with impact, UNFPA in Iraq organised three workshops in the Central South area of Iraq and the Kurdistan Region bringing together a total of 91 humanitarian workers to discuss the best practices in story-telling and photography. The workshop provided an overview of the ethics and principles of quality reporting and story-telling on critical issues such as gender-based violence and reproductive health, particularly on how to ensure the safety and dignity of women and girls while communicating their stories to the public. The workshop also addressed visual communication, including the core elements of a successful brand, the importance of effective and impactful photography, and the best practices and tools for ensuring consistent quality.

Roadmap to Handing over the Women Community Centres in Kurdistan

On 23 October, UNFPA organised a workshop to discuss the action plan for the handover of 20 women centres to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the NGOs managing the centres.
Helping those affected by floods across Iraq

On Friday 23 November, many areas in Iraq witnessed hours of relentless torrential rainfall. The heavy overnight rainstorms that lasted several hours led to the flooding of thousands of homes and buildings, in addition to over a dozen casualties.

To respond to this urgent needs of families affected by the natural disaster, UNFPA distributed around 8,000 dignity kits to the displaced in Nineveh, Salahuddin and Sulaymaniyah and deployed a GBV mobile team for assessment and provision of services. Furthermore, UNFPA’s partners opened their centres to accommodate as many displaced families from camps and whose tents have been destroyed by the floods.

This timely response was critical for many of the women, including vulnerable female head of households, pregnant women and females living in over-crowded shelters.

Final brushes on the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women in Iraq

In the absence of a law on gender-based violence and domestic violence against women, a National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women plays crucial role in providing an overall framework to policy-makers regarding key priority actions to be taken to prevent and respond to such types of violence. Therefore, on 2 October 2018, UNFPA and the Women Empowerment Directorate, General Secretarial for the Council of Ministers organised, in Baghdad, Iraq, the first consultation workshop for the revision of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women. The workshop, attended by 25 government representatives, focused on the structure of the new strategy, based on the lessons learnt of the current strategy in place. The National Strategy is expected to be finalised and launched during the 16 Days of Activism.
During November, UNFPA in Iraq held a series of workshops and meetings with the Speaker of the House, ministers, parliamentarians, decision-makers, and representatives from the international community and civil society organisations. The discussions focused on the swift approval of the Law to Protect Families from Domestic Violence, finalisation and endorsement of the updated National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women, and the referral of GBV cases from the courts to the MOLSA shelter, supported by UNFPA, in Baghdad. UNFPA’s continuous advocacy efforts, especially targeting the Parliament resulted in the Speaker expressing his commitment to women’s issues: ending GBV, the provision of Shelters for GBV survivors, and the promulgation of appropriate laws to protect women in Iraq and attend to their psychological needs after violence occurs.

Under-Secretary-General and the UN Secretary-General’s Advisor on Policy, Ms. Ana Maria Menéndez, visited Anbar Governorate in western Iraq on 17 November 2018. During her visit, Ms. Menéndez visited the UNFPA-supported youth centre and the women centre where she discussed peacebuilding and stabilization with youth through their involvement in peacebuilding activities. In her meeting with the women at the women centre, she focused on the importance of their inclusion and participation in all segments of Iraqi society as part of their contribution to the stability and prosperity of the country.

On 25 and 26 of November, the Government of Iraq and the Government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, supported by UNFPA, launched the 16 Days of Activism to Combat Violence against Women across the country, in presence of high level officials, representatives of the international community, UN Agencies and civil society organizations. Speeches focused on the importance of eradicating violence against women especially harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. UNFPA’s implementing partners also organized activities to highlight the importance of raising awareness on GBV in Iraq and how gender-based violence robs women and girls of their futures and undermine their health and well-being.
DECEMBER 2018

IRAQ CELEBRATES 10 DAYS OF ACTIVISM

This year, the 10 Days of Activism from 1 to 10 December, highlighted Youth participation in Action for Safety and Equality. Y-Peer in Iraq, supported by UNFPA, held more than 30 activities and awareness sessions in 17 governorates for 1,600 young men and women across the country focusing on raising awareness on reproductive rights, strengthening youth capacity in combatting gender-based violence, and encouraging young people to take the initiative and create their own projects at the local level among other topics.

