

WORKFORCE EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN PROJECT

FINAL PROJECT RESULTS AND
OPERATIONS REPORT



Introduction

PartnersGlobal, in collaboration with **Partners**Iraq—together referred to as the **Partners** Team—implemented the Workforce Empowerment for Women (WEW) Project between 2019–2023. The WEW Project, funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) worked towards increasing protection and access to equitable and safe employment for Iraqi women. The WEW Project looked to achieve the following goals:

- Reducing women’s vulnerability to harassment and discrimination in the workplace through legal assistance and access to information on their legal rights;
- Improving governance processes and networks of support for women to assert their workplace rights by working with labor judges, lawyers, and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs’ (MoLSA) inspectors; and,
- Improving social attitudes towards working women and their rights in workplaces across Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra.

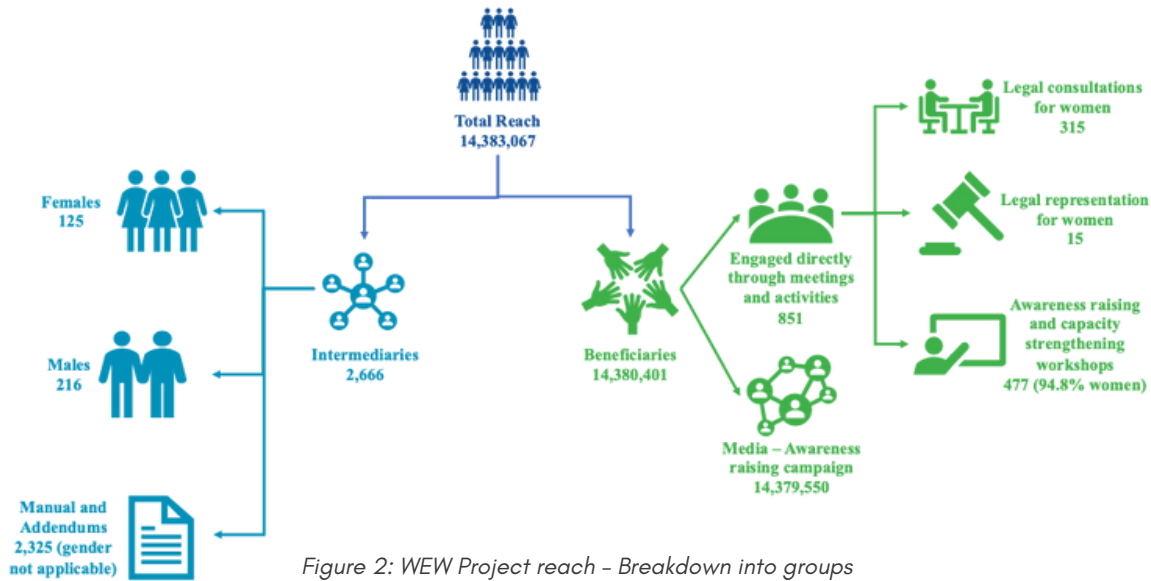
General Approach

Towards fulfilling the project’s goals, **Partners**’ approach was executed using a threefold approach centered around community engagement and advocacy. The project’s beneficiaries and intermediaries were engaged in (1) awareness raising of the Iraqi Labor Law NO.37/2015 and the protection measures it offers to Iraqi women in the workforce; (2) capacity strengthening to enhance skills and competencies toward improved implementation of the law and (3) introducing safeguard mechanisms to ensure the sustainability of the knowledge, skills, and practices gained throughout the project, and in turn, ensure optimal efficacy of the law’s implementation. The diagram below illustrates this approach:



Figure 1: Workforce Empowerment for Women (WEW) Project’s areas of intervention.

Partners managed to successfully reach **14,383,067** individuals by the end of the WEW Project. This number is divided between 2,666 intermediaries and 14,380,401 beneficiaries, 851 of whom were engaged directly through meetings and activities – of which the vast majority (808) were females. Among the women reached, 315 engaged in legal consultations as part of the Legal Assistance Fund (LAF) and 15 were beneficiaries to legal representation before the law. 477 other individuals engaged in awareness raising and capacity building workshops, including 25 male family members. Of those trained women, 42% indicated they took either legal or administrative action to respond to gender-related labor rights violations. This percentage reached 76.9% among trained women who had faced gender-based harassment or discrimination in the workplace.



