


IOM IRAQ



**DEAF PEOPLE IN IRAQ,  
A CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC  
MINORITY: THEIR RIGHTS  
AND VISION FOR INCLUSION**

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## FOREWORD

Deaf people in Iraq have experienced significant disadvantages from decades of armed conflict, terrorism, war, stigma, and economic hardship. Deaf people, a cultural-linguistic minority, have rarely been consulted in Iraq on matters related to their daily life, rights and vision for the future.

There is a real need for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other humanitarian, transitional and development agencies to be informed on how to ensure information and projects are accessible to the deaf community. The first step is to consult with the deaf community in Iraq on barriers they have experienced and solutions they have identified.

With generous support from the Government of Australia, IOM Iraq continues to strengthen its approach to disability inclusion. In 2019, the IOM Iraq Disability Inclusion Strategy 2019—2021 was launched, which laid some solid foundations for disability inclusive practices and programming. In 2022, IOM Iraq Country Strategy 2022-2024 and IOM Iraq Disability Inclusion Strategy 2022-2024 will also be launched, with the latter focussing on increased accountability – among all programme and programme support divisions across IOM Iraq –for reducing barriers experienced by people with disabilities.

This report identifies concrete ways for members of the Federal Government of Iraq, Kurdistan Regional Government, United Nations Country team, national and international NGOs, local Civil Society Organizations and stakeholders to address barriers experienced by deaf people, in partnership with deaf people.

Ultimately, we hope that IOM's support will help to make the most of the skills, resources and solidarity already expressed by deaf people in Iraq, with the ultimate aim of contributing to a more accessible and inclusive Iraq.

Giorgi Gigauri

Chief of Mission

IOM Iraq

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DFAT</b>	<b>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</b>
<b>CRPD</b>	<b>UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities</b>
<b>HLID</b>	<b>Holy Land Institute for the Deaf</b>
<b>IOM</b>	<b>International Organization for Migration</b>
<b>IE</b>	<b>Inclusive Education</b>
<b>IFHOH</b>	<b>International Federation of Hard of Hearing People</b>
<b>IT</b>	<b>Information Technology</b>
<b>IS</b>	<b>International Sign</b>
<b>KRG</b>	<b>Kurdistan Regional Government</b>
<b>KRI</b>	<b>Kurdistan Region of Iraq</b>
<b>JSL</b>	<b>Jordanian Sign Language</b>
<b>MENA</b>	<b>Middle East and North Africa Region</b>
<b>MHPSS</b>	<b>Mental Health and Psychosocial Support</b>
<b>OPD</b>	<b>Organization of persons with disabilities</b>
<b>OHCHR</b>	<b>United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</b>
<b>WASLI</b>	<b>World Association for Sign Language Interpreters</b>
<b>WFD</b>	<b>World Federation of the Deaf</b>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Deaf people, a cultural -linguistic minority have rarely been consulted in Iraq on matters related to their daily life. They and other people with disabilities have been disproportionately impacted from a lifetime of war, armed conflict, terrorism, war, stigma, and economic hardship.<sup>1</sup> This report and the consultations that informed it, aims to improve our understanding of the barriers deaf people face, in order to strengthen policies and responses to address them.

The report draws on findings of 74 interviews with people of which 77 per-cent were deaf or hard of hearing. Input was drawn from deaf individuals, sign language interpreters, deaf institutes, and government representatives. Deaf people actively participated in this consultation as interviewees, data collectors and advisors. The report prioritizes the unique perspectives of deaf people on the basis that they are experts over their own lives and are best placed to explain and advise on their experiences.

The report outlines the following six main findings:

1. Sign languages in Iraq are often denied to deaf people, and the lack of legitimacy places sign languages at risk of endangerment of being lost.

Deaf people in Iraq are frequently denied their right to communication. Most deaf people who had access to education learn Iraqi or Kurdish Sign Language as students at deaf institutes. Many deaf people have not had the opportunity to learn sign language. Majority of deaf people have only a limited form of communication with their families.

2. There is a shortage of sign language interpreters and no qualifications exist in Iraq.

There is a nationwide shortage of sign language interpreters. A lack of sign language interpreter training course or ethical code place deaf people at risk of harm. Deaf people face significant hurdles in accessing information the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Deaf-led Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) lack resources to carry out core work and most general OPDs are not inclusive.

Deaf-led OPDs don't have access to resources to carry out their advocacy and activities. Furthermore, organizations designed to support and advocate for diverse persons with a disability are not always well equipped to support deaf people. Deaf women face additional barriers to engaging in deaf-led and general OPDs.

4. There is no early intervention and the quality of Deaf education is poor.

Families do not receive any support to teach their young deaf children sign language. There are limited educational options for deaf students and many deaf children are denied access to education. Where there are education options there are serious concerns regarding the quality of education for deaf children and children who are hard of hearing.

5. Deaf people live in poverty with limited access to employment. In addition, they have limited opportunities to participate in humanitarian and development programming.

Deaf people experience difficulties accessing job opportunities due to stigma, limited literacy, a lack of accessible information, and a lack of access to sign language interpreters. Deaf people rarely have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, or benefit from humanitarian and development programs.

6. Deaf people in Iraq face discrimination are often not able to exercise their human rights.

Deaf people face significant discrimination and their cultural-linguistic identity as a deaf community is systematically disregarded. Many deaf children and adults in Iraq experience chronic isolation and have no language to communicate with. International research indicates this can increase their risk of abuse.

These findings produced a set of recommendations which are explained in full in the report. Here, we highlight key recommendations and examples of specific actions to be taken in collaboration with deaf people in Iraq:

A. Address stigma and isolation through Deaf awareness

Suggested actions include Deaf awareness activities to address stigma and with targeted campaigns on specific topics; encourage and promote awareness and acceptance in families of deaf children and establish meaningful communication between them by teaching sign language.

1. United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)/Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2016a, *Report on the Rights of Person with Disabilities in Iraq*

**B. Strengthen deaf communities and deaf representation**

Suggested actions include providing resources for advocacy by deaf people; build capacity of emerging deaf leaders and resource Deaf awareness for general OPDs who advocate on general disability inclusion issues.

**C. Legitimize and strengthen sign language development and use in Iraq.**

Suggested actions include investing in a sign language linguistic study; establish sign language 'hubs'; recognition of Iraqi and Kurdish Sign Languages as legitimate and official languages by Federal Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government; support sign languages classes for isolated deaf people and implement Deaf awareness and sign language classes hearing stakeholders.