IRAQ LAUNCHES THE NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

On 9 December, the Government of Iraq and UNFPA in Iraq launched a national strategy to combat violence against women, a significant step towards achieving women’s rights. This strategy provides an overall framework on which policy and decision makers will draw to take concrete actions aimed at preventing violence against women and girls and protecting survivors of violence. Endorsement by all stakeholders of this updated national strategy formalises the commitment of the Government of Iraq and the United Nations to take concrete action.

UNFPA Representative to Iraq, Dr. Oluremi Sogunro, stated: “This strategy is yet another win for women and girls in Iraq as it adds to the progresses observed in the past few years. UNFPA is proud to have worked with the Government of Iraq to develop this strategy through the provision of the technical capacities and expertise.

16 DAYS CAMPAIGN MARATHON IN BAGHDAD

UNFPA with the Ministry of Youth and Tajdid NGO organized of a marathon for 400 participants on 13 December to raise awareness on the important role women and girls play in society and call to end gender-based violence.
DECEMBER 2018

Awareness Sessions on Reproductive Health in Kerbala, Kirkuk & Ninewa

As part of the commitment to end unmet need for family planning and preventable maternal deaths, UNFPA supported three awareness trainings on reproductive health rights and services for more than 50 health providers in Kerbala, Kirkuk, and Ninewa during the third week of December. The trainings focused on antenatal and postnatal care, family planning and emergency obstetric care.

During the sessions, professional medical staff briefed women on the services they are entitled to and that are required for the healthy pregnancy and safe delivery. The discussions explained how family planning enables husbands and wives to exercise their right to decide whether, when or how often they would like to have children.

Final Preparations for the National Adolescents and Youth Survey

As part of the preparations for the National Adolescents and Youth Survey 2019, UNFPA conducted, on 20 December, a training of trainers for 23 supervisors from the ministries of planning and ministries of youth of the Federal Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government. The training focused on the roles and responsibilities of the supervisors and enumerators as well as the role of both ministries in supporting the field work. The participants discussed each section of the questionnaire, the interview methodology, and the training of the field workers on data collection.
NADIA MURAD, YAZIDI ACTIVIST AWARDED THE 2018 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

On 5 October, Nadia Murad was awarded the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize. Nadia is a survivor of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) perpetuated by ISIL in Iraq. Through her strength and bravery, she has become the voice of women suffering from sexual violence in conflict (SVC).

“Today, the world applauds Nadia Murad’s courage. However, we must not forget that there are currently close to 3,086 Yazidis remaining in captivity, among these approximately 1,126 are women,” said Dr Oluremi Sogunro, UNFPA Representative to Iraq.

“UNFPA in Iraq calls for action to rescue these women and girls and reiterates its readiness to continue its support to SGBV and GBV survivors through the Women Survivor Centres and Women Social Centres that provide medical services, psychosocial support services and legal counselling,” he added.

UNFPA DENOUNCES THE ATTACKS ON DIRECTORATES PROTECTING WOMEN IN IRAQ

UNFPA in Iraq condemns the cowardly attack on the office of the Directorate to Combat Violence against Women (DCVAW) in Sulaymaniyah on 29 November by four gunmen using heavy weaponry.

“We regret that such attacks happen, especially during the 16 Days of Activism to Combat Violence against Women, when the whole world, including the Government of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is calling to put an end to abuse and violence against women. We all have the responsibility to protect women and girls, especially survivors of gender-based violence,” said Dr Oluremi Sogunro, UNFPA Representative to Iraq.

UNFPA reiterates its commitment to support the KRG, and more specifically its partner the General DCVAW, in eradicating violence against women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

A CALL TO PUT AN END TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN IRAQ

UNFPA & UNICEF Joint Statement

In Iraq, women and girls from different backgrounds remain at risk of violence, in their homes, at school and in public spaces.

According to a recent joint survey by the Government of Iraq and UNICEF, 37 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 in Iraq think that violence towards women is acceptable, while a new UNFPA study shows that 63 per cent of Gender-Based Violence incidents in the country are perpetrated by a family member.

As the 16 days of activism for the Elimination of Violence against Women kick off, UNICEF and UNFPA reaffirm their commitment to end all forms of violence against women.

Dr Oluremi Sognuro, UNFPA Representative to Iraq, said: “Ending violence against women and girls is not a choice, it is rather a long-term commitment and should become part and parcel of Iraqi society through joint efforts from all of us. We should do everything possible to support women and girls to have a life full of dignity and prosperity.”

