



We Are Still Here

Mosulite Women 500 Days After the Conclusion of the Coalition Military Operation

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



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We Are Still Here - Mosulite Women 500 Days After the Conclusion of the Coalition Military Operation

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Cover photo: Dohuk, Iraq. A mother with her two children.

Photo credit: Arianna Pagani.

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Introduction

A displaced girl carries a kite at Khazer camp in Iraq. Picture taken on 21 January 2017.

In April 2017, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) organised an international convening on the lack of effective women’s participation in the UN system. Among the participants were women activists and civil society organisations from the Middle East and North Africa region, as well as representatives of States and UN agencies.

During that convening, Iraqi Activists drew particular attention to the military operation that the coalition forces initiated against Daesh in Mosul, where the use of explosive weapons devastated the city, killed and injured civilians, and drove people from their homes. At that point, villages surrounding the city and Mosul itself were being forcibly retaken by the Iraqi forces with the support of the coalition forces, and the local population was treated as hostile, potentially hostile or victims. Iraqi activists shared their concerns that this approach increased polarisation and further irreconcilable division, possibly creating the fault lines for future conflict and hindering any possibility of solidarity. It was this information which inspired WILPF to undertake an investigation into the gendered consequences that the military operations have had on the lives of women and girls in Mosul, and the role civil society plays in building peace.

Almost two years after Mosul was declared ‘liberated’ from Daesh, the concerns that Iraqi women activists raised, alerting the international community about the severe repercussions of the military operations, have materialised; 1.8 million displaced Iraqis remain unable to return to their homes, and large parts of the city are entirely destroyed. In the short-term, hard security measures pursued by



western states in their fight against terrorism and militant extremism have once again disregarded the human rights of the local civilian population and undermined local peacebuilding approaches. Moreover, large groups of Iraqi civilians remain in a near detention setting in camps, and many of them are labeled as terrorists and denied access justice or due process.

While men and women, girls and boys, are all enduring the repercussions of Daesh's rule and subsequent military operations and displacement, women and girls are disproportionately impacted under both settings. Both the Iraqi authorities and the intervening powers failed to take into account and address the different experiences of women and girls, thereby failing to meet their specific needs and demands. The space and resources for local civil society to operate have been diminishing despite them being the first and main responders to the humanitarian catastrophe. It is crucial, therefore, to analyse the impact of the military operation on the city, the population and social cohesion within the community from a feminist, civilian-entered perspective and challenge toxic security partnerships that reinforce the drivers of conflict and force militarised security on the civilian population.

We urge member states and international actors to understand the lessons learned from the military operation in Mosul and to take them on board as they set and implement strategies for responding to conflicts in Iraq and beyond. This must include how States respond to the return of their own citizens. Put simply, all must be afforded the full protection of international law so as not to be made stateless, that there be effective investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution of those who have committed crimes in accordance with national law and with full regard to human rights. Governments need to address the root causes of conflict and extremism; reducing international responsibility into hyper-militarised counter-terrorism strategies have not eliminated Daesh and has instead caused severe, long term harm to the civilian population. A military operation alone cannot address the reasons that Daesh was established, able to attract militant fighters and control a large territory. Research shows that those reasons are still there and growing, stalled rebuilding efforts, the continued internal displacement of citizens, and rivalries between former wartime allies are being exploited by the remaining elements of Daesh to operate a renewed insurgency and these factors are being exacerbated by the dismantling of civil society that had been combating violent extremism long before the Western states realised it is a threat.

It is now time to rethink the militarised counter terrorism approach. It is not working. Instead, in the specific circumstance of Mosul but with general application, we are better advised to return to the guidance provided by our greater understanding of the role of gendered structures of power, of human rights law, its universality, the responsibility it demands from States towards civilians everywhere, including the need for accountability and redress for crimes and violations committed by both individuals and states alike.

We have called the publication "We Are Still Here" as a response to the military operation "We Are Coming" that announced the storming of Mosul. With this title, we hope to bring the attention back to the people whose futures were and are still being affected by the operations.

Madeleine Rees,
Secretary-General of WILPF



Photo credit: Arianna Pagani

Political Economy and Power Dynamics

The conflict has pushed the traditional power dynamics.

Women's Rights in Iraq

By the time Mosul was deemed liberated from the control of Daesh in July 2017, Iraq had been in conflict for several decades and this had halted the advancement of women's rights in the country. In conjunction with an economic boom in the early 1970s, the state co-opted large numbers of women through generous welfare programs and considerable socio-economic rights¹ and pursued "a form of state feminism that enabled many Iraqi women to benefit from a growing education system at all levels including the university level, an expanding labor market that required skilled labor, and the attempted replacement of local religious and tribal authorities with centralized state power."²

Moreover, women were first granted equal rights under the law in the Baath party constitution implemented in the 1970s which remained in effect until 2003, and were given the right to vote in 1980. However, the regime's rhetoric and policies on women and gender changed drastically between the start of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War and 2003. The Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War and the devastating embargo "contributed not only to the deterioration in infrastructures and everyday living conditions but also to the shift toward greater social conservatism, religiosity, and more restricted social spaces and mobility for women. [...] And withdrew its political support for women's equality and participation in public life, adopting a more conservative and restrictive gender ideology."³



Women's public organising was practically eliminated under the regime of Saddam Hussein, except for the Baath-sponsored General Federation of Iraqi Women, under which "the creation of the safe haven in the north of Iraq in 1991 led to the emergence of *de facto* autonomous Kurdish rule in this area and enabled Kurdish women, who already had a long history of activism within political parties, to increase their involvement through participation in women's unions, women's organisations and groups not linked to political parties."⁴

With the fall of the former governing regime in 2003, a growing wave of extremism, sectarian and ethnic violence engulfed the country, especially between 2006 and 2007, causing a mass exodus of civilians,⁵ forcing especially minorities across the country to flee abroad or to the north.⁶ Moreover, in the second half of 2008, the situation of some minorities deteriorated. In addition, the economy of Iraq deteriorated due to corruption, bad governance, lack of transparency and accountability, and cronyism in appointing unqualified staff to run the institutions. Rates of poverty increased drastically with a clear impact on women and children. With the increasingly religious and sectarian climate, and the domination of the armed militia, women were exposed to killing; they lost security in both private and public spaces.

Violence and terror attacks escalated even further in the run-up to the March 2010 parliamentary elections. Human Rights Watch reported: "the deterioration of security has promoted a rise in tribal customs and religiously-inflected political extremism, which have had a deleterious effect on women's rights, both inside and outside the home."⁷

Women were disproportionately affected by ongoing violence and forced displacement, causing them to lose not only their sources of livelihood, but also a sense of security, with severe psychological consequences. Displacement due to conflict has led to increases in trafficking of women, but it is only one of the multi-layered forms of suffering inflicted on women in conflict situations. In her article *Sexual violence in Iraq: Challenges for transnational feminist politics*, Nadjé Al-Ali described the Iraqi women's post-invasion experience as marked by "rampant domestic violence, verbal and physical intimidation, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage - as well as increases in mu'tah or so-called pleasure marriages - trafficking, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation, and honour-based crimes, including killings."⁸

In practice women continued to face various forms of legal, political, economic, and social discrimination, such as, for example, the lack of criminalisation of domestic violence under Iraq's Criminal Code. In fact, while provisions have been inserted in the Code to protect women from physical and sexual assault, no explicit mention is made of domestic violence, and article 398 of the Criminal Code provides that charges of sexual violence be dropped if the assailant marries the victim.⁹ Women who were sexually exploited, raped, imprisoned, and in many cases killed, had no voices and there the legal system was not supporting them under Saddam's regime. However, even though in Iraqi Kurdistan, a law on the prevention of domestic violence (Act No. 8) has been in force since 2011, "new laws and amendments in the Kurdistan Region have not had a significant positive impact on women's lives, owing to a lack of implementation and monitoring."¹⁰

Even though the Iraqi Law No. 188 of 1959 addressed some of the concerns regarding women's rights raised by women's right activists, such as establishing the minimum age for marriage at 18 and tackling the issue of child marriage, it left issues such as forced marriage and guardianship open to legal interpretation, resulting in the perpetuation of men's control over women's bodies.¹¹ The Personal Status Law of 1959, also, did not allow polygamy; however, Saddam Hussein changed the law when he was about to marry his second wife. The new modified law allowed those who own properties and some sort of financial capacities to have two wives. To this day, polygamy is allowed for men under certain circumstances under Chapter 1 of the Personal Status Law.



Iraq became a signatory to CEDAW in 1986 but with reservations, particularly with regards to its personal status that regulates marriage, divorce and inheritance. Several discriminatory laws remain in the Personal Status Law and Criminal Law. New laws introduced after 2003 further perpetuated

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In 2005 a 25 percent gender quota to include women in the parliament at the national and municipal level was instituted; however, this has not led to meaningful change in the situation of women and has not resulted in more women being involved in decision-making positions.
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the negative trajectory in women’s legal rights. For instance, Article 41 of the new Iraqi Constitution provided legal context for the discrimination against women under the pretext of religious affiliation. Those who have made attempts (most recently in October 2017) to pass the Jaafari Law in the Iraqi Parliament justified their proposal based on Article 41 of the Constitution. Jaafari Law permits significant violations of women’s and girls’ rights and discrimination against them, including allowing girls to marry at the age of nine. In 2005 a 25 percent gender quota to include women in the parliament at the national and municipal level was instituted; however, this has not led to meaningful change in the situation of women and has not resulted in more women being involved in decision-making positions.

In February 2014, Iraq became the first state in the Arab world to adopt a National Action Plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); however, despite this important step, gaps pertaining to women’s rights in Iraq remain flagrant until today, particularly in terms of economic, social and political aspects limiting women’s lives, safety, and equal rights. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is not significantly different but there have been more legal changes and policies that are in line with the international standards on women’s rights compared to the Federal Government of Iraq. For instance, the gender quota in the KRI is 30 percent. According to Iraq’s NAP and the Shadow Report submitted to CEDAW in 2014, the Kurdistan Regional Government has a more advanced track record of gender-equal laws and rules. It has amended a higher number of laws and introduced new laws to alleviate discrimination and violence against women, established government bodies to oversee gender mainstreaming (High Council of Women’s Affairs) and adopted policy strategies to eliminate VAW. However, there are issues with implementation, and patriarchal norms and practices continue to hinder progress in women’s rights.