**D. Increase access to information including through trained and accountable sign language interpreters**

Suggested actions include ensuring information is available in multiple formats, and is disseminated in a variety of ways, recruiting more sign interpreters, developing a sign language interpreter strategy and each ministry and governorate funding sign interpreters.

**E. Strengthen Deaf education**

Suggested actions include resource early intervention support to families of deaf children; develop and resource a Deaf education strategy and support deaf adults to learn literacy and continue their primary and secondary education.

**F. Increase access to livelihood opportunities, employment and social protection**

Suggested actions include actors to use proactive measures to ensure that deaf people can access livelihoods programming and Vocational Training Centers; challenge negative attitudes amongst sectors employers and increase numbers of deaf people employed across sectors; address existing barriers deaf people accessing social protection payments.

**G. Empower and safeguard deaf people and improve access to the justice system.**

Suggested actions include raise awareness about the rights of deaf people; develop and implement empowerment and safeguarding efforts and the capacity of the justice system to be accessible.



Figure 1: Marwa presenting at workshop for members of the National Communications and Media Commission of Iraq

## INTRODUCTION

Deaf people in Iraq have experienced significant disadvantages from a lifetime of war, armed conflict, terrorism, war, stigma, and poverty. There is significant progress required across all tiers of the Federal Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government, humanitarian and development agencies and local civil society to protect and enable deaf children and adults' cultural, linguistic and human rights as well as advocacy initiatives resulting to a more inclusive environment where deaf people, can have an active role in an inclusive society.

Accurate figures on the number of deaf or hard of hearing are not available in Iraq. Iraq has one of the highest populations of people with disabilities in the world, and there is a very high incidence of genetic deafness in the Middle Eastern region.<sup>23</sup> In addition, hearing loss and tinnitus from war related injuries such as blasts are two of the most prevalent disabilities amongst both civilians and soldiers.<sup>4 5</sup>

This report references deaf people and people who are hard of hearing. Deaf people identify as a cultural-linguistic group with rich and complex sign languages. People who are hard of hearing has a different meaning, and refers to late 'deafened adults, cochlear implant users, and people who experience tinnitus, Meniere's disease, hyperacusis and auditory processing disorders, and they are not a cultural-linguistic minority group.<sup>6</sup> The report will refer to deaf and hard of hearing people as deaf, except in a few circumstances when there is a specific reference to a hard of hearing individual.<sup>7</sup>

Currently, information on sign language use in Iraq is very limited. At the same time, the need for IOM and other humanitarian and development agencies to be informed on how to ensure information and projects are accessible to the deaf community is imperative, and more information is required before actors can start to address the barriers identified by deaf people. The rapid consultation studied in this report will help bridge some of these knowledge gaps, supporting the disability movement to engage with deaf people and enabling Federal Government of Iraq, Kurdistan Regional Government, Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) other humanitarian and development agencies to address barriers facing the deaf community in policy and programming and providing a roadmap to support the deaf people in Iraq to strengthen their autonomy and ability to claim their rights, and to contribute to creating a more inclusive society in Iraq.



Figure 2: Key informant interview in Basra

2. Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [media release](#) on the impact of the armed conflict on persons with disabilities in Iraq.
3. Al-Fityani, K. and Padden, C., 2010. Sign language geography in the Arab world. *Sign languages: A Cambridge survey*, 20.
4. VICE (12 January 2019) [Deafened by the war on ISIS](#), accessed 7 November 2021.
5. Theodoroff, S.M., Lewis, M.S., Folmer, R.L., Henry, J.A. and Carlson, K.F., 2015. Hearing impairment and tinnitus: prevalence, risk factors, and outcomes in US service members and veterans deployed to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. *Epidemiologic reviews*, 37(1), pp.71-85.
6. International Federation of Hard of Hearing People (IFHOH) (n.d.) [About Us](#), accessed 2 December 2021.
7. This is standing with Kusters et. al. who defines 'deaf' as a term describing all kinds of deaf persons, including those who are hard of hearing. Kusters, A., De Meulder, M. and O'Brien, D., 2017. Innovations in deaf studies: Critically mapping the field. *Innovations in deaf studies: The role of deaf scholars*, pp.1-53.



## METHODOLOGY

This rapid consultation has taken a unique deaf-led participatory approach. The method was developed by an international team including culturally Deaf<sup>8</sup> advisers and a hearing bi-lingual researcher that utilized evidence based deaf friendly participatory methods that were then developed to suit the Iraqi context.

The culturally Deaf advisors trained and equipped six local deaf data collectors using visual methods and research questions were filmed in short videos that data collectors kept on their phones as guides.<sup>9</sup>

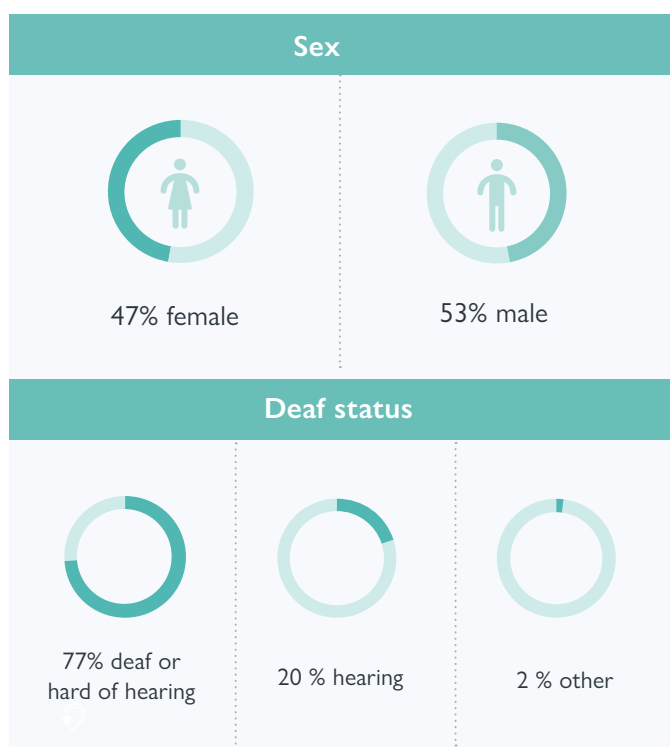
Data collection was conducted through field work in Sulaymaniyah, Basrah and Baghdad in November 2021. These three locations were chosen to ensure representation from across KRI, Central and Southern Iraq in a short data collection period, and the presence of a deaf-led OPD in the selected governorate was essential.