UNFPA and UNICEF with partners are providing specialized services, including psychosocial support, for of sexual violence in Iraq and working to prevent child marriages. UNFPA has also supported the launch of a specialized emergency helpline for survivors of violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
The First Secretary at the Australian Embassy in Iraq, Joanna O’Shea, visited UNFPA-supported GBV survivor’s helpline (119)’s office in Erbil to discuss the challenges and needs of the survivors and how can Australia help strengthen the response to GBV in Iraq.

The Canadian Ambassador in Iraq, Paul Gibbard, visited the UNFPA-supported women centre and delivery room in Debaga 1 & 2 camps for internally displaced people in Kurdistan, Iraq, where he was briefed on the challenges faced by survivors of gender-based violence & the maternal heath services.

UNFPA Representative to Iraq, Dr Oluremi Sogunro, received the Spanish ambassador in Iraq, Mr Juan Jose Escobar, to discuss the challenges faced by gender-based violence survivors & access to services as well as psychosocial support, following a contribution of EUR 400,000 to UNFPA GBV programme.
In Refugee Camps

- 13,476 women reached through RH services
- 6,094 women received GBV services
- 1,398 women received RH and family planning consultations
- 2,807 safe deliveries
- 37 dignity kits distributed

In IDP Camps and Host Communities

- 89,091 women received RH services
- 14,249 people received RH awareness sessions
- 1 mobile clinic
- 80,545 women received GBV services
- 398,693 people received GBV awareness sessions
- 12,572 dignity kits distributed

- 76 health facilities
- 108 women centres
- 4 Youth centres & spaces
UNFPA is extremely thankful to its donors for their contribution this year towards humanitarian and development programmes and response in Iraq.
Sana’ was like any other teenager in Syria; she was a guitar aficionada and an A-student with a love for writing poems. Her favourite getaways were the weekends when her father took her and her siblings to the waterfall and park to play.

Eight years ago, she was involved in a hit-and-run accident which left her suffering from memory loss, as well as emotional and physical injuries.

“I was only 13; I was heading to the market with my friend in Zabadani, Syria when a car hit me. I sustained injuries and suffered from a complete loss of memory for two months; I was very disoriented and lost all sense of being”, she said.

The most terrifying part for her was her inability to remember her parents, her siblings, and her friends. She recalls feeling so alone and scared: “I didn’t know what was happening to me or whom to trust. I suddenly found myself among these kind strangers,” she explained.

The then-teenager suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and had vivid flashbacks of the incident, nightmares, and intense distress.

Her journey towards full recovery was hindered by the break-out of the war in Syria in 2011 and the intensification of the conflict afterwards. When the Battle of Zabadani began in January 2012, the family of four feared for their lives as clashes escalated. One month later, they fled to find refuge in Domiz 1 camp for refugees in Duhok, Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Domiz 1 camp is home to close to 5,000 Syrian refugees who fled the war seeking a haven where UNFPA supports a reproductive health unit within the Domiz hospital, a youth centre and a women’s social centre. These centres provide young people and women counselling, psychosocial support, awareness sessions, recreational activities, and life-skills courses.

The move from Zabadani to Kurdistan led to Sana’ losing the sense of stability she had started regaining after her accident and had to, yet again, start anew. The displacement and the long journey further delayed her progress.

When Sana’ first arrived at the camp, she felt so lonely and frightened despite her parents’ continuous efforts to get her out of the tent they lived in.

“My parents were very supportive, they kept pushing me to make friends with the neighbours and meet new people but I was afraid,” said now 17-year-old Sana’. “I made a friend, though: Meena”. Meena had been attending the literacy courses offered at the UNFPA-supported women centre and encouraged Sana’ to join, explaining the services provided there such as psychosocial support to women and girls.

“I was thrilled to hear about the existence of such a centre. I had been looking for the opportunity to have professional advice and someone to guide me through my recovery,” she added.

“I have been attending the centre for three years now; I have so far attended literacy classes, sports, sewing, drawing, and the adolescent courses in an attempt to remember some basic life skills. The social workers have registered me for as many classes as possible, to help me regain my memory and catch-up on what I could have forgotten.”

Sana’ has also befriended one of the Centre’s volunteers, who sits with her twice a week to help her practice her writing and pronunciation.

All the care and support Sana’ received from her family and from the social workers at the Women Centre pushed her to dream big. “My plan is to start playing the guitar again. I reached out to the House of Artists, the UNFPA-supported initiative in Domiz 1 camp to help young refugees develop their talents in the camp, and I will start attending the guitar teaching lessons very soon”.

*name changed for privacy and protection