Mosul

Mosul is one of the oldest cities of Iraq and is located in the Nineveh Governorate of Iraq; parts of Nineveh, especially near Mosul, are disputed territories between Erbil and Baghdad. The city is divided by the river Tigris into two parts: the left bank (on the eastern side) and the right bank (on the western side). The Western side, which hosts the old city of Mosul and is characterised by narrow alleys and is densely populated, particularly with poor and low-income populations, witnessed the highest level of destruction during military operations due to the use of artillery, not previously used in the Eastern Mosul offensive. In contrast with the offensive on Eastern Mosul, where aerielly deployed ordnance was largely limited to precision-guided munitions, in Western Mosul forces involved in the operation used a wide array of air-to-surface and surface-to-surface ordnance, causing havoc in densely populated areas.¹²

The city has historically had an ethnically and religiously diverse population, consisting of a majority Arab Sunni population and a number of religious and ethnic minority groups, including Christians, Shabak, Baha’i, Turkmen and Yazidis.¹³ Over the last few decades, it witnessed a series of devastating conflicts that made Mosul into both a receiving city of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a witness to the fleeing of many others from it. During the escalation of violence from 2006



Mosul is one of the oldest cities of Iraq. The river Tigris divides the city into the left bank and the right bank. This photo is taken on 10 January 2018 and destroyed buildings are seen in the background.



Photo credit: Reuters/Ari Jalal – stock.adobe.com

onwards, large numbers of Sunni Muslims arrived in the city from southern and western villages, plus families from Hawija/ Kirkuk who had fled Daesh, which had already taken over the town. On the other hand, the increased sectarian tensions led to the forced displacement of its Christian minority. Half of the city's Christian population had already fled to Baghdad and other Iraqi cities and villages during the 1960s, due to persecution. When Daesh gained control, the remaining minorities were forced to flee to escape violence.

Military Operations in Mosul

After occupying Iraqi territories in Anbar governorate in 2013, Daesh was able to expand to other governorates very swiftly, such as Salah al-Din and Kirkuk, to eventually reach Mosul and officially seize control of the city in June 2014. While Daesh only took a few days to capture Mosul in June 2014,¹⁴ it took Iraqi and US-led coalition forces almost nine months of destructive and heavy fighting¹⁵ to claim the city back, including an exhausting siege of the city, which led to severe deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Dates of the Military Operations

The Iraqi forces' military operation in Mosul was part of a larger operation that led to retaking of a number of cities under Daesh control from 2015 onwards, namely: Tikrit on 31 March 2015, Sinjar on 13 November 2015, Ramadi on 28 December 2015, Fallujah on 17 June 2016 and Salah Al Din in early 2017.¹⁶ The military operation was first launched in October 2016. East Mosul was retaken on 24 January 2017 and operations to retake Western Mosul commenced on 19 February 2017 and terminated with the Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi declaration of victory over Daesh on 10 July.¹⁷

The operations to 'liberate' Mosul also reflected an intensive involvement of various militia groups in the fighting, and encompassed airstrikes by the US-led coalition on the city, all of which have led to the quasi-destruction of Western Mosul and exacerbated the already fragile sectarian dynamics in Iraq. Airstrikes conducted by the US-led coalition against Daesh significantly increased during the conflict's last year, rising from an "average of 440 a month in the last six months of 2016 to just under 800 a month [in July 2017]," according to the Independent.¹⁸ A study of 45 pro-government airstrikes carried out by Amnesty International has shown that, starting in January 2017, a series of attacks were launched in Western Mosul relying heavily on explosive weapons with wide area effects such as IRAMs (Improvised Rocket Assisted Munitions), causing the death of at least 426 civilians. The use of explosive weapons in densely-populated areas, not only cause the destructions of vital infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, housing, water and sanitation systems, but also have detrimental effects on the civilian population trapped in the areas.¹⁹ "With their crude targeting abilities, these weapons wreaked havoc in densely-populated West Mosul and took the lives of thousands of civilians," Amnesty International's report said.²⁰ It found that prior to military operations, the coalition air-dropped leaflets into Daesh-controlled areas of the city warning civilians, however, they "failed to take effective precautions to protect civilians when launching attacks,"²¹ and airstrikes hit houses with children's clothes on the roof, signaling the presence of civilians.



A general view of destroyed buildings in the old city of Mosul. Photo taken on 24 February 2018.

Photo credit: Reuters/Alaa Al-Marjani – stock.adobe.com

The forces mobilised against Daesh encompassed the Iraqi military and security forces, including the Anti-Terrorism Squad; the Federal Police; the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) - a volunteering tribal and sectarian armed group - as well as an international coalition led by the US.²² Additionally, the Peshmerga, the Kurdish armed troops, also participated in the 'liberation' process, especially securing Kurdistan border lines.

The series of terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States that were claimed by Daesh and the blatant human rights violations they committed within Iraq and Syria have pushed many States to take military actions as a response to the military advancements of Daesh both regionally and internationally. This included founding an international military alliance in the region that includes, but is not limited to, France, the UK, the Netherlands, Turkey and Canada, as well as providing technical, financial and military support to Iraqi forces and their affiliated armed groups.



While the United States and other States taking part in the international coalition have not engaged in directly deploying troops on the ground in Iraq for this operation, they have nevertheless invested technical and financial support to Iraqi and proxy local armed forces. As of July 2017, the US-led coalition “had trained about 106,000 Iraqi security forces, including 40,000 Iraqi troops, 15,000 police, 6,000 border guards, 21,000 Kurdish Peshmerga, 14,000 from the elite Counter Terrorism Service and another 9,500 “tribal mobilisation forces.”²³

More specifically related to the United States’ involvement in boosting the military capacity of the Iraqi army, US officials have publicly claimed having supported the 16th Division of the Iraqi army, the same exact division allegedly accused of extrajudicial executions and summary killings in Mosul, including minors, on the unfounded grounds of collaborating with or being tied to Daesh.²⁴

Amid the celebration of military triumph over Daesh, manifested through political speeches announcing “the victory” and congratulatory billboards all over the country, grave human rights violations were committed by Iraqi forces, including summary executions, indiscriminate airstrikes and shelling of densely populated areas²⁵, while the severe living conditions, such as lack of access to healthcare, medicines and food and the cuts to public servants’ salaries, that were inflicted upon Mosulites, remain disregarded.

While the political and military rhetoric was sailing away from the ordeals suffered by women, the reported sexual and gender-based violence, including rape incidents and sexual exploitation perpetrated by the militiamen, were left untouched due to fear of stigma and honour killing. Mosulite women were left vulnerable to the attacks of military troops and militias, in addition to the crimes of Daesh against them. Essentially, sexual violence materialises a situation of imbalanced power between the rape perpetrator and the survivor. Within the armed conflicts and wars in a Middle Eastern context, men are supported by two types of powers: the inherited masculine power due to their gender plus the political power of weapons and authority. Women were pushed to provide sexual services in exchange for food or even a piece of bread to feed their children, a safe place to shelter them, or even for the chance to reach a UNHCR shelter. Such exploitation was not limited to fighters and bandits; it was reported that women who were able to flee the armed conflicts were also sexually exploited by the shelters’ guards and humanitarian agents providing them with water, sanitation, and food. The psychological and social consequences impacting women’s lives and future were totally neglected.

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The Destruction of Western Mosul

One aspect that impacted the effectiveness of civilian protection mechanisms was the disproportionate use of force between the Eastern side and the Western side of Mosul. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), from October 2016 to the end of June 2017, nearly 900,000 civilians fled the city, with 705,000 from Western Mosul alone.²⁶



Civil society organisations voiced their concerns regarding devastation and the high cost of human lives in Mosul, particularly in the Western part where the military operations, especially the use of explosive weapons, were far more destructive not only than in Eastern Mosul, but than in any other Daesh stronghold. A woman civil society leader from Mosul described the incomparable destruction of the city:

“ The level of destruction is huge. What I don't understand is the use of excessive force in Mosul but yet in Hawijah, which is a fierce center of Daesh, or Tala'afar, they [coalition forces] managed to get Daesh out of there, I don't know how, through a deal or whatever, but it wasn't destroyed. Haiwaj is not destroyed. Tala'afar is not destroyed. Sharqat is not destroyed. So why Mosul? Why Mosul, when we have so much heritage to protect? ”

UN Habitat estimates in the report *Protection of Civilians in Mosul: Identifying Lessons for Contingency Planning* that “over 5,000 residential buildings in the old city of Mosul were severely damaged or destroyed by July.”²⁷ As explained by a women civil society leader in WILPF's study, “it was difficult for the military operations to take place without casualties,” especially in the Western side. Military operations' heavy shelling with explosive weapons on residential areas and excessive use of force caused the destruction of large numbers of vulnerable old buildings, “including the 12th century Grand Mosque of al-Nuri from where Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the so-called caliphate in June 2014, which was destroyed by the Islamic State in the last days of the Western Mosul battle in July 2017.”²⁸

A woman survivor from Mosul explained: “The buildings in Old Mosul are very old. When one rocket hit, many buildings fell, even those that were not hit directly. The Western part, as such, is completely destroyed and to date the corpses of people are still under the rubble.” The chairperson of a women's rights organisation based in Baghdad, added: “it will take a long time to learn about the tragic situation, especially on the devastated Western side, where thousands of homes are destroyed and the infrastructure is completely in ruins.”



Photo credit: Arianna Pegami

Human Rights Violations

This mother and her child managed to get to Diyarbakir via the Iraqi-Turkish border.

Violations of Women's Rights Under Daesh Rule

From the time that Daesh took over Mosul and key western cities in Iraq in 2014, different manifestations of gender-based violence (GBV) appeared. Daesh's violence against women was not limited to the systematic use of slavery, rape and persecution. Discriminatory social and cultural norms also limited women's full participation in society and hindered their social integration, as well as their movement, dress, and social opportunities. Following Daesh seizing the city, a strict gender division in schools and public spaces was enforced, limiting women's possibilities to access education, healthcare and the job market. As a consequence, many resorted to working from home to continue to earn an income. A woman activist in Mosul explains: "Before Daesh took control, I used to run two medical clinics. After they took control of the city, they confiscated my clinics and imposed rules on women, including forbidding them from working. I didn't confront Daesh, not even verbally, instead I worked from my home secretly. When the operations started my confiscated clinics were targeted by airstrikes because Daesh militants were hiding in them."

Women, in many instances, also preferred to withdraw their children from school due to the change from the national educational curricula to stricter gender segregation and newly imposed curricula. A woman from Mosul interviewed in one of WILPF's focus group discussions (FGD) said:

“ I didn't let my four children go to school because the schools taught Daesh curricula. They stayed at home and studied the old school curriculum. Now after the liberation, my kids have returned to school. They did their exams and passed into their consecutive grades. ”

Another respondent in the focus group discussions, a woman who is internally displaced, explained how the life of her whole family changed with the new rule of Daesh: “Before Daesh, my husband had a job, he worked at the Dam of Mosul and all my children were going to school, all six of them. The older was in middle school and the younger in primary. [...] We had land and livestock. But when Daesh came, they destroyed our life in the village. We had to flee and lost everything.”