Data was collected from participants (after obtaining their informed written consent) using the following methods:

- Focus groups with deaf people: Deaf friendly participatory methods included an Iraqi photo library, storytelling and a group discussion whereby the deaf research collectors supported the group to identify central themes from the stories. Responses from the deaf focus groups were captured on video, translated and transcribed from Iraqi and Kurdish Sign Language into English.
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders: Different sets of questions were developed for sign language interpreters, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOLSA), deaf institutes, general OPDs and deaf-led OPDs. Deaf data collectors utilized a sign language interpreter to carry out the interviews where participants spoke Arabic or Sorani. The lead in-country researcher then transcribed the responses into English.<sup>10</sup>
- In-depth interviews: A culturally Deaf advisor conducted more in-depth semi-structured interviews with deaf partici

pants and deaf leaders of deaf-specific OPDs (including participants and leaders from Dohuk, Erbil, Karbala and Mosul) and sign language interpreters in additional locations via online visual platforms. These interviews were carried out in Iraqi and/or Kurdish Sign Language. One sign language interpreter chose to write his responses and email them.

In total 74 respondents participated in the rapid consultation. Of these, 53 percent (N=40) of respondents were male, 47 percent (N=34) were female. 77 percent (N=57) of all respondents reported that they are deaf or hard of hearing. The participants represented 5 deaf-led OPDs, 2 general OPDs, 5 deaf institutes, 1 mainstream institute and governmental authorities.



8. Deaf people often use the capital D in Deaf to culturally identify with the deaf community.

9. As many deaf people in Iraq have had limited access to education, the team focused on visual approaches and reduced the amount of literacy to a minimum.

10. The interviews were conducted with MoLSA employees from both Federal Government of Iraq in Basrah and Baghdad with KRG Sulaymaniyah.

Consent forms and interview questions were developed as a team and then translated from English into Kurdish Sign Language, Iraqi Sign Language, Kurdish and Iraqi written languages. Deaf data collectors carried out the semi-structured interviews in Kurdish and Arabic Sign Language, a sign language interpreter then interpreted the sign language into Arabic or Kurdish and vice versa.

The team continuously reviewed and developed the method as the project progressed. For example, the culturally Deaf advisors tweaked the way questions were asked in sign language to maximize participant understanding and deaf data collectors were asked to make one-minute videos of their thoughts and feelings after each day of data collection. This helped to inform the culturally Deaf advisors of trends seen in data collection, identify where further support was needed and generate information regarding the impact.

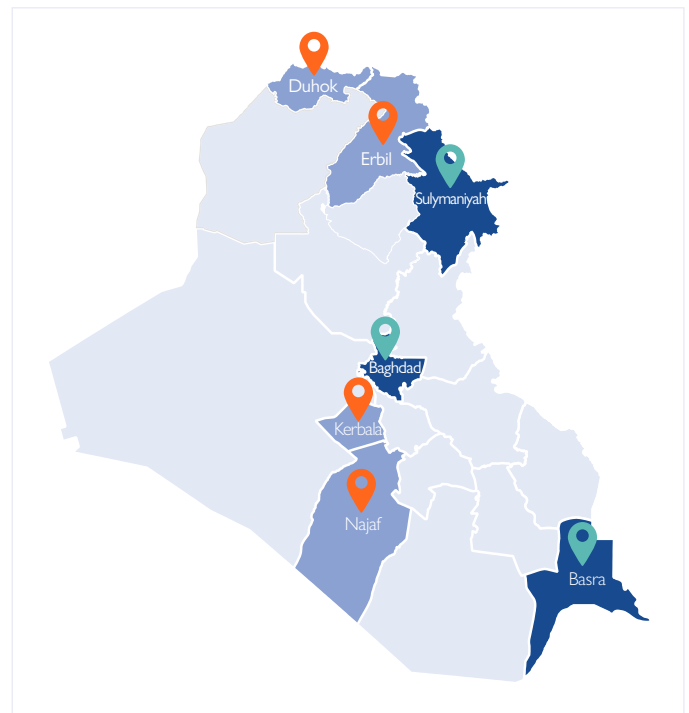
Gender sensitive methods were fully explored and applied as much as possible to ensure that female participants (that are either deaf/hearing/hard of hearing) were able to participate in the consultation safely and actively on an equal footing as male participants (that are either deaf/hearing or hard of hearing). Following cultural advice, a mixed gender focus group was facilitated in Sulaymaniyah and options to participate in separate gendered deaf focus groups were offered in Basrah and Baghdad. Separate gendered focus groups were chosen in Basrah and mixed focus groups were conducted in Sulaymaniyah and Baghdad.

Qualitative analysis of the information was conducted using a thematic approach. Once the findings were complete, recommendations were developed. The findings and recommendations were validated through a combined online and face to face workshop with deaf people. The workshops were facilitated by the culturally Deaf advisers and two deaf data collectors in Baghdad, with feedback was reviewed and collected for the final report. This final report is available in Iraqi Sign Language via video and in Arabic, Kurdish, English text to maximize accessibility.

## Limitations

The rapid consultation has the following limitations and constraints:

- Due to time constraints, face to face data collection was only conducted in three of 18 governorates in Iraq, and despite considerable interest amongst deaf people who volunteered to participate, online interviews were not possible after the deadline. Time constraints also impacted on the number of isolated deaf participants that could be identified. Internally displaced deaf persons were not interviewed.
- The international team was not able to travel to Iraq due to visa restrictions, COVID-19 restrictions and limited time. Therefore, data collector training, supporting interviews in person and drawing on multiple sign language interpreters was all conducted online.
- More detailed information on the methodology and consent process may be accessed by contacting IOM Iraq.



## FINDINGS

This section outlines the main findings of the rapid consultation.

### I. Sign Languages in Iraq are often denied to deaf people, and the lack of legitimacy places sign languages at risk of endangerment of being lost.

Deaf people in Iraq use different sign languages depending primarily on where they are situated.