Challenges

The workshops illustrate that women are more likely to seek administrative or legal action if they are aware of their rights and are given the necessary tools to assert their rights under the Iraqi Labor Law. **Partners** found that the type of awareness and support provided to women does shape the extent to which women seek legal support when facing gender-based workplace violations. This is due to a number of socio-cultural factors hindering women’s ability and confidence to seek legal action, as shown in Figure 2.

- 1 Societal norms that often place the blame on female victims
- 2 Socioeconomic challenges that diminish women’s financial ability to cover legal expenses
- 3 Fear of reprisal from their employers that could result in loss of jobs
- 4 Bureaucratic red-tape that could elongate or obscure case litigation
- 5 The absence of “legal culture” among Iraqis in general, especially women, whereby seeking legal support is mistakenly conflated and connoted with being guilty

To that end, the WEW Project had quite a multifaceted set of challenges to overcome in its quest to enhance women’s access to legal protection, equity, and a safe working environment. Achieving the project’s goals in light of such challenges necessitated collaborative, multi-sectoral, innovative, and comprehensive approaches.

Interventions and Impact

The WEW Project’s interventions involved components pertaining to raising awareness of the law and its guarantees, strengthening capacities, and building a diverse support ecosystem that is gender-sensitive, law cognizant, adaptive and equitable. The project also served to standardize and sustain the procedures and mechanisms within the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) that are available for Iraqi working women to access their rights under the Iraqi labor law.

Partners first established a Cooperative Planning Working Group (CPWG), which met on three separate occasions, convening representatives from MoLSA, Iraqi Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), unions, employers, lawyers, and other legal practitioners. There were three important outcomes that emanated from these three meetings:

- Many of the stakeholder representatives who attended the sessions indicated that it was the first time that a development project convened such a diverse set of stakeholders to strategize and explore innovated solution to address the challenges hindering women’s access to a safe and equitable working environment.
- Stakeholders agreed on five common objectives reflecting shared priorities and concerns over gender-based workplace violations, including, tackling harassment and discrimination, improving automation and digital solutions, enhancing awareness and knowledge, strengthening complaint mechanism and law enforcement, and enhancing financial allocations and confidence in state institutions.
- The discussions informed the design, implementation, and efficacy of the activities that followed, including the innovation grant. This grant resulted in the Heia mobile application, a secure and accessible application providing working women with information on the labor law as well as a safe and secure mechanism to anonymously ask legal questions and acquire consultations.

The project also worked with Iraqi lawyers from the Iraqi Bar Association (IBA), Aymen AlJabouri Company (AJC) and the Legal Clinics Network (LCN), as well as MoLSA’s labor inspectors and labor judges. Activity design involved raising stakeholder awareness and strengthening their capacity to comprehend and/or enforce the Iraqi labor law’s provisions and processes, with an emphasis on the rights of Iraqi working women. Thus, 60 IBA lawyers and 60 labor inspectors were trained in total. The training included modules on the Iraqi Labor Law’s functionality, as well as gender-sensitive approaches to addressing gender-based workplace harassment and the general discrimination against working women.

Moreover, a generalized manual on the gender provisions of the Iraqi labor law was collaboratively drafted with the support of government stakeholders and legal experts. The manual was designed in both English and Arabic, 2,000 copies were delivered to Iraqi lawyers – exceeding the original target of

300 – and the manual was also made available online. To ensure that labor judges and labor inspectors also had a guide facilitating their work in light of the law, technical addendums to the generalized manual were designed for each respective group. 125 copies of the manual were delivered to labor judges – exceeding the project’s target of 50, and 200 copies were delivered to MoLSA’s labor inspectors – exceeding the project’s target of 125.

In addition to the labor inspectors’ addendum, the WEW Project looked to also address the issue of turnover among labor inspectors. The **Partners** Team found that this turnover rate affected the project’s ability to properly maintain a target goal of 100 trained labor inspectors. To address this turnover issue, Partners worked with MoLSA, legal experts, and Iraqi CSOs to provide trainings and establish a Training of Trainers (ToT) Unit and a Gender Unit within MoLSA’s Labor Inspection Department. A total of 12 labor inspectors (6 males and 6 females) were initially trained and then observed to provide a similar training to their peers. In doing so, Partners was attempting to establish a sustainable mechanism to ensure that new inspectors, whether hired or transferred from other departments, catch up to their colleagues.

Additionally, 5 male and 3 female inspectors were trained as part of the project’s success story of establishing a Gender Unit within the Labor Inspection Department to effectively enhance gender sensitivity and promote gender equality within the Iraqi workforce.