Before Daesh took over, women already abided, in many instances, to the so-called 'rules of modesty'; these constituted a socially accepted and agreed upon dress code that came as a result of the *Faith Campaign* imposed by Saddam Hussein in 1990. Some women's dress code included

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“Women took their roles in different ways. Daesh forced women to wear the niqab. When women put on the niqab no one could recognise them. Women were invisible to them [Daesh]. During the 'liberation', my colleague was able to resume working as a doctor thanks to that and to help the community without fear.”
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wearing coloured head-scarves with only their faces showing.²⁹ But Daesh's control meant the imposition of an even stricter control over women's daily life and the way they dressed. Women were expected to cover their entire body, including wearing the black niqab in public covering their faces and wearing gloves and socks covering all of their skin.³⁰ However, some women felt the imposed dress code provided them with a form of protection from violence during Daesh's rule. They felt like the niqab made them “invisible”, said one key informant, who continued working during that time in a healthcare organisation. “Women took their roles in different ways. Daesh forced women to wear the niqab. When women put on the niqab no one could recognise them. Women were invisible to them [Daesh]. During the 'liberation', my colleague was able to resume working as a doctor thanks to that and to help the community without fear.”

Any violation of the code was met with physical and pecuniary punishment. Those who didn't abide by the dress code or the code of conduct in public were subjected to punishments.³¹ Corporal punishments would be inflicted by special women-only police teams in charge of ensuring that women dressed and behaved properly.³² Those women are commonly known in Daesh-controlled areas as *Alhisbah* (in Arabic: accountability/ male and female religious police) and *Aladhadhat* (biters/ female police biters of Daesh), from the torture tool used by the brigade to punish women who violated strict Daesh dress codes. The so-called 'biter' is a metal-pronged device designed to clip chunks of flesh.³³ Victims were able, in some cases, to choose to pay a fine for breaking the law and escape punishment if they could afford it. However, the impoverishment of the population during Daesh rule made this option often unavailable to the majority of the population. The violence and brutality of these groups would continue to cause fear and trauma among women in displacement camps who had been subjected to those abuses.³⁴

Additionally, women's violation of Daesh rule could have severe repercussions on the male members of the family, in particular husbands. In Iraqi culture, women are in charge of upholding their honour, their families' honour, and their tribes' honour. In addition, and under patriarchal social systems, husbands are believed to be responsible for controlling their wives' behaviours and movement.



As another respondent said: “We were terrified to go out. For example, my husband was beaten [by Daesh] because of me. I went out of the house to call my son for lunch. The man [Daesh militant] saw me and he came up to my husband and gave him a paper informing him he was being summoned by the authorities. We went and they punished him with 20 lashes.”

In addition, Daesh targeted women human rights defenders and women political leaders who were seen as challenging the newly imposed regulations. A woman civil society leader, participant of WILPF’s study, remembered the story of one of her fellow activists who stood up against Daesh: “In the first women’s conference in Mosul, we honoured women human rights defenders who were killed by Daesh. One of them was Samira Al-Naimi.³⁵ She was a lawyer who challenged their authority early on and criticised them on social media. She wrote slogans against them on the walls of Mosul. She was detained for a week where she was subjected to torture and then publicly executed in 2014 [after being sentenced for apostasy].”

Widespread Human Rights Violations During the Coalition Military Operations

Although the unrecoverable loss of cultural heritage in Western Mosul remains a major issue, the coalition military operation also raised concerns among human rights organisations regarding the high number of casualties.

“Thousands of people died under the rubble of their houses, including women and children, and because of the siege inflicted on them. I don’t know what the plan of the Iraqi government or the international coalition was. Was their plan to completely destroy the Western side of Mosul?”

Newly internally displaced women queue to receive humanitarian aid supplies at Al Khazer camp, east of Mosul, Iraq. Photo taken on 14 November 2016.



Photo credit: Reuters/Zohra Bensemra - stock.adobe.com

A woman activist asked in frustration during WILPF's interview. Human Rights Watch, through a study of over 380 impact sites in Western Mosul, documented the effects of the detonation of large, air-dropped munitions launched by the anti-Daesh coalition which "pose an excessive risk to civilians when used in populated areas, given their large blast and fragmentation radius," as well as noting that "at least two incidents with no clear military target in the vicinity that killed at least 13 civilians may have been unlawful."³⁶ Survivors of explosive weapons attacks suffer from different kinds of long-term consequences, including disability, psychological harm, and social and economic exclusion.³⁷

One woman from a local CSO working on the ground at the time of the operations said: "We, as civil society organisations, called for a cease-fire in order to try to pull civilians, especially the wounded, out or at least give people a chance to take a breath, but it was difficult. It was a tragedy, buildings destroyed onto their inhabitants, entire families liquidated when the military operations were launched."

It was not only buildings and infrastructures that were destroyed but entire families' livelihoods and lives, making it almost impossible for many internally displaced persons to return to their hometown. A woman participating in the WILPF's focus groups discussions shared the economic constraints her family faced following the military offensive:

"I am from the Western side. My husband was working ... [Then] salaries were suspended, life was stalled. [...] There is nothing to eat, there is no income. There is no life left to live on the Western side since the war and the killing started there. Our house now is completely destroyed. I have a young son who just turned 19 years old, he was going to school, his future is gone now. Our lives are completely destroyed. Completely. I am telling you, life is completely stalled on the Western side. "

Even though androcentric approaches to warfare have often disregarded the impact of conflict on women, the consequences of damage and destruction caused by explosive weapons affect women and men differently. The use of explosive weapons can have long-lasting effects on women due to destruction of fundamental healthcare infrastructures, higher risks of stigmatisation and marginalisation, and the difficulty to access humanitarian relief and victim assistance.

Military Interests Putting Women at Additional Risk

In 2016, in an attempt to legitimise the use of non-state actors, the Iraqi Parliament passed the Popular Mobilization Authority Law, which identified the Popular Mobilization Forces as an arm of the military, under the orders of the high military commander.¹¹ Popular Mobilization Forces' combatants were volunteers, driven by tribal and religious ideological thinking, and prescription was not restricted by age and qualification requirements, as it is in the case of joining the military forces. The paramilitary group was the least trained, often unprepared to follow orders, and they were not subject to the institutional Military Law including punishment and obligations, which resulted in gross human rights violations.⁴⁰



In WILPF's study, one participant working in a local organisation providing health services explained:

“ Most of the fighters who volunteered [in the Popular Mobilization Forces], did so based on religious calls, many of them did not have combating or military skills, they joined driven by religious motivations to 'liberate' their country from Daesh. There were no efforts to raise awareness [regarding warfare hostilities], as such some of them perpetrated violations, such as looting or sometimes murdering and assaulting women. We called for these violations to be investigated and not forgotten just because they were fighters who heroically contributed to liberate the homeland from Daesh. These violations must not be tolerated. ”

Only later on during the Mosul military operation were their tasks limited to securing the outskirts of the city, while the main city was 'liberated' by the Anti-terrorism Squad and the Federal Police. The coordinator of a women-led NGO interviewed in WILPF's study said:

“ When the liberation process started, everyone participated in it, including the formal forces [Iraqi military and security forces] and the Popular Mobilization Forces. There were violations due to tribal revenge. Civil society organisations criticised those violations and called on the authorities to intervene. By the time the forces reached Mosul, the Popular Mobilization Forces' operations were limited to securing the borders, while the fighting and retaking of the city was done by the army. ”

Although extensive studies have been carried out on the human rights violations perpetrated by Daesh in Mosul, the level of sheer destruction caused by the military operations, in particular the bombing and shelling with explosive weapons, remains poorly addressed. In July 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that international observers had documented a range of human rights violations perpetrated by forces supporting the Iraqi government.⁴¹ This was later confirmed by a UN report.⁴² However, the Iraqi authorities still have to prove to be willing to hold any of those soldiers accountable. "As Prime Minister Abadi enjoys victory in Mosul, he is ignoring the flood of evidence of his soldiers committing vicious war crimes in the very city he's promised to liberate," said Human Rights Middle East Director Sarah Leah Whitson in July 2017.⁴³

Similarly, the UN Security Council Resolution 2379 established an investigative team tasked with collecting, storing and preserving evidence of crimes committed exclusively by Daesh. The mandate was not extended to those committed by other armed parties, which suggests a hierarchy of perpetrators where the same crimes could be punished if committed by one person or acquitted if committed by another, solely on the basis of the ideological belief of the perpetrator. This also highlights the biased political agenda that deliberately neglects the disproportionate impact of armed conflicts on women and girls and centralises instead the victory of military troops.

.....
 “ Such exploitation was not limited to fighters and bandits; it was reported that women who were able to flee the armed conflicts were also sexually exploited by the shelters' guards and humanitarian agents providing them with water, sanitation, and food.”

While little information about violations perpetrated by Iraqi forces is available, women IDPs reported that, on a number of occasions, Peshmerga forces, apart from 'liberating' towns from Daesh militants, also took over towns that were not under Daesh control. During WILPF's interviews, the Peshmerga forces were, in fact, often accused of having forcefully deported families from these towns into IDP camps in Kurdish regions with the justification of possible security threats.⁴⁴



In this regard, one respondent during the focus group discussion said: “Our town was not under Daesh control, it was also not in the fire lines. There was no fighting but it was near the security barricade. We were asked to leave our homes because of security reasons. Our house has not been destroyed, but the Peshmerga and displaced persons are now in our town and we are not allowed to return to our homes.”

Human Rights Watch has investigated the cases of 17 villages and towns in Kirkuk and Nineveh governorate where KRG security forces allegedly unlawfully demolished homes between September 2014 and May 2016.⁴⁵ An Iraqi woman activist stated that “eleven villages belonging to Arab citizens were destroyed in Nineveh Governorate, specifically villages located in Nineveh Plain area. So far, internally displaced citizens have not returned to their villages and live in the camps of Hassansham and Khazar.” HRW’s report raised concerns regarding Kurdish ambitions to reclaim lands during the operations.

Another internally displaced woman told WILPF:

“ We were living in our area and there was no Daesh there. Until one night they came and the bombing started. It was 5 a.m. when we heard the first explosion. The same day, the Peshmerga came and told us to leave our area. We got displaced to Mosul and we stayed in the school of Rashidiya,⁴⁶ for a week or 10 days. People were relying on the Peshmerga to obtain information. We were moved several times, then we reached Hassan Cham Camp,⁴⁷ but there we had no electricity for three months.[...] Then we went to the Nargizlia camp⁴⁸ and we arrived to this camp. ”



Photo credit: Jana Andert

Humanitarian Impact of Military Operations

A woman and her children are getting water at a check point.

Fleeing or Staying?