There are parallels with the spoken linguistic division in Iraq, where the primary language spoken in areas outside the KRI is Arabic, while Kurdish Sorani and Badini are spoken in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) situated in the north. One hundred per-cent of the deaf participants that live in areas outside the KRI communicate in Iraqi Sign Language. The majority of Iraqi Sign Language users reported concern that their language was influenced by [International Sign Language](#) and other foreign sign languages via social media:

*"I would have a conversation with some deaf people, and I would find them mixing our signs and foreign signs together. I reminded them to stick with using Iraqi Sign Language. They would tell me they would have no choice but to learn more new signs because they are not learning anything new in Iraq, so they had to use signs from elsewhere." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

Meanwhile, just under 90 per-cent deaf participants living in KRI concur that they communicate in Kurdish Sign Language. These users reported that dialects of Kurdish Sign Language exist across different locations in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), such as Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. This mirrors the spoken linguistic situation where Kurdish communities living in Dohuk speak Badini while those living in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah speak Sorani (with other regional Kurdish languages present). Kurdish Sign Language users all reported that Kurdish Sign Language has been influenced by both Iraqi Sign Language and International Sign (IS) via social media. The remaining 10 percent consisted of one deaf participant who signed Iraqi Sign Language, (but would prefer to have Kurdish Sign Language strengthened and unified) and another participant who signed a mix of Kurdish, Iraqi and foreign sign languages.

It is possible that within the multi-lingual environment, Kurdish deaf participants are easily able to switch to different languages including Iraqi Sign Language when they meet with deaf people that live in areas outside the KRI. This may explain why some deaf people in areas outside the KRI are of the opinion that Iraqi Sign Language is used throughout areas outside the KRI.

Sign languages in Iraq are at risk of endangerment due to the influence of social media and other regional and foreign sign languages, and limited sign language knowledge of hearing teachers.

The historical influence of Iraqi Sign Language upon Kurdish Sign Language includes hearing teachers from KRI, attending college in Baghdad in the 1970's and bringing back Iraqi Sign Language, and more recently since 2006 when deaf Kurds started to borrow other signs (IS, and other foreign signs) from social media. Kurdish Sign Language was reported to be further diminished by some teachers of the deaf (particularly noted in Dohuk) who did not know sufficient Kurdish signs to teach deaf children and the gaps in their sign language resulted in signs either being 'made up' or borrowed from any sign language found on the internet. In some regions, a lack of a formal sign language complicated student learning:

*"The institute for the deaf in Dohuk uses different, made-up signs. No signs for world countries, fruits, vegetables, academic terms, etc. Hearing teachers are not competent in sign language. We used to have a hearing teacher who could sign well but he left. Deaf students learn and use signs from overseas because they are exposed to social media, but these are not Kurdish signs. The situation in Dohuk is a linguistic mess." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

These influences combined with a lack of linguistic studies and recording of the language via sign language dictionaries, result in reports that Kurdish Sign Language is lacking a unified front and is at risk of endangerment. Several Kurdish Sign Language Users expressed concern that their language was in jeopardy, and they wished to retain their language:

*"Deaf Kurds are starting to adopt other signs (International Sign, and other foreign signs). I disagree with it and want to keep Kurdish Sign Language this way." (Deaf female participant, Erbil Governorate)*

The Influence of social media on the participant's respective sign languages was consistently raised as a concern. All sign languages evolve as with spoken language to incorporate new vocabulary (such as the sign for COVID-19 for example). Signs and words continue to be borrowed from other languages all over the world in both signed and spoken languages. Globalization and greater inter-connectedness via social media platforms have increased

the speed of borrowing. However, deaf people in Iraq are placed in an unfortunate position where they are forced to rely on information in foreign sign languages (usually American Sign Language) as there is an unavailability of information in their own language. For example, deaf people are desperate to learn about how to keep themselves safe from COVID-19, learn about how to access vaccines and to seek medical advice if they or their family are infected with COVID-19. The lack of access to COVID-19 information relevant to the Iraqi context remains a critical issue for deaf people in Iraq, and this gap is filled by accessing content in foreign sign languages. This example illustrates gaps in accessible information (in Iraqi and Kurdish Sign Languages) but also demonstrates instances where deaf people have no option but to borrow signs to add to their own sign language for essential communication.

Both Iraqi Sign Language and Kurdish Sign Language are at further risk as the League of Arab States' Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs (CAMSA) with the support of Al Jazeera Satellite network, has pushed to reform sign languages from 22 states into a uniformed Arabic Sign Language which has not been developed or approved by deaf people in the Arab region.<sup>11 12 13 14</sup> The World Federation of the Deaf strongly opposes any forcible purification or unification of Sign Languages.<sup>15</sup>

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Committee recognizes the importance legally recognizing and protecting sign languages, and in 2019 asked the Federal Government of Iraq whether they have legally recognized and protected sign language as an official language.<sup>16</sup> To date, the Federal Government of Iraq has not provided an official reply.

#### The majority of deaf people have only a limited form of communication with their families.

When communicating directly within families, 75 per-cent of deaf participants reported that they communicate using gesture and home signs. [Home signs](#) are developed within the family, they are very limited, and do not prepare the child for literacy or education and they are not a language.

For example, deaf people whose families develop their own home signs would not be able to communicate with their home signs outside of their family. These participants reported a frustration at not being able to have any in-depth conversations with any members of their family:

*"I would use different signs/gestures when communicating with my family. However, I have no meaningful or deep conversations with them." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

A further 20 per-cent of people interviewed communicate via oral speech with their families. As there's very limited means to denote who is hard of hearing and who is deaf, it could be assumed that this percentage of people may be more likely to be hard of hearing rather than deaf. Only five per-cent of participants reported that they communicate in sign language with their families and this cohort had deaf parents and/or siblings.

#### Most deaf people learn to communicate in sign language as children at deaf institutes if they have access to education while the remainder learn as adults or they have no access.

The majority (71 per-cent) of deaf participants learnt Iraqi or Kurdish Sign Language from deaf institutes.<sup>1718</sup> They reportedly learnt from both their teachers and their fellow deaf students. A further 21 per-cent of deaf participants learnt sign language as young people or adults from the adult deaf community, usually through their local deaf -led OPD. Some of these participants reported that they didn't have the opportunity to attend a deaf institute while others reported limitations in learning sign language at their deaf institutes, due to their teachers' having inadequate sign language skills.

Deaf-led OPDs, are seen by Deaf leaders as the key enabler to facilitating the learning and sharing of sign language:

*"Deaf people need exposure to deaf adults who can sign well. Unemployed deaf people have more time to attend deaf organizations, socialize and develop sign language skills." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Nineveh Governorate)*

11. Al-Fityani, K. and Padden, C., 2010. Op. cit.

12. A similar parallel in spoken languages was the attempt to implement Esperanto. Garvía, R., 2015. Esperanto and its Rivals. University of Pennsylvania Press.

13. Al-Fityani, K., 2010a. Deaf people, modernity, and a contentious effort to unify Arab sign languages (Doctoral dissertation, UC San Diego) p. xv

14. Adam, R., 2015. Standardization of sign languages. Sign Language Studies, 15(4), pp.432-445. and Al-Fityani, K. and Padden, C., 2010. Op. Cit.