In collaboration with five Iraqi CSOs, **Partners** held a series of awareness raising and training workshops for a total of 477 working and non-working Iraqi women and male family members. By the end of these workshops, 88% of trained women and 94% of their male family members reported an increase in their knowledge and ability to identify at least two mechanisms or resources available to working women to assert their legal rights under the Iraqi labor law. Further, 99.7% of trained women and 96% of male family members for their ability to identify barriers and challenges to a safe working environment. The significance of these improvements is that the trained women and their family members became more aware of what constitutes as a gender-based workplace labor rights violations, as they also learned about the Iraqi labor law and its guarantees for working women.

It is worth noting that two workshops were held in Ninewa and yielded positive results, precluding the significance of enacting similar interventions to the WEW project’s, especially as women in Ninewa continue to face difficult socioeconomic, security, and socio-cultural challenges following the liberation from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) forces.

In collaboration with five (5) Iraqi CSOs and led by a media consultant, Partners launched an online and offline awareness raising campaign to raise Iraqis’ level of knowledge and understanding of the Iraqi Labor Law and its provisions. Featuring photo designs, informative videos, Facebook direct messages, SMS, radio messages, LED screens, and billboards, the media campaign reached over 14 million individuals. This approach contributed to enhanced community awareness of workplace gender-based harassment and discrimination and the mechanisms through which the Iraqi labor law addresses these issues and safeguards women’s labor rights. To ensure the sustainability of the media campaign’s social media pages, Partners partnered with Heia organization who agreed to adopt the pages following the end of project implementation.

The media campaign also promoted the LAF, serving to describe its objectives, the services it offers, and how Iraqi women can benefit from its legal assistance. This approach encouraged women who faced workplace gender-based harassment or discrimination to reach out, through the promoted hotlines, and acquire legal consultation and/or legal representation before their employers or the Labor Courts.

The LAF was ultimately operated in partnership with LCN, who dedicated experienced lawyers to provide a total of 315 legal consultations and take on 15 cases before the Labor Courts by the end of project implementation. Of those cases, one was successfully settled between the employer and the female employee while five others were in the process of litigation by the end of the project.

Despite this, only 5% of the women who reached out to LCN proceeded with seeking legal representation. The socio-cultural challenges that inhibited women's willingness to acquire legal representation through the LAF necessitates future interventions to alleviate such hindrances. Thus, it is important to effectively address gender inequity within the Iraqi workforce and enhance the level of awareness of the law and of its efficacy, which still requires enhanced activation in its own right.

Nevertheless, WEW did find much success in the Legal Internship Program. This program, which was implemented by AJC and then the LCN, was implemented in tandem with LAF's activities. A total of 10 recent law graduates, 7 of whom were women - exceeding the original target of 2, interned at AJC and LCN and gained unparalleled hands-on experience working with experienced lawyers. Some of the interns were supporting LAF consultations and cases, including attending hearings at Labor Courts. **Partners** found that the legal internship program raised young lawyers' interest in gender-based issues and built their knowledge and skills to working on cases of workplace harassment and discrimination. As a result of this program, three interns were hired to work full-time at the law firms in which they interned, while the remaining were hired elsewhere.

Conclusions

There are a number of best practices and lessons learned that similar interventions could leverage from WEW project implementation. These include (a) the importance of having meaningful and proactive engagement with relevant and diverse stakeholders, (b) the significance of maintaining clear and open communication channels with all relevant stakeholders, (c) the importance of cooperative planning, (d) the positive results that emanate from capturing momentum whenever the opportunity presents itself, and (e) the importance of implementing sustainable approaches throughout the implementation to ensure the continuity of the project's successes beyond its programming lifespan.

The **Partners** Team also found it essential to remain adaptive when external challenges emerged to ensure the project remained impact driven. For instance, when the labor court judges' training activity could not take place, **Partners** had to act positively. **Partners** seized the opportunity to address another challenge that hindered the sustainability of the project's results - in the form of labor inspectors' turnover. Hence, the ToT and Gender Units activities were implemented, proving to be important additions to the project, contributing significantly to the sustainability of its results.

Overall, **Partners** ensured an adaptive and integrated risk management approach throughout its implementation of the WEW Project. Our team ensured systemic, timely, and proactive interventions whenever the likelihood of a risk emerged. **Partners** also examined the internal and external operations and contextual environments and identified risks and their implications on the project outcomes before devising interventions to each risk. Our team took necessary precautions to mitigate any negative impacts, a process that was repeated throughout the project's implementation period. This strategy also upheld the tenets of inclusivity and Do No Harm (DNH) to more effectively involve marginalized individuals and communities in project activities.

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