The concerns for the massive humanitarian impact of the Mosul military operations is not only limited to the risks the civilian population faced during the shelling but also while fleeing and in displacement. With the intensification of the bombing, civilians were encouraged to either remain in their homes or to flee through safe passages supposedly opened for civilians.⁴⁹ However, with the destruction by an airstrike of the last remaining bridge on the Tigris River connecting the Eastern and Western sides of Mosul on 28 December 2016,⁵⁰ hundreds of thousands of civilians remained trapped in the Western side.

The risks involved in fleeing prompted many families to stay in their areas due to the lack of genuinely safe routes and the fact that crossing frontlines was extremely dangerous. In this respect, one internally displaced woman in WILPF's study recounted her story and the risks she encountered along the road: "It was very difficult to leave. When we finally left, I guided my family out. At some point a young man lit a cigarette and Daesh started shooting at us. I couldn't look back to check on my children until I reached safety at the military barricade. I looked and asked 'are you all here?'"

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The risks involved in fleeing prompted many families to stay in their areas due to the lack of genuinely safe routes and the fact that crossing frontlines was extremely dangerous.
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Moreover, “what distinguishes Mosul also is that the houses have a cellar and the population used the cellar or basement, perhaps this was one of the factors that provided some kind of protection for residents who could not leave,” one key informant explained, and that led many to feel safer to stay in their houses rather than undertaking the dangerous journey out of the city.

“Those who stayed were faced with harsh living conditions, which were exacerbated even further by the military operations because “all services were unavailable, no water, no electricity, no food. We were under siege and under shelling from air and ground artillery. We were in the middle of the attack which was very vicious. Finally, we were liberated, but we lost a lot of people, families, and civilians, the liberation process was not easy,” explained one activist.”

Families who tried to flee usually resorted to leaving at night by foot through paths fraught with perils. An IDP woman in Garmawa camp described her experience fleeing the city as follows: “We left home at midnight and arrived to safety at 11 a.m. in the morning. We had to zigzag through explosives, Daesh militants were after us, the air jets were striking. We lost our way. We saw death. Then we reached the army point and we knew we had escaped death. We were not looking for food or water. We were only looking for safety.” The difficulties of leaving were echoed by another respondent currently living in one of the displacement camps who discussed the risks of leaving Mosul at night while trying to escape Daesh’s retaliations: “We walked through the streets of the village, then we got to the road. We didn’t know what was going to happen. On the way, Daesh militants were following us and some people were killed. We knew it was going to be a long way. We were going astray until we met the Army and the Peshmerga.”



A newly displaced woman carries her child at a check point in Qayyara, east of Mosul, Iraq. Photo taken on 26 October 2016.

Photo credit: Reuters/Goran Tomasevic – stock.adobe.com

One key respondent explained that the difficulty of the path made it impossible for families with the elderly and persons with disabilities to leave. In many cases family members refused to leave them behind and whole families remained in Mosul for that reason.⁵¹ Moreover, Daesh militants prevented families from leaving the area by threatening civilians and using them as human shields. One respondent working in a women’s rights organisation reported, “It was difficult, the bombing was ongoing, the operations were continuing, Daesh tried to use the population as human shields.”



The lack of protection and the ongoing fighting had severe psychological consequences on civilians, who were made to live in constant fear and terror. Women bore the double burden of this violence. One respondent working in an organisation operating throughout Iraq and with a specialised office in Mosul dealing with the issues of displaced persons, returnees, and those subject to violence, reported: “Daesh was recruiting women and carrying them with explosives, especially in Mosul. In the old area, security forces were able to hold one of these women, who were loaded with explosive belts and packages while crossing the safe passage for the families.”

Change of Traditional Gender Roles



A woman bakes traditional bread while a girl sits nearby her. The photo is taken in the Chebayesh marsh in Nassiriya, southeast of Baghdad, on 11 February 2015.

Photo credit: Reuters/Alaa Al-Marjani – stock.adobe.com

Gendered humanitarian response commonly pays disproportionate attention to the effects of sexual and gender-based violence on women and disregards socio-economic factors affecting women’s daily life during displacement. This is not to say that sexual and gender-based violence should not be taken into account as a core aspect affecting women’s sense of safety and security. But a more holistic approach to gender analysis of displacement is necessary. Women’s experiences of displacement vary according to a number of factors, including the place of settlement and origin, whether they come from a rural or urban background, their level of education, literacy, social class, ability/disability, ethnic and religious background, occupational skills, age, and specific family circumstances, among others. In the specific case of Mosul, women interviewed during the FGD pointed out how economic constraints and loss of livelihoods due to displacement coupled with the poor living conditions in the camps increased women’s sense of insecurity and directly affected their socio-economic position within the camp’s community. Moreover, the available camps were not capable to accommodate all IDPs fleeing Daesh; therefore, many IDPs lived within the host communities in unfinished buildings, farms, and in poor housing for cheaper prices.

The precarious economic conditions of the population are also closely tied to the suspension of the salaries of civil servants living and working in areas under the control of Daesh since July 2015. An economy like the Iraqi one, heavily reliant on the public sector, means that large portions of the population are employed by the state and depend on it for their subsistence. The government’s refusal to feed into Daesh’s income stream caused important ‘collateral damage,’ as a government



official admitted to the international news agency Reuters. “We are fighting Daesh and suspending salaries is a part of the war against Daesh. Regrettably, in every war there is collateral damage,” said Ali al-Freji, an adviser at the Iraqi cabinet’s economic committee.⁵²

For years, people were deprived of their livelihoods, pushing some to take paid positions with Daesh. One woman IDP respondent said: “My husband was employed by the government, he was injured and now has a permanent disability, his salary was suspended since Daesh took control and now I can’t afford to go to the authorities to process his salary or afford to hire a lawyer to help.” One of the priorities of civilians in Mosul following the retaking of the city was the immediate reinstatement of civil servants’ salaries, pensions, and social welfare assistance to ease the economic burden.

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“There are many women who are widows, who lost breadwinners, women whose homes were destroyed who are living in remains of schools or ruins of buildings, we need to find for them economic opportunities to stand on their feet.”
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Additionally, with the loss of family livelihoods and male unemployment, women’s increased role as income providers has led to some change in men’s and women’s perceptions of women’s economic roles. Many women interviewed found that they had taken on the role of breadwinners of the family and the responsibility to perform both economic and household tasks, including child care. One woman respondent in the displacement camp described her situation as follows: “I am the breadwinner, I am responsible for my family. My father used to be responsible for them, but now I am responsible for everything, their education, their health, their coming and going, what they eat and drink. I mean, literally everything.” Women respondents, whether inside

Mosul or internally displaced, all agreed that their main priority was to find opportunities for income generation to provide for their families. One woman in Mosul said: “There are many women who are widows, who lost breadwinners, women whose homes were destroyed who are living in remains of schools or ruins of buildings, we need to find for them economic opportunities to stand on their feet.”

Child Marriage and Polygamy

The economic constraints of male unemployment and displacement also forced women to make difficult decisions, including marrying off their underage daughters. A woman activist working in one of the displacement camps said: “We heard of how a mother was forced to marry her daughters as minors because she had too many children. The number of children among displaced families was between five and nine, and most of the women were pregnant and had children [while in the camps].” Another respondent, a women’s rights defender based in Sulaimaniyah shared, “There have been tensions between host communities and displaced women. Kurdish men are increasingly marrying off internally displaced women and challenging the local laws of Kurdistan. Polygamy is increasing.” Marrying IDP women, specifically young girls, is tightly tied to the repercussions of the

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“We heard of how a mother was forced to marry her daughters as minors because she had too many children.”
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economic situation; in fact, men who are well-settled within their host communities, exploit the economic needs of IDP families for safety and money by marrying their daughters. This also reflects the exploitation of widow mothers who lost their husbands in the conflict and who are left to struggle alone without any kind of support and with zero income to manage for their children and household.



Displaced Iraqi girls sing outside a tent school set up by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) at Hassan Sham camp, east of Mosul, Iraq. Photo taken on 8 December 2016.



Photo credit: Reuters/Mohammed Salem – stock.adobe.com

One of the main concerns raised by women activists working with underage girls who had been married off is that “they deal with her [the young bride] as a servant at home, at the same time she is a machine to make children. The little girl doesn't even know her rights and how to be with the husband, because the whole big family lives in the same room.” She also stressed: “In order to empower young women and girls, it is important to develop a health programme for family planning and children. Women in these areas are tired of procreating a large number of children, it is important to put pressure on clerics to criminalise the marriage of minors and punish parents who marry underage girls as young as 13.”

Other cases of gender-based violence reported during the military operation in Mosul included families seeking abortion services for their daughters. One aid worker who worked at the frontlines during the military operations in Mosul said:

“ We had lots of cases and trauma among the young girls, such as undocumented marriages, early pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies, we had to be the mediator between the family and the mother to be. We had to convince the family that it is not wise to push for abortion. Many families came asking to perform abortion for their daughters' unwanted pregnancies, or the men were caught by the armed forces, or because they didn't approve the marriage, or because they were afraid to have a son of a Daesh militant in the family, they were willing to do anything including termination of pregnancies. ”

At the end of 2017, the Iraqi parliament rejected the amendments to the Personal Status Law, which would have introduced more discriminatory legal provisions against women. The proposed amendments, in fact, would have required the secular courts to apply religious law on marriage, divorce, and inheritance.⁵³

Access to Healthcare

Until 2014, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and other medical organisations were able to provide high level medical care through “skilled nurses, doctors and surgeons, adequate medications, and high-quality equipment available and accessible to all,”⁵⁴ but regular access to healthcare became difficult when the city fell under the control of Daesh. According to a report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Iraq in April 2016,⁵⁵ many hospitals, clinics and health services in Daesh-controlled areas had been reported to be “partially or completely non-functional because of lack of medical staff and the damage done to medical

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“[...] many hospitals, clinics and health services in Daesh-controlled areas had been reported to be “partially or completely non-functional because of lack of medical staff and the damage done to medical facilities.”

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facilities.” However, organisations interviewed in WILPF’s study noted that the start of military operations and the ongoing conflict exacerbated the problem. In violation of IHL, Daesh regularly occupied medical facilities during the battle of Mosul, placing civilians and staff there at risk of incoming attacks. This was the case of the al-Salam Hospital in Wahda neighbourhood of Eastern Mosul,⁵⁶ the Ibn-Al-Athir hospital compound⁵⁷ as well as a clinic in Hammam al-Alil, 30 kilometers southeast of Mosul.⁵⁸ The Hammam al-Alil clinic was hit by a coalition airstrike on October 18, 2016, leaving eight civilians killed and at least two wounded, in an indiscriminate attack causing disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian objects, according to Human Rights Watch.⁵⁹



Photo credit: Jana Andert

The start of the military operations and the ongoing conflict exacerbated the already existing difficulties on getting access to healthcare.