15. WFD (2009) [WFD statement: WFD calls for the unification process of Sign Languages in the Arab region to cease immediately](#), WFD, accessed 28 September 2020

16. OHCHR (2019) Op. Cit.

17. This finding is delivered with caution. It may not be representative of the total deaf population in Iraq as deaf people who have been kept at home most likely have not had the opportunity to learn sign language, to access information and to participate in this study.

18. Deaf institutes are the equivalent to deaf schools in other contexts.

A smaller number of deaf participants (eight per-cent) learnt sign language from their family.

It is evident from the aforementioned findings that 92 per-cent of the participants had no access to sign language in their early years prior to commencing schooling. Unless there are additional deaf members in the family, families with deaf children or adults do not know sign language and cannot communicate effectively with their deaf family member. A deep concern was expressed by deaf participants that parents and families of young deaf children had no support or avenues to learn Kurdish or Iraqi Sign language, resulting in [language deprivation](#) for deaf children. This will be discussed further in the findings below, particularly around risk of exploitation and abuse.

#### Different versions of sign language dictionaries do exist.

Participants reported that there were two Kurdish Sign Language Dictionaries developed in Erbil. The first was reported to be developed in 2003 or 2004, by a hearing teacher who led the task with participation by deaf teachers. A more recent Kurdish Sign Language Dictionary was developed in 2013. A participant reported, a hearing teacher asked deaf teachers and hearing sign language interpreters to participate. Seven people from Erbil (three deaf people and four hearing people), four deaf people from Sulaymaniyah, and one deaf person and two hearing people from Dohuk.

Deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs reported that MOLSA produced two Iraqi sign language dictionaries so far, in 2001 and 2008. In addition, there is an Islamic Iraqi Sign Language dictionary, it is not clear whether the deaf community was involved in the development of this dictionary.

#### Attitudinal and structural barriers contributed to deficiencies in knowledge of, and access to, sign language.

Some cities and regions lack a consolidated and consistent sign language. Participants highlighted that Kurdish Sign Language needed to be better developed in Dohuk as there are currently gaps in the language, hampering access to learning sign language:

*"We want a center here to develop Kurdish Sign Language and give training courses such as teaching families of deaf children." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

The three representatives from MOLSA interviewed reported that a barrier to deaf children, adults and their families learning sign language and having access to sign language interpreters is an absence of funding by the government. Frustration was expressed about the inability to support deaf children and adults along with their families. One MOLSA representative reported that there are no government plans to improve accessibility to public information for deaf and hard of hearing people in Iraq. Nor are there any plans to officially recognize Iraqi and/or Kurdish Sign Language as official languages in Iraq. One MOLSA representative in Baghdad suggested that data is needed to have a clearer picture of how many deaf children and adults there are, and accurate data would help to rationalize and advocate for the provision of sign language services to deaf people and their families.

## 2. There is a shortage of sign language interpreters and no qualifications exist in Iraq.

### Sign language interpreters can facilitate communication and participation but are not readily available.

A common view (reported by 28 per-cent of deaf respondents) was that they need access to sign language interpreters and that there is a shortage of interpreters. There are documents cases of Deaf people in Iraq facing difficulties communicating with health staff due to lack of sign interpreters whilst hospitalized with COVID - 19.<sup>19 20</sup> This impacts deaf people's ability to access key services such as health services:

*"I had difficulty accessing medical services at a government-owned hospital. A doctor was wearing a non-transparent mask and there were no sign language interpreters around, and it was difficult communicating with the doctor. The government should install interpreters there so that the deaf people can have proper access to the medical services." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

Deaf participants and deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs consistently reported that there was no funding for salaries for sign language interpreters and that it was common for deaf people to pay out of their own pocket to access an interpreter. Deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs confirmed that there was no government funding with the exception of governments in Erbil and Fallujah where sign language interpreters are paid for their work.<sup>21</sup> Some deaf OPDs were reported to fund-raise to help pay for interpreters.

19. International Disability Alliance (2020) Op. Cit.

20. International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2021) [Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in Iraq: Barriers, Challenges, and Priorities](#), IOM

21. There is no further information available to verify funding details.

Sign language interpreters were reported by deaf participants to interpret voluntarily at times. Some deaf participants (10 per cent) reported that they have never seen or used an interpreter in their lifetime. This number is likely to be higher as isolated and hidden deaf people were very difficult to locate, to participate in the consultation. A further 15 per-cent of deaf participants said that the majority of interpreters were male, and more female sign language interpreters were required given cultural considerations. Relying on family members to interpret (15 per cent), or acquaintances that know sign language is problematic given the bearing on confidentiality, privacy and autonomy along with the fact that the majority of deaf people reported that they have limited communication with their family and others.

*"There was one case when a deaf man tried to apply for a job at the Ministry of Oil. He requested assistance from a hearing [acquaintance that knew sign language] to proceed with the job application. In the end, the deaf man did not get the job, but the hearing interpreter did." (Deaf leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad)*

#### Not all sign language interpreters are competent or ethical.

Participants noted that while a few sign language interpreters are proficient, the majority of interpreters are not fluent in the relevant sign language, and only able to communicate between 40 and 70 per-cent of the conversation.<sup>22</sup> The lack of availability of interpreter training, together with the absence of a professional code of conduct (or other ethical framework), process for interpreters to become licensed, and reliable wages for sign language interpreters contributed to difficulties for the deaf community and their ability to rely on and trust sign language interpreters.

Discord between deaf people and sign language interpreters was noted at times. There were stories of sign language interpreters lacking impartiality, accepting bribes and taking advantage of deaf people in different ways,



Figure 3: National deaf committee members participating in training in Baghdad

22. Sign language competency incorporates the ability to understand the speaker and sign the meaning (with sufficient sign language vocabulary), the ability to read sign language well and voice correctly as well as provide the cultural bridge between the hearing and deaf person.

Sign language interpreters concurred that whilst some of them have paid roles, some of them are required to move frequently from one paid role to the next. They report that they regularly volunteer for deaf people and there is a significant shortage of interpreters. All sign language interpreters stated that there is a lack of funding, support or training to develop and maintain sign language interpreting skills, particularly outside of Baghdad.