As a woman civil society leader noted: “There is a whole hospital destroyed, the Red Cross is beginning to return to some hospitals, but these efforts are insufficient to meet the needs of hundreds of thousands of people living in this area.” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported that even though Mosul once had 3,500 hospital beds, today there are still less than 1,000 hospital beds for a population of 1.8 million people and the reconstruction of health facilities has been extremely slow.⁶⁰

In order to bridge the gap left by the government in terms of the medical assistance provided to affected areas, local organisations worked in cooperation with the security forces to grant access to



services. “We were very active, including at the frontlines when the liberation forces started providing health services to civilians. We had mobile clinics and we provided services to women delivering babies and injured civilians. They [the liberation forces] saw how active we were and approached us when the local clinic was liberated. The liberation forces requested that we run it to provide the people with medical health,” a woman humanitarian worker said. The limited possibility of mobile clinics to operate due to the dire conditions of the roads, and mud and rain making some areas impossible to reach, coupled with the reduced capacity of medical facilities meant that healthcare treatment, in certain instances, had to be provided by military facilities.



A view of the Republican hospital destroyed gate at the medical city in Mosul. Photo taken on 10 July 2018.

Photo credit: Reuters/Ari Jalal – stock.adobe.com

As reported by a woman humanitarian worker who was involved in relief efforts during the Mosul operations, the medical facilities remaining were unable to meet the needs of the population and military facilities began to treat injured civilians: “There were no medical operations dedicated for injured civilians. The medical services were dedicated for military forces, but also had to extend treatment services to civilians.” In order to tackle this problem, the Iraqi army collaborated with the local organisations during the military operations allowing healthcare organisations to follow the army and open primary care clinics to treat civilians and “[the liberation forces] watched us distributing food and serving the community and offered to bring us injured civilians to be treated and those who could not have been taken to military hospitals,” one humanitarian worker said.

The difficult access to healthcare had a double impact on women, because as a woman civil society leader explained: “We documented many cases of women, children and people with disabilities who were unable to obtain any assistance and thus lost their lives as a result of the lack of access to specific medical care and medications as a result of the military operations.”

Studies have found that higher proportions of women and children are killed by the use of explosive weapons and in particular pregnant women are put at additional risk by blast waves which could damage the placenta and lead to miscarriage and the destruction of infrastructure, and the consequent “decrease of access to reproductive health can be a death sentence for women.”⁶¹

The impossibility of accessing specialist reproductive health care during displacement put pregnant women at additional risk.⁶² In October 2016, UNFPA estimated that between 250,000 to 300,000



women of reproductive age were in need of reproductive health services and care for gender-based violence.⁶³ As part of the response to the Mosul operations, UNFPA positioned 25 mobile reproductive health teams and established 20 maternal health facilities. The clinics provided gynaecological services, family planning care, antenatal care, safe delivery services and post-natal care,⁶⁴ in addition to 23 teams for psychosocial support, emergency case management and referrals for survivors of gender-based violence.⁶⁵

Gender-Based Violence

Conflict, forced displacement, the lack of rule of law and protective mechanisms, as well as the disruption of communities have a particular impact on the increased incidence of gender-based violence and reinforce already existing patriarchal structures. Human Rights Watch pointed out that the continuous displacement of people causes an increase in cases of “trafficking in women and girls in and out of the country for sexual exploitation.”⁶⁶

One woman from one of the local organisations explained that in order to tackle the increase of harassment, gender-based violence and patriarchal culture, a number of initiatives were started in the camps: “We run awareness campaigns, we try to have awareness campaigns from men specialists to men to explain what harassment and rape are.”

While gendered humanitarian response rightly prioritises prevention, it often lacks specific measures to avoid re-stigmatisation of survivors and to promote reintegration into the community. Moreover, even though prevention mechanisms are in place in displacement camps, the majority of the

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The collapse of the legal system pushes survivors to refrain from reporting abuses and violence due to fear of repercussions against them and their children.
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humanitarian actors were not aware of the gender-based violence mitigation mechanisms such as the Call to Action and the IASC GBV Mainstreaming Guidelines, and therefore, gender-based violence continues to be a persistent issue. Reporting remains difficult due to the lack of access to fair justice, protection, and health systems and to the challenges women’s rights organisations find in accessing certain areas for security reasons. In particular, the collapse of the legal system pushes survivors to refrain from reporting abuses and violence due to fear of repercussions against them and their children.

One activist working in the Kirkuk camp reported: “I had cases where women were displaced but were living inside the Kirkuk governorate [outside the camps] and they were subjected to cases of violence and threats to the safety of their lives. [...] I took them [the displaced women who were threatened with death] to the camp and they stayed with some of the families there. The families they were staying with were beating them, especially the widows.”

The majority of respondents working in the humanitarian and relief field reported that they were not able to document gender-based violence during the military operation, however, some cases were reported during displacement, especially in the camps. Only a few organisations, such as the Hamorabi Human Rights Organisation working in the Nineveh governorate with minorities, were able to monitor violations and attacks on women, minorities, whether Yazidi, Christian, Shabak, Kaka’i, Turkmen, etc.

As mentioned above, the lack of a legal framework specifically criminalising domestic violence in Iraq, negatively affected the possibilities for women to report cases of domestic violence and to access



support services dedicated to women. Since 2015, the Iraqi government has been working on a new law against domestic violence that would not only protect survivors, including the provision of restraining orders and government-run shelters for those fleeing their homes, but also would consider the possibility of creating a cross-ministerial committee to combat domestic violence.⁶⁷ To date, the draft Anti-Domestic Violence Law remains an open debate in the Parliament and no step has been taken to formalise the proposed law but women's rights activists have been calling out some provisions in the draft law, including the possibility of referrals to family reconciliation committees.

However, one activist interviewed reported that following the military offensive and during the reconstruction period, the resumption of the justice system in Mosul prompted a decrease of cases of gender-based violence and encouraged displaced women to step forward and report cases of violence: "Many women started filing complaints of domestic violence against their husbands, especially in cases of physical violence, beatings, psychological violence, or multiple marriages."



A woman who is a relative of men accused of being Islamic State militants is seen at a camp in Bartella, east of Mosul, Iraq. Photo taken on 15 July 2017.

Photo credit: Reuters/Thaier Al-Sudani - stock.adobe.com

In particular, it was pointed out that women related to Daesh militants arriving at the camps were more subject to gender-based violence and sexual harassment, "these women are more vulnerable to harassment, sexual assaults, sexual bargains for obtaining the necessary relief items to live. They are poor, their educational status is substandard, the social situation is disjointed because most of them have been abandoned by their tribes," a woman human rights defender, based in Baghdad elaborated.

In addition to the violence experienced by women and the increased incidence of sexual violence, there are still women from Mosul who have been abducted and remain disappeared, especially around 1,500 Yazidi women, whose fate remains unknown. Only a small number were released after the 'liberation' of Mosul. One woman activist during the interview asked, "This is one of our concerns today. How can these women be released?" She highlighted the severe consequences of detention and torture of these women and the ways they "suffer due to very severe psychological harm and even health problems." She argued that this should be one of central issues during the reconstruction period.



Photo credit: Arianna Pagani

Along the roads of the city, in buildings still under construction, there are hundreds of groups of Yazidis looking for shelter. Photo taken in Duhok, Iraq.

All those issues have been addressed by women in a number of advocacy activities. The chairperson of a local NGO explained:

“ More than one organisation has opened outreach centres, social and legal centres, but it still doesn't cover all areas of Mosul. We need these centres and need to document the testimonies. This is part of a programme decided on 23 July when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2379 on the accountability of members of Daesh, and the Security Council is supposed to form a committee or an international investigation team to examine testimonies and hear testimony from victims. We have raised the issue of sexual violence and the issue of women's testimonies, as well as the representation of civil society in the work of this group, especially the issue of gender and the issue of compensation for survivors. We presented our concrete proposals in a letter with a number of international organisations to the Security Council on this subject, but also regarding the issue of access to justice for Daesh families. There is also a joint communiqué signed between the Government of Iraq and the Special Rapporteur of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, signed in 2015 by the two parties. ”

Dealing with the Psychological Impact of Conflict

Another challenge is the widespread presence of mental health issues because of the violations of human rights that women and the community as a whole endured. Conflict, including the bombing and shelling of the city with explosive weapons, losing family members, exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, fleeing within horrifying circumstances, hunger, and displacement have substantial health and social impacts on IDPs, including acute and long-term effects on mental health.⁶⁸ Studies have shown that the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression among the female displaced population is much higher than among men.⁶⁹ In particular, displaced women



are often neglected and suffer the social, cultural, economical and health impacts of violence without due support. One of the shortcomings of WILPF's study is that women interviewed refrained from discussing directly their experiences of violence and trauma. However, one woman activist explained that during their work on mobile clinics, this attitude was common because those women "had lost their children and their husbands, and they suppressed their tragedies."

Although women faced violence at the hands of various armed actors, including government and government-supported actors as well as opposition militias and Daesh, psychosocial support, such as female-led therapy, is rarely provided in displacement camps. Interestingly, an article from IRIN in 2018, shed light on the informal strategies Mosulite women adopted during the rule of Daesh to overcome trauma. The article argues that hairdressers, barbers, cosmetologists, and manicurists served as "the keepers of untold secrets" and "the salon is transformed into an unofficial group therapy session,"⁷⁰ compensating for the lack of access to mental health services.

In addition to the need for specific mental health services for women, women respondents in the FGD reiterated the need to build local and national capacities to deal with the consequences of violence against women, rather than relocating the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence to third countries as is currently being done by most international programmes. A woman working for a local NGO pointed out:

" There are programmes from a number of countries. One example is the German programme, which was opened to more than 600 women Yazidi survivors. They went to Germany to undertake psychotherapy. This programme ended this year and next year there are similar programmes in Canada and Australia. We continue to send our daughters abroad to receive treatment in this way. I think they need an environment close to themselves, an environment that they understand and know, but their presence in foreign countries may provide security but shock them at the same time. "

Another woman working for a local NGO stressed, "We need to build an army of gender-based violence case managers and counselors; we need to have a good number of trained mental health professionals. Those are not adequately available currently" because women and children are "still affected by the shock, and the psychological services provided by some international organisations are limited."

A number of organisations also set up initiatives and programmes giving women the chance to earn an income while providing psychological support for the trauma experienced. An internally displaced woman volunteering to help other women IDPs explained how one of the programmes worked: "I worked with IOM as a sewing trainer and women were referred to us by a therapist. Our goal was to keep them busy; for this reason we tried to avoid speaking of sad topics, but rather brought up different subjects. For the first 10 minutes we would play, dance and sing and then we showed them how to knit and the last 10 minutes we used to discuss their current state of mind or to play sports."

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 "We need to build an army of gender-based violence case managers and counselors; we need to have a good number of trained mental health professionals. Those are not adequately available currently"



Photo credit: Reuters/Art Jalal - stock.adobe.com

Response to the Needs

Yazidi children play with colourful pinwheels that represent the living souls of the Yazidi women held captive by Daesh.

Humanitarian Response in Mosul

According to UNHCR data from November 2017, 1,021,212 people had been internally displaced in Nineveh district, part of which was the result of the Mosul military operations.⁷¹ By the time the operations started, the UN's Humanitarian Coordinator had worked on a comprehensive humanitarian contingency plan for the protection of civilians in Mosul. Protection mechanisms, such as secure humanitarian corridors and preparations of transport services for IDPs, were in place. However, even though those mechanisms should have already been consolidated in previous military operations against Daesh, it was reported that the delay of funding to implement contingency plans and the slow recruitment of staff made it difficult to cope with the mass displacement of civilians and the violence of fighting.⁷²

Women activists articulated in the WILPF study that Iraqi forces' engagement with civil society at large was very limited and there was little coordination between governmental institutions and local civil society organisations to allow early engagement in humanitarian work during the operation. One example of how this lack of coordination undermined a prompt response by local civil society organisations (CSOs) was that these groups were not informed of when operations would commence, leaving them behind schedule and unprepared when the first military offensive was launched. The coordinator of a women-led organisation on the ground said: "In terms of consultation and cooperation with the military and security forces, I think it was very weak, there was no full or



high coordination with the organisations.” Respondents believed that this was, on the one hand, due to the fact that Mosul itself did not have a strong structure for civil society to thrive, especially since the Daesh takeover. On the other hand, another respondent noted that one key issue was that even when some form of coordination in terms of delivery of humanitarian response happened, it was not planned but rather spontaneous.

Generally, the humanitarian response plan in Iraq was to be implemented by UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), while only 10% of funding was allocated to national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in 2017.⁷³ One of the main criticisms raised by the women in WILPF’s study was that “this [type of] humanitarian response is focused on camps. Since the liberation, services have been very weak and in the Western side [of Mosul] there are no services at all. The houses are destroyed. Soon people in the camps will be forced to return. Return to what? Ruins?”

“Since the liberation, services have been very weak and in the Western side [of Mosul] there are no services at all. The houses are destroyed. Soon people in the camps will be forced to return. Return to what? Ruins?”

Moreover, the inadequate and delayed securing of funding constrained the capacity of UN agencies and international organisations to assist in the first phase of military operations. Even when international organisations managed to intervene, they were predominantly able to help only on the Eastern side and only thanks to their collaboration with local NGOs. One woman aid worker working in a local NGO explained in the study:

“We are partners with the UN, we distribute food to the people through support from the [Iraq Humanitarian] Pool Fund.⁷⁴ However, projects that focus on reviving the livelihoods of people, like the ones we run in the Western side that is completely devastated, are funded by INGOs. We helped in rehabilitating bakery shops, dairy shops, even a video games shop to protect children and provide them with a safe area to play because playing outside is too dangerous due to all the explosive remnants. But if we had waited for the UN, it would be too late.”

The people trapped in Mosul, in the meantime, lived through harsh conditions for months amid scarcity of food and medicine. Many drank from unsafe water, causing them to suffer waterborne diseases, and young children had no access to milk.

In the study, women key informants also pointed at the need to address each situation individually and described the different services provided by the organisations they worked with. One key informant explained, “It was impossible to deliver aid to the Western side, aid only began coming after the region was completely liberated.” Only after the liberation of the Eastern part of Mosul, “organisations began to establish a foothold in the delivery of basic services to families; in displacement camps, perhaps the role of organisations developed more in terms of legal and social services as well as health and relief.” Stressing the weight local CSOs were forced to work with, she added: “I think it is possible to say that the role of the organisations during the liberation was a hundred percent focused on relief. Many of the organisations were entering the liberated areas to provide basic and relief services to the families. They used to deliver water, for example, or essential food such as grains, etc., or even fuel to families. These organisations worked around the clock in the liberated areas.”

Conditions in the Camps

While many chose or were forced to remain in Mosul, large portions of the population were able to flee Daesh and military violence. Displaced families were relocated in 19 camps and emergency sites, while others were able to live with family and/ or in host communities.⁷⁵ Many families often preferred settling in host communities in unfinished structures outside of the camps because of the camps' restrictions on mobility, including not being allowed to leave the camps, except through the payment of money or the mediation of a community leader, and mobile phones being confiscated for security reasons. For women who were not accompanied by their husbands or a male family member, leaving camps was made additionally difficult as they had limited access to resources or to patronage of tribal networks.

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“Displaced people got rid of Daesh, but their living circumstances remained harsh. I arrived into the tent late at night. The tent was not ready. There was no food.”

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Certain UN agencies in Iraq built IDP camps and stocked relief items before the launching or in conjunction with relief operations, but they did not fully estimate the extent of displacement that such a brutal offensive would cause. The inadequate planning of displacement camps and their poor construction meant that most camps were not finished by the time military operations started, and relief supplies were not easily accessible to IDPs. One IDP woman respondent in the study said: “Displaced people got rid of Daesh, but their living circumstances remained harsh. I arrived into the tent late at night. The tent was not ready. There was no food.”

The living conditions of IDPs in the camps were worsened by the fact that the majority of the operations took place over winter and temperatures were frigid. Civilians were lacking gasoline and electricity for heating and access to relief items, ranging from food supplies and drinking water to blankets to protect them from the cold. In many of the interviews, women highlighted problems such as the tents being too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. Most of the IDP respondents in WILPF's study indicated that the quantity and quality of food aid was insufficient and poor, and access to food aid was limited for women because lines were overcrowded and they usually had to wait for long hours among men to get their turn.



A newly displaced woman washes dishes in Khazer refugee camp, Iraq. Photo taken on 11 November 2016.

Photo credit: Reuters/Zohra Bensemra – stock.adobe.com

The camps' overcrowding soon became a persistent issue, with people stranded at the entrance of camps "waiting in the mud and cold, crouching by small fires, using porta-cabin toilets and asking which buses will take them onwards,"⁷⁶ as government and UNHCR camps reached capacity within the first month of the Mosul offensive. The focus group discussions for WILPF's study were carried out with women who were recently displaced and who had lived through multiple displacements and moved from camp to camp. The majority of these women complained about the situation in the camps, where services and resources allocated to displaced persons had been depleted over time. As one of the women who participated in the FGD responded: "Look at us now, we are 10 people in one tent, we have no salary, no job. We are in the hands of God, that's it."

Additionally, the overcrowding and bad planning of the camps meant that a number of security and safety issues arose as soon as the first IDPs arrived. This included the fear of the tent catching fire, after similar incidents took place in the camp; or finding snakes and scorpions inside the tents because the base of the tent was not paved; or the difficulty of walking from one tent to another on rainy days as the roads in between became muddy. The poor construction of IDP camps left many lacking a permanent home or sustainable livelihoods. Many people will likely remain in limbo for years in IDP camps, urban slums, or other areas of refuge with little prospect of reaching a durable solution, with their living conditions worsening due to security issues and poor hygienic conditions. This exposes IDPs to additional vulnerability, impoverishment and marginalisation. The lack of adequate housing tends to affect women disproportionately. They will have suffered trauma during their flight, and will have lost familiar coping strategies and support mechanisms, and so will struggle even further in inadequate shelter.

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 Displaced women and girls living in camps are particularly vulnerable to the risk of being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. Not enough attention is paid to their specific needs and vulnerabilities in the design and layout of the camps.

Moreover, displaced women and girls living in camps are particularly vulnerable to the risk of being subjected to sexual and gender-based violence. Not enough attention is paid to their specific needs and vulnerabilities in the design and layout of the camps. Women respondents to the FGD described how the issue of security in the camps affected them in gender-specific ways. For example, they felt that a main problem was a lack of privacy, both in the tents and in the shared bathrooms. One IDP woman respondent in WILPF's study elaborated: the tents are close to each other. The neighbour in the next tent can hear everything. And the common wash area. Every three tents have a common wash area, a man can walk in while a woman is in the wash area and the locks in many shared washrooms were broken. Bathrooms were in fact often difficult to reach, especially for women, who would feel unsafe to use them at night and feared for their privacy.

Women's Empowerment Projects in the Camps

The challenges when addressing the patriarchal structures reinforced by militarism and violent conflict are reflected in the structure of the camps. While almost all camps are led by men, there are a few cases where women were able to take leadership roles at the displacement camps. Those were usually organised into women's committees and involved mapping the needs and priorities of women in the camp and creating awareness on different issues, including training women on economic skills, giving psychosocial support, or making referrals to different services. One of the women key informants from the study explained: "Many organisations are still working in the camps and they focus specifically on women in terms of empowering programmes, building their capacities and creating women leaderships for camp management. However, camp management is still 90 percent under the control of men."



According to one activist working on the ground, women’s willingness to participate in decision-making was concretised with: “Women in the camps learning how to write policy papers and recommendations aimed at changing some of the policies or decisions within the camp as well as how to lobby, but also so that they could use it when they return to their original areas.” An internally displaced woman in a leadership role explained:

“ We made visits to every tent in the camp. We would visit 15-20 tents a day. We were able to visit all the tents in the camp in four months. We asked the women about their needs and wrote it down to share with the camp administration. The recently displaced persons who arrived came with nothing, only their clothes that they were wearing. I hosted some of them for 20 days in my tent. We need to be there for each other. ”

The women who took those leadership roles showed a high level of resilience and a strong willingness to improve the situation of women even though they themselves had limited resources and faced major challenges. IDP women in leadership roles reported that some of the challenges they faced included managing the expectations of internally displaced women they visited and the lack of trust towards them. One respondent said: “When I visited the women [internally displaced], they would tell me they were promised aid but it never came through, they told me it is all ink on paper, there is no trust; I explained to them that it’s out of our hands and that whatever we receive we share it with all.”

A number of empowerment projects emerged in the camps, in particular Kirkuk, Anbar and Salah Al-Din. Women were involved in all aspects of humanitarian relief in the camps: “From the distribution and rapid response of humanitarian relief, and the fight against gender-based violence, as well as legal assistance for many of them to obtain documents. There were also children-friendly spaces where children could freely express what they had experienced. There were also economic empowerment programmes for displaced women and rural women,” said one respondent working in an organisation dealing with violence against women.

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The Kirkuk camp welcomed IDPs arriving from Mosul, Anbar, Falluja, Salah Al-Din as well as Kirkuk itself and it is one of the few camps where programmes dedicated to women were started. One of the human rights activists working in the camp stated that: “We worked to empower women for extended periods of time through literacy classes for those who could not read or write. For those who are literate, we would run awareness-raising sessions on women’s rights. We would start from the basics of human and women’s rights, and move to [the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women] CEDAW and UN [Security Council] Resolution 1325 [on Women, Peace and Security], and I was impressed by the possibilities and capabilities of women, they only needed the right motivation.” These training sessions not only allowed women to write about and report their

needs and demand for change within the camp, but they provided women with knowledge and skills that they could re-apply once back in their areas of origin. However, she also pointed out that, having worked in a number of camps throughout Iraq, she noticed that engaging IDP women in the everyday life of the camps, as it happened in Kirkuk, was not homogenous across all areas. “In the southern governorates, women did not participate to the same extent in these areas,” she noted.