Sign language interpreters report that they are forced to carry out piecemeal attempts with deaf students to fill the sign language vocabulary gaps that occur during class. Sign language interpreters also noted that it was sometimes difficult to interpret for deaf people who had limited sign language literacy:

*"I sometimes face an issue in interpretation with people who never attend institutes and they don't know how to use the sign language, so I don't understand them." (Male hearing sign language interpreter, Baghdad Governorate)*

**Deaf people continue to face significant hurdles in accessing information about how to protect themselves and others during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

The ability to access to information impacts on all areas of life. Significant barriers in Iraq are present for deaf people due to a lack of information in sign language and limited literacy. The pandemic has highlighted these critical challenges for deaf people in Iraq, as described below:

*"When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Iraq, it caused a lot of confusion and panic among the Iraqi deaf community. We were not well-informed of what was happening as there were no sign language interpreters to continually update us about the situation. Communication with doctors was difficult as they did not know Iraqi Sign Language. Many deaf people got sick with COVID-19, and 5 deaf people have died." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

One participant reported that a sign language interpreter in Baghdad shares information interpreted into sign language via social media platforms, which was accessible by deaf people. Social media materials that utilize sign language were a vital source of information. A significant number of deaf people (36 per-cent) relied on social media to obtain information about the pandemic, restrictions, vaccines and health treatments. There have been some short campaigns on COVID-19 by video, but they were discontinued due to lack of funding. The majority of information regarding the pandemic is accessed via international sign or other foreign sign languages (particularly American Sign Language). This is problematic as one participant notes:

*"Most information I got about COVID-19 was via social media platforms shared via International Sign. It makes us more reliant on information in International Sign and abandon our sign language in Dohuk. It is wrong." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

**Sign language interpretation is required to assist deaf people to access information.**

Deaf participants consistently reported that they would like to see a sign language interpreter on television, particularly so that they could access the news. There has been a small increase in the numbers of sign interpreters on television due to the lobbying efforts of the deaf community in Iraq. Whilst a Kurdish sign language interpreter has interpreted on the news previously in Iraq, deaf participants reported that they could not understand what they were signing. Almost one-third of deaf participants had very limited access to information about the pandemic and would like to access the daily news on television via a sign language interpreter using their own language:

*"There would be evening news at 6pm interpreted in Iraqi Sign Language but it would only last between 15-30 minutes. No sign language interpretation of public information dedicated to disseminating information and updates about COVID-19 on a daily basis. Hearing people have far more access to information than the deaf people." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

Not all attempts to make information accessible to the deaf population have been successful, as one participant noted:

*"There is a Kurdish sign language interpreter on a Kurdish satellite television (who happens to be a hearing teacher for the deaf) but her signing skills are incomprehensible and therefore we did not have access to quality information about COVID-19." (Deaf male participant, Erbil Governorate)*

This signifies the importance of partnering with deaf people when attempting to develop accessible information to ensure that it is indeed accessible. Family and friends are another significant source of information about the pandemic. 29 per-cent of deaf participants source information from family and friends. This is potentially challenging considering the lack of communication between deaf participants and their families. The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) reported that they hired a sign language interpreter to assist the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) to become more inclusive for the October 2021 Elections.<sup>23</sup>

23. Disability Insider (2021) UN hires a sign language interpreter to reach deaf voters for Iraq's October election, Disability Insider, accessed 23 October 2021.

### 3. Deaf-led OPDs lack resources to carry out core work and most general OPDs are not inclusive.

OPDs that support and advocate for diverse persons with a disability are not always well equipped to support deaf people.

Some deaf respondents felt that general OPDs that represent members with diverse disabilities (sometimes termed by deaf participants as 'hearing' OPDs) did not support deaf people or treat them as equals. Deaf peoples' cultural and linguistic identity were not understood within OPDs. In attempts to be inclusive, one OPD reported that sign language was taught to their members, but it was taught by a hearing person rather than a deaf person.

*"Hearing people [with disabilities] are able to protest and demand their rights, but when we try, they tell us to protest later and later so we never get to demand our rights. [Also], hearing OPD's do not help us get together, deaf people are oppressed and in poverty." (Deaf female participant, Sulaymaniyah Governorate)*

Despite these negative experiences, other respondents reported positive interactions with general OPDs, and they found the OPDs' welcoming and supportive of sign language communication.

**Deaf-led OPDs play an important role but they still face barriers due to lack of capacity and resources.**

Sixty-three per-cent of deaf participants were members or leaders of deaf OPDs, and 37 per-cent were not members. It is reported that deaf-led OPDs across Iraq have a large membership base<sup>24</sup>. It is unknown how many of these members are deaf women.

Some participants reported that with the exception of a government funded deaf-led OPD in Karbala, deaf OPDs have experienced financial difficulties since the war with some deaf OPDs closing down at different times due to a lack of support.<sup>25</sup>

*"We need support from the Governor to rebuild the office here in Basrah and fund the workshop that we have... Some deaf members feel their existence here is useless and some feel this is wasting their time by coming here and doing nothing." (Deaf female leader of deaf-led OPD, Basrah Governorate)*

In order to improve the level of support they offer and better represent the experiences of the deaf community, deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs suggested the need for direct resourcing. This would enable deaf OPDs to teach sign language to families of deaf children and provide transport to pick up isolated deaf people and run weekly activities.

Social protection remains unavailable to many deaf people due to limited accessible information and support on how to apply. Deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs reported that they support deaf people to apply for social protection:

*"Two support cards exist. I help deaf people apply for them. One is for the deaf (the beneficiary/recipient) and the other is for the caretaker who takes care and assists the deaf person." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

**Deaf women face additional barriers to engaging in deaf-led and general OPDs.**

Deaf female participants shared that deaf women were not encouraged to participate in deaf-led OPDs. Some deaf leaders of deaf-led OPDs confirmed that there were less activities available for deaf women and participation in deaf OPDs was further reduced by deaf women being kept home due to over-protective families. One female deaf respondent explained:

I am not a member of any deaf organization. Deaf women are generally not encouraged to be members of a deaf society. Female participation is not encouraged or supported. (Deaf female participant, Erbil Governorate)

### 4. There is no early intervention and the quality of Deaf education is poor.

**Families do not receive any support during early childhood to teach their deaf children sign language.**

Multiple participants noted that the absence of early intervention support to families of deaf children led to a risk of language deprivation amongst deaf children. Language deprivation is compounded by families that keep deaf children hidden at home in the early years and often into adulthood. They are said to do this either because they feel ashamed or they wish to protect them from stigma or bullying that is reported to be significant in Iraq according to deaf-specific OPD leaders:

24. Membership numbers of some deaf-led OPDs were shared with IOM Iraq as part of mapping and consultation in 2020: Deaf-led OPD in Dohuk: 2300 members, Deaf-led OPD in Basrah: 200 members, Deaf-led OPD in Baghdad: 3000 members, Deaf-led OPD in Karbala: 95 members, Deaf-led OPD in Sulaymaniyah: 1200 members, Deaf-led OPD in Najaf: 360 members, Deaf-led OPD in Erbil: 900 members. It is unknown how many of these members are deaf women.