A woman from one of the organisations working in the camps explained: “Our organisation supported displaced women with economic projects, so when these women returned to Mosul, they took their



projects with them, whether they were sewing workshops, housewares or shops selling household or food items; it is important that this contributed to the revitalisation of their region." Although the training perpetuated women's traditional roles, despite this not being a sustainable model of economic empowerment, it produced some encouraging results that led to women setting up their own businesses focusing on small projects such as sewing, running hair salons or photography. "These are projects that can bring some money to women. But I believe this is the lowest form of empowerment. We need medium projects, in which women are not operating as individuals, but work in groups."

Through those projects women noticed a shift of attitude and a break from traditional gender roles, as one IDP respondent, who was volunteering with INGO as a community facilitator, noted, "When I started working, my husband was not accepting the idea, but now he's convinced, and is encouraging me to work."

Daesh's Violent Mentality Remains

Even though Daesh lost control of Mosul, its long rule in the city led to the creation of a unique system of morality in the Mosul society, especially for women. Both in the city and in the displacement camps, a culture of shame, bound by a repression of sexuality and a tight control of women's bodies by men persists to this day.⁷⁷ A woman working in a civil society organisation in Mosul said: "We may have liberated the land from Daesh, but have we liberated the minds from their mentality? When I visit the camps, I hear grandmothers sing lullabies to their grandsons for seeking revenge when they grow older. I hear children singing songs from Daesh."

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Another activist working in displacement camps reported "The mentality of Daesh still exists, not only in terms of the use of violence, but also in terms of control of women and marriage of underage girls, depriving them of schooling and viewing them as inferior beings."

This male-dominated mentality has been particularly absorbed by children. According to one of WILPF's key informants, "Children have been brainwashed during a period of Daesh. It is important to consider how they can be reintegrated in a healthy way. We have noticed through our work with children that two years have passed since the liberation of Salah Al-Din and Anbar, but children are still singing songs that were broadcast during a time of Daesh."

The presence of family members affiliated with Daesh is one of the main concerns in post-'liberation' Mosul. Many women who are suspected of being affiliated to a member of Daesh, particularly Yazidi and Muslim women who were married off to members of Daesh, have been kept with their children in high-security displacement camps. Those women are often discriminated against and prevented from obtaining legal documents for their marriages or for their children and they are at risk of falling through the cracks in the post-liberation period.

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have ties with Daesh, due to fear of tribal revenge. And although Iraqi laws grant Iraqi women the right to pass their nationality to their children, this right was suspended for those married to Daesh members, or those suspected to have ties with Daesh, due to social pressure on state officials and the extension of the power of security forces over the judicial system.

Women's rights organisations in Mosul have been working on creating a plan that takes into account the issue of IDPs and their need for psychosocial treatment, but also economic rehabilitation and integration into society. Such plans need to also deal with families that do not have legal documents, especially for their children, and with the issue of reforming the security system in

Iraq, especially the Ministry of the Interior and the judiciary. As such, these organisations highlighted the need for social cohesion and reconciliation programmes, and have argued that, in order to achieve these, women from Daesh families who are in IDP camps must be helped in order to facilitate their reintegration into society. Women activists mentioned that the rehabilitation has to be pursued by creating new curricula and programmes and through long-term engagement with those individuals still affected by Daesh's influence. They stated the goal should be to build programmes that would allow "integration to happen in such a way that they do not return to form a new cell or a new generation of terrorists, because in an environment infused with violence and extremism, this cannot be eliminated easily." Finally, a woman activist stressed that: "All these issues are on the table and must now be worked on in the next phase after liberation. We are working on this and focus on it in the priorities of the National Plan for the Role of Women in Security and Peace Operations."

Some families agreed on marrying their daughters off to Daesh militants due to coercion or fear of reprisal as Daesh controlled the cities. After the defeat of Daesh, they disowned their girls because of fear of tribal revenge, others hid their daughters completely. For more than three years, girls were restricted to their homes for protection. "Many women that we had to deal with are paying for being wives of Daesh militants. It wasn't the woman's choice, her own family would disown her because they are afraid, the family of the husband will disown her, because they don't want to be associated with his direct family, in either case women are punished. How can you bring peace when you are already pushing people over and over again? You push them back towards violence again."

"What happened after the liberation is that the families from the tribes themselves decided to first blow up the houses of the Daesh families and force the families to live in the tents. After sending them to the tents they felt sorry and decided to allow only young girls and the female children to come back to their families, because they have no shame."



Photo credit: Jana Andert

Women's Leading Roles in the Revival of Mosul

Despite the eradication of Daesh's rule in Mosul, women and girls are still facing severe difficulties in claiming back their positions in society.

Returning to Mosul

Although the city has been 'liberated', women in Mosul and in IDP camps feel their lives still have not been normalised. According to an activist interviewed, "There are quite a few IDPs, according to the statistics, who still are in the camps, both in the areas of Erbil and Dohuk, which is in the Kurdistan region, and also near Kirkuk in the south of Mosul, there are camps and areas around Mosul such as Al Qayyara, Tal Afar, etc." The challenges for women who wish to return to Mosul are multiple. In some cases, they cannot afford to leave the camps, in others they are still waiting to obtain security clearance. Some others fear tribal revenge if they return to the city. Many expressed fears about their future, as one activist reported: "all of them are thinking about what they will eat, what will happen to them, will they return to their homes or not?" This was echoed by many women IDPs interviewed during the focus group discussions. One of them said: "I mean, I feel like I want to return but I do not have a future there." Another Christian respondent described some of the challenges she faced when she returned to Mosul: "I returned to my house to see the religious slogans written all over the walls. It was very provocative."

One activist working in a camp in Kirkuk said that she continues to give training sessions to displaced women there, however, even though the majority of those who were from Mosul returned to Mosul, challenges are still present. In this regard she said: "The culture of fear is still entrenched in these areas and there are still large numbers of weapons. Additionally, the rule of the clan law is more



powerful than the rule of law there. There are many challenges: their economic suffering, the lack of employment opportunities, women who have gained strength and rights and started to lose them once they returned to their area of origin.” She explained that the path to rebuilding the social texture of Mosul is still long and she hoped that “international organisations working in liberated areas will try to work with women in order to promote and change the existing culture of society and empower women more. I also hope that the central government will work on a strategic plan to promote social cohesion, promote the human rights environment in the region, allocate budgets and open schools for children who have been denied school for three years or more, or who were under the control of Daesh.”

International organisations are still working, but many of them have left the region as aid has become scarce, pushing people to rely only on the simple aid provided by the Iraqi government, and the donations of people, churches, mosques and local organisations. The UN Humanitarian appeal requested for Iraq went down from 1.1 billion USD in 2014 to 568 million USD in 2018⁷⁸. Women generally felt disappointed for the slow response in reconstructing the city of Mosul, especially the Western side. They also criticised the limited participation of women in the reconstruction conference that was held in Kuwait. For example, one respondent said that: “Unfortunately, only NGOs that are affiliated to political powers participated in the Kuwait reconstruction conference.” More importantly, the burden of reconstruction fell mostly on local initiatives that were initiated post-liberation by the local population themselves to remove hundreds of tons of debris from the area to allow people to return. One notable example is the Iraqi Women’s Network which proposed to form “local grassroots committees that begin by integrating the needs of conflict affected areas into a national strategy, identifying the needs of their regions to reach a comprehensive national strategy to address all the issues experienced by Iraqi society.”

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“These women face many challenges today: the economic suffering, the lack of employment opportunities. During displacement, the role of women changed and they felt more empowered to claim their rights, including at the domestic level, and they now fear that returning would mean losing them again.”
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Women’s fear is not only due to economic considerations, but they are particularly afraid of losing the relative freedom achieved during displacement. One NGO worker explained that: “These women face many challenges today: the economic suffering, the lack of employment opportunities. During displacement, the role of women changed and they felt more empowered to claim their rights, including at the domestic level, and they now fear that returning would mean losing them again.” For example, women who were internally displaced in areas with fewer patriarchal rules shared concerns of returning to Mosul due to the conservative attitude marginalising women. A gender-based violence expert working in the Kirkuk camp explained that the level of participation of women and the impacts on them was different from area to area. For example, “Tribal rule and control is less strong in Kirkuk; many women IDPs who came from Mosul were able to stand

up against their abusive husbands, they understood their rights, they were able to claim their rights during displacement in Kirkuk. Now they are afraid to lose all those rights if they go back to Mosul.”

After the ‘liberation’ of Mosul, women respondents who were in Mosul and survived Daesh had a sense of empowerment and some are even running for elections. A number of women, in fact, decided to put themselves forward as candidates in the upcoming election, even if they had no previous political experience. This was instrumental to “achieving a good number of women in parliament, the provincial council and other decision-making positions within the government departments,” said a woman activist interviewed.



Government Strategic Plan

Once the 'liberation' process was over, civil society organisations stressed the need for a joint effort and mobilisation of all existing groups in order to concentrate on the post-liberation phase. They highlighted issues such as the return of the displaced, the restoration of trust and communication among the members of the community, and working on peace and sustainability.

The central government will work on a strategic plan to promote cultural development and enhance the human rights environment in the region. However, "there are no funds allocated for the reconstruction process, the state does not have the money," said an activist interviewed by WILPF. She added: "I believe that they cannot be covered because the cost of reconstruction is over \$ 100 billion." Indeed, Iraq received no more than \$ 30 billion in pledges during the International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq held in Kuwait in February 2018, although the Iraqi government appealed for \$ 88 billion. The activist also said that the main issue to tackle is regaining the trust of the population: "people do not see that they are receiving compensation for the devastation they suffered and the tragedy they experienced," but the government is not providing any clear solutions to it. Another woman civil society leader from Mosul stressed that: "there will be no peace building in Mosul and Nineveh due to distrust and conflicts between factions and parties," and the persistence of sectarianism and partisan politics and political polarisation.



A student walks inside the damaged campus of the University of Mosul. Photo taken on 25 February 2018.

Photo credit: Reuters/Khalid Al-Mousily – stock.adobe.com

State-sponsored protection mechanisms need to be established under the Joint Statement signed with the United Nations last year, as well as UN Security Council Resolution 2379, to provide protection measures for women in terms of amending laws, documentation and monitoring violations. It is very crucial to make this one of the priorities of the government. As one respondent noted: "the enactment of laws criminalising violence in all its forms is very important. We seek to build a country that criminalises violence by special laws and empowers women economically. The only way to guarantee that peace and security in Iraq will be very sustainable is by protecting women's dignity, especially that of displaced women."