25. Imam Hussain Specialized Center for the Deaf and Mute in Karbala, is an auspice of the government General Secretariat of Imam Hussein Holy Shrine for the Deaf, receives an annual budget. It covers pay for employees, internet connection, video calls, interpreters' fee, security guards, transportation, refreshment, etc. This deaf OPD has a mostly religious focus in conjunction with teaching Iraqi Sign Language



*"There is no opportunity for families of deaf children to learn Kurdish Sign Language and be able to communicate with their deaf children/family members." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

A life hidden at home with no access to language to engage in any meaningful communication with anyone leads to social and emotional isolation, leading to poor general and mental health outcomes.<sup>26</sup> For this reason, World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) strongly recommends that governments 'implement programs to support the teaching of sign language to family members and carers of deaf children, in co-operation with deaf Communities and deaf sign language teachers.'<sup>27</sup> Deaf awareness needs to be coupled with sign language tuition to tackle the stigma that many families associate with their child being deaf.

**There are limited educational options for deaf students and many deaf children are denied access to education, contributing to their social isolation.**

Primary and secondary education for deaf students in Iraq consists exclusively of deaf specialist institutes and there is no other model of education available to deaf students in Iraq according to the deaf participants. Some deaf children are withheld from attending deaf institutes by family:

*"Some families withhold information from their deaf sons and daughters about the presence of an institute for the deaf. Years later, the deaf person would find out about the existence of those institutes, but it is too late for them to study." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

Restricted numbers of enrolment were reported to cause angst for some families of deaf children, and Deaf education was further constrained due to the cost of transport and institute attendance. Deaf participants and deaf teachers wish for educational attainment to be able to continue through to the end of secondary institute, but more government funding is required for this to occur.

A MOLSA representative in Basrah reports 'we just opened the first stage of the secondary [deaf institute], but it really needed a lot of work on our side because the government is not supporting' these efforts. The lack of support mentioned here is incurred to mean financial investment. In KRI, Deaf education has been extended to the 12th grade. Yet many deaf Kurdish students are reported to struggle with literacy skills.

There is limited information available about deaf children and adults' accessibility to [assistive technology](#). DeafKidz International's evaluation reports mentioned indirectly via the teachers that deaf children did have access to hearing aids and cochlear implants, but it is unclear to what extent.<sup>28</sup>

**Serious concerns exist regarding the quality of education for deaf children in Iraq.**

Deaf participants raised concerns based on their experiences that included teachers who could not sign (therefore the curriculum was inaccessible), no availability of sign language interpreters to sign for the teachers, no opportunity to extend education despite student wishes, physical abuse and a lack of engagement with teachers:

*"I have deaf children but their teachers can't sign well or they use the wrong signs. So, I try to get teachers to learn sign language but they won't. Teachers' sign language skills should be excellent." (Deaf female participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

Low quality education resulted in poor educational outcomes and limited opportunities for deaf students. Deaf participants who reported illiteracy called for an opportunity to access adult education so that they can learn to read and write. So too did deaf participants who wish for a chance to access secondary institute education as adults:

*"Provide Adult Education to deaf adults who did not complete their high institute education. We deserve another chance to complete it. Many want to complete it to be able to get a pay raise in their jobs." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

The British Council funded DeafKidz International to deliver teacher training to teachers and deaf teacher assistants from 12 deaf of the 25 institutes across Iraq. The training was delivered over a five-day workshop in Beirut, 2018 with follow up training in 2019 in Erbil with staff from six institutes.

Deaf students currently have the opportunity to attend tertiary studies in information technology (IT) an IT institute in Sulaymaniyah. The college is reported to teach deaf classes within a mainstream education facility. The manager of this institute reported that deaf girls and women are more likely to graduate from the institute as deaf boys and men experience more family pressure to earn an income by accepting jobs such as washing cars, parking cars and me-

26. Humphries, T., Kushalnagar, P., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., Rathmann, C. and Smith, S., 2016. Avoiding linguistic neglect of deaf children. *Social Service Review*, 90(4), pp.589-619.

27. WFD (2016) [WFD Position paper on the language rights of deaf children](#), WFD, p. 4 accessed 4 December 2021.

28. DeafKidz International/British Council (2018) Training Report, Capacity Building in Primary and Secondary Education. DeafKidz International/British Council

chanical work. The institute manager reported that there is no government funding for sign language interpreters and despite seeking funds from private companies, the final year of deaf student's classes has now been closed, meaning that deaf students are unable to graduate.

Hard of hearing students are also not well supported within the education system.

A deaf teacher called for hard of hearing students to be able to access mainstream institutes as they are currently only studying at deaf institutes. Reports of hard of hearing students being utilized as class interpreters for teachers were conveyed, as one deaf participant shares:

*"There was a hard of hearing student. Teachers, especially the new ones, used the student to help interpret during lessons for other deaf students in Grade 7, 8, and 9. He lost his own classroom time. Deaf students could not report about this incident to the institute director because they could not communicate clearly to the director [as the director could not sign]." (Deaf male participant, Dohuk Governorate)*

Deaf staff are employed in some deaf institutes in the education of deaf students. They often feel undervalued.

The employment of deaf staff in some deaf institutes has supported the acquisition of sign language development and provided deaf role models for students, however this function is reported by participants to be undervalued.<sup>29 30</sup>



Figure 4: Hassam participating in key informant interview in Baghdad.

29. Deaf Institutes often employ deaf staff who are involved in the education of deaf students. Many are employed as 'deaf teaching assistants' and a few as 'deaf teachers' (trained teachers who are deaf).
30. A range of factors were reported to contribute to deaf staff feeling undervalued. Deaf staff hold lower or no teaching credentials due to the fact they experienced poor quality education themselves and many struggle with literacy. Deaf staff are assigned to teaching practical subjects such as arts and physical education. In addition, it is reported that there is a bias amongst hearing teachers with the belief that deaf staff cannot teach with a weak level of acceptance and respect towards deaf people, their culture and sign language. For this reason, it is rare for deaf teachers to hold leadership or high-level positions in institutes for the deaf.