In February 2009 amendments to the election law in Iraqi Kurdistan increased the legal quota for women in the legislature from 25% to 30%.⁷⁹ However, women activists noted that “women are an integral part of building national strategies. This is what we have emphasised. Women should not only make up a 25% representation in these committees, as in parliament, but it should be half or more. The needs of women are very important and the women's vision of peace is a vision that is different from that of war-lords who are men.”

A leading women's rights advocate working on the inclusion of women in conflict management and conflict resolution in the region, explained that “our experience shows that women can play such a central role, especially in camps, villages and towns” and it was important to recognise the presence of women in conflict resolution and security but asked “How can women contribute? We believe that it is necessary to involve women. Because women are an effective energy in the construction process, especially in working as productive hands.” She said: “We have built the capacity of dozens of young women to contribute to conflict resolution processes and peace-building.”

One of the early initiatives women's groups undertook was the organisation of a women's conference in Mosul. The national conference in Mosul on 26 August 2017 was held by the Iraqi Women Network in cooperation with the Iraqi Hope Society and women activists. Titled *Women of Iraq, makers of peace and justice*, the conference aimed at creating solidarity among women in Mosul as well as reporting and documenting the violence they have experienced. It also addressed the post-liberation challenges in combating the effects of extremism and terrorism and in encouraging women to contribute to stability, security, reconciliation and reconstruction of affected areas, particularly for women survivors of violence and displaced women. The conference put together more than 180 participants, including women from various cities in Iraq, civil society activists and women who have resisted the culture of violence, exclusion and terrorism during the rule of Daesh. One of the activists said, “We wanted the voice of women to be heard, recognition that women are also a voice and have an effective role in the process of stability and the reconstruction process, and we are still working in this direction.”

Recommendations to the Iraqi Government

- Immediately release women who are suspected of being affiliated to a member of Daesh, particularly Yazidi and Muslim women who are married to members of Daesh, from high-security displacement camps and instead work on economic rehabilitation and integration with society.
- Guarantee safe, dignified and voluntary return of displaced persons.
- Acknowledge and address the challenges women face when attempting to return to Mosul, including difficulties of leaving the camps, obtaining security clearance and fear of tribal revenge.
- Provide support to women who have become the sole income provider for their families.
- Establish programmes to support survivors of explosive weapons attacks, including psychological and social support.
- Ensure mechanisms of reparation are established and are implemented with a gender responsive approach.
- Develop confidence-building measures and negotiate a sustainable political solution ensuring that politically independent women are fairly represented in peace processes including national reconciliation and reconstruction and recovery.
- Establish a comprehensive gender-based violence response programme comprising of support to survivors, such as protection, health services, shelters, psychosocial support, financial and legal aid, and ensure the availability and accessibility of these services in all areas.
- Set up programmes to raise awareness on sexual and gender-based violence; define specific measures to avoid re-stigmatisation of survivors; provide psychological support services for survivors and establish shelters for survivors.
- Emphasise the capacity-building for graduates of psychology faculties and social workers from the Iraqi universities and hire at least one of them in every women's shelter, women's centre, health clinic, and hospital.
- Immediately reinstate civil servants' salaries, pensions, and social welfare assistance, ensuring they are gender responsive, to ease the economic burden on the civilian population, including the provision of compensation and support for those who have lost their livelihoods and housing as a consequence of the conflict.
- Ensure the fast reconstruction of high-level medical care infrastructures and schools.
- Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programmes must be set up, ensuring that they are responsive to gender equality, mitigation of gender-based violence, and women's economic empowerment.

- Establish a legal framework specifically criminalising domestic violence in Iraq and implement confidence-building measures to allow survivors to report abuses.
- Address the legal gaps between national laws and Kurdish legislation to promote women's protection.
- Reject any amendment to the Personal Status Law proposing to apply religious law on issues such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and address the recommendations put forward by women led organisations in Iraq on amendments of the Personal Status Law (Alja'afari law).
- Ensure that durable solutions are established to provide IDPs with shelter, access to health, education, social protection and legal assistance (including access to legal documentation) in collaboration with all relevant actors, including establishing a national policy to address the humanitarian situation.
- Develop a reconstruction plan based on the promotion of social cohesion and human rights and ensure women's meaningful participation in the reconstruction process.
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Recommendations to Member States and the International Community

- Develop stronger and more explicit international standards, restrictions and prohibitions regarding the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.
- Investigate, collect, store and preserve evidence of crimes and human rights violations and abuses, including those perpetrated against women, that were committed by all parties to the conflict.
- Ensure that the “funding mobilisation and allocations” prioritise GBV programming, assessments, and support to survivors, both into humanitarian and development programming.
- Take serious actions to hold accountable all those responsible for violations of human rights during the military operations, including the unlawful demolition of homes, forceful deportation of civilians and indiscriminate attack causing disproportionate harm to civilians and civilian objects.
- Pressure all parties to the conflict to reveal the fate of those that continue disappeared and ensure that any person deprived of liberty is held in a recognised place of detention and has the right to challenge his or her detention before an independent and impartial body.
- Apply diplomatic pressure on the Iraqi government to stop all administrative procedures that hinder women’s access to documentations; tackle any unnecessary discrimination preventing women suspected of being affiliated with Daesh from obtaining legal documents for themselves and their children.

Recommendations to NGOs

- Guarantee access to specialist reproductive health care for all women, including gynaecological services, family planning care, antenatal care, safe delivery services and post-natal care.
- Provide training for women and men mental health professionals and build the capacity of local female and male actors to provide psychosocial support and mental health services that is gender-sensitive.
- Ensure that gender-sensitive health services, and both psychological and social support to be provided are in consultation with women grassroots organisations operating on the ground and with women and girls who are the targets of these services , with specific attention to the needs of IDPs.
- In collaboration with local women experts and health professionals, establish support services for women, including female-led therapy for displaced women to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression among the female displaced population as well as the social, cultural, economical and health impacts of violence.
- Strengthen the meaningful inclusion of women in decision-making processes within the camps and in camp administration and provide technical support and capacity building that is co-designed by women themselves to serve what they perceive needed to achieve their meaningful participation.
- Ensure that all staff and local partners are trained on GBV Mainstreaming Guidelines.
- Ensure that the humanitarian actors including INGOs staff and local partners' adherence to GBV Mitigation mechanisms is monitored and evaluated.
- Ensure safe and unhindered access to all humanitarian assistance to the civilian population, including unobstructed access to gasoline, food supplies and drinking water in IDP camps.
- Strengthen efficient collaboration with local civil society organisations, including women-led organisations to allow early engagement in humanitarian work and access to medical services.
- Guarantee the protection of women who are suspected of being affiliated to a member of Daesh from gender-based violence and sexual harassment in displacement camps in collaboration with local feminist and women experts to establish a comprehensive protection mechanism/system that is locally informed and effectively implemented.
- In consultation with women-led grassroots organisations, develop gendered humanitarian response frameworks which would not also address the effects of sexual and gender-based violence on women but extend also to socio-economic factors affecting women's lives.
- Re-think humanitarian action beyond the boxes of classic humanitarian sectors (e.g., food, shelter) to recognise and support the holistic contribution of women-led organisations and grassroots women on the ground to humanitarian assistance and protection.

ANNEX I: About the study

Objectives of the Study

Conflict is always unpredictable. In addition, employing a military response or adopting a militaristic approach to reach stabilisation inhibits not only the effective reconstruction of communities, but also future possibilities of reconciliation. The gendered nature of this is almost always relegated to a post-stabilisation phase and hence fails to identify the different experiences of men and women: their experience of harms, the social relations in different locations, e.g. those who are internally displaced, those who have returned to villages, etc. as well as the structures of power and how that impacts on the participation of women and of those individuals belonging to different national/ethnic groups, religious beliefs, and others. Failing to address those perspectives has severe policy repercussions, as it leads to a disproportionate imbalance on individuals' abilities to access basic rights to health care, food, housing, education and access to information. It also leads to women being left out of peace processes and policy making related to reconstruction and reintegration, as well as disarmament and arms control.

Consequently, the information stemming from an analysis based on a more gendered understanding of the conflict and its impacts will provide guidance as to what is needed to improve immediate access to and enjoyment of human rights, where accountability lies, and what support from the international community should be provided. Additionally, it will provide initial information as a basis to developing a framework for transitional justice. Unless addressed through an effective disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, the situation will remain unstable and the massively prejudice the ability of the civilian population, particularly women, to play a role in developing peaceful solutions. The extent of the problem will be analysed during this research as a vital element of building more stable social structures.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, in close collaboration with its local partner organisation in Kurdistan, ASUDA, conducted a research analysis to address the aforementioned issues. A policy researcher will also be involved in conducting key informant interviews with civil society leaders to inform the study, as well as supporting in the write-up.

This study stems from our firm belief in the need to elevate, echo, and build on women's voices to reach a sustainable and just resolution of the conflict. The research will help to identify:

- How has the shift in the structures of power as a result of the military operations impacted women's experiences? What were the consequences of the use of violence, including the extensive use of explosive weapons in populated areas, on social structures, and economic and political rights?
- What are some of the needs that arose from those experiences and what is needed to fill the gaps that those needs have created?
- Has the international community's response been effective so far? What can be improved to ensure a more sustainable, inclusive and efficient response mechanism? On the other hand, how as the international community contributed to the violence, e.g. through using explosive weapons in populated areas or through transferring weapons to actors engaged in the fighting?

Methodology

A qualitative approach was employed in the study to generate a social construct to form an understanding of how the respondents construct their reality. For the sake of this study, the proposed target respondents included:

1. Women who are internally displaced as a result of the Military Operations in and around Mosul in the camp of Garmawa and outside of the camp, including IDP women activists.
2. Women working in civil society organizations working to help the people and women of Mosul, whether in provision of humanitarian aid, psychosocial support, shelter, etc. or organisations working on advocating the rights of women of Mosul.

Sampling: The selection of women will be based on snowballing approach through consultation and advice with WILPF's local partner in Kurdistan, ASUDA.

Data collection: The data collection methodology included a desk review, and primary data collection including key informant interviews and focus groups discussions.

Target	Data collection Method	Respondent numbers
IDPs women in Garmawa camp	Four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	38
IDPs women in leadership roles	Key Informants Interviews (KIs)	5
Women in civil society organisations and activists	Key Informants Interviews (KIs)	17
Total		60

End notes

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Since our establishment, we have brought together women from around the world who are united in working for peace. Our approach is always nonviolent, and we use existing international legal and political frameworks to achieve fundamental change in the way states conceptualise and address issues of gender, militarism, peace and security.



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