*"There were incidents when deaf staff were asked to perform janitorial duties. There are hearing teachers who do less and are not competent in sign language and they get paid more than deaf staff. While deaf staff are the ones doing more work." (Deaf female participant, Erbil Governorate)*

## 5. Deaf people live in poverty with limited access to employment. In addition, they have limited opportunities to participate in humanitarian and development programming.

Deaf people face multidimensional poverty and require access to job opportunities.

Deaf respondents (61 per-cent of those interviewed) called for increased job opportunities as the most important socio-economic need in Iraq. Deaf people are facing increasing living costs, and with limited education and literacy, limited access to communication and information along with experiences of marginalization and oppression, it is reasonable to suggest that deaf people experience multidimensional poverty:

*"Living costs are higher but very little income, so life is difficult." (Deaf female participant, Basrah Governorate)*

Deaf people were reported to have far less access to work opportunities as compared to their hearing peers. Attitude and stigma are reported to be significant barriers to employment along with the additional financial burden of paying for a sign language interpreter for job interviews:

*"We don't have jobs. We need to learn more but hearing people don't teach us and deaf people do not work with hearing [due to communication difficulties]. When deaf people are together, they can learn more and get jobs better." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

In addition, the Federal Government of Iraq Law No. 38 of 2013: Chapter 6, Article 16 requires the Iraqi government and the private sector employ people with disabilities (including deaf people). However deaf people don't have access to information about this scheme or the support to apply. Representatives reported that this requirement is often misused and is rarely used to recruit deaf people or people with disabilities.

The lack of income impacts on deaf people's ability to pay for health care. For example, deaf people Mosul reported in a media article that hospitals are not able to help them beyond a check-up and they are required to pay for tests.

It was also reported that most people who were deafened by war are too poor to pay for their transport to visit the hospital.<sup>31</sup>

Deaf people rarely have the opportunity to participate in, contribute to, or benefit from humanitarian and development programmes.

The lack of access to information about opportunities offered by humanitarian and development agencies presents a major barrier which is compounded by the lack of access to sign language interpretation during activities. Limited literacy is reported to be an additional challenge to participation. When participation does occur, it is unclear how much has been understood by deaf participants and what the outcomes are. As respondents explained:

*"I would attend some training programs with sign language interpreters but same old results. No real developments or benefits from them." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*

Some deaf participants reported that they recently participated in capacity building training by IOM in Erbil. A humanitarian organization has recently advertised for a full-time sign language interpreter to work across twenty-one IDP camps in Erbil, Mosul and Dohuk suggesting that there are significant numbers of deaf people residing in these IDP camps.<sup>32</sup> Another participant reported that he was consulted six years ago by a humanitarian agency. He discussed the issues of sign language interpreters, poor quality Deaf education and low literacy and unemployment amongst deaf people. He was told that there would be follow up and he held hope for action, but nothing eventuated, and this led to disappointment.

Livelihood training and capacity building opportunities were reported by participants to occur more frequently in Baghdad, with more limited opportunities in other areas of Iraq. This could be that development opportunities are centralized due to a lack of resources or that deaf people in other governorates have less access to information about such opportunities:

*"Not all deaf people have equal access to programs and services in their cities [such as Mosul, and Kirkuk]. They would have to come to Baghdad to attend training. Deaf people in Baghdad have better access." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Karbala Governorate)*

31. VICE (2018) Op. Cit.

32. Al Mesalla for Human Resources Development (2021). [Interpreter \(Sign Language\)](#), accessed 6 December 2021

## 6. Deaf people in Iraq face discrimination and are often not able to exercise their human rights.

Deaf people face significant discrimination and their cultural-linguistic identity as a deaf community is systematically disregarded.

The CRPD committee reported that the Government of Iraq must implement a range of measures to shift the prevalent charity-based perception of disability in Iraq to a rights-based approach to disability, to align to the State's obligations under the CRPD.<sup>33</sup> Forty percent of deaf participants reported that they have lifelong experiences of feeling less equal and deserving of their human rights as compared to their hearing peers:

*"I want deaf people to be valued and treated as equals in workplace." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

Deaf people reported feeling less worthy as people for being deaf and communicating in sign language. Deaf participants reported that their families prohibited them from signing in public due to the shame it could incur on their family. One of the deaf data collectors reported that he is prohibited from entering government buildings simply on the basis that he is deaf.

Deaf males and females' decision-making rights are often circumscribed by their family when deciding to marry a spouse. Whilst both deaf women and men's choice and control were reported to be restricted, others noted that deaf women were particularly discriminated against:

*"Hearing families would prevent single deaf men and women from marrying other deaf people fearing that it would cause deafness. Their families were not able to understand that those deaf people preferred to marry a deaf partner so to be able to communicate in a language that they both share. There must be Deaf awareness at the level of family and to help overcome stigma and promote parental acceptance towards their deaf children and their right to choose." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

**A lack of sign interpreter provision and lack of understanding by others on rights of deaf people has a significant impact on deaf people**

Deaf participants reported that they feel tired of hearing people (including hearing sign language interpreters) assuming they know what is best and speaking on their behalf.

Deaf participants called for equality, the end to oppression and discrimination. They reported that they want to make their own decisions, they want to enact their agency and autonomy, all of which are their human rights entitlements as per the UN CRPD and the Federal Law 38, 2013 and KRG Law 22.

The Federal Government of Iraq noted that Article 15 (VI) of Law 38 states that the High Judicial Court and the Ministry of Justice are responsible for providing tools/services to assist persons with disabilities and special needs (e.g., sign language interpreter, hearing aids) in order to help deaf people to 'defend their rights and have an equal status with others'.<sup>34</sup> The parallel report to the CRPD highlighted the concern that sign interpreters may not be available, in particular, it does not state whether sign language interpreters have to be competent<sup>35</sup>. They report that sign language interpreters should be able to ensure that deaf people have full communication. For example, deaf respondents recalled instances related to court hearings and equal employment:

*"I intervened at a court to save a deaf man from being served a 15-year sentence. He was falsely accused by a hearing person. If it weren't for my intervention, the deaf person would have been unfairly imprisoned." (Female hearing sign language interpreter, Basrah Governorate)*

In addition, deaf people are reported to face legal hurdles at courts when with regards to pursuing criminal justice and to buying and selling land.

*"Judges tell deaf people that they cannot proceed with their [divorce] case alone and that they must find a legal guarantor to proceed with. It is imperative to promote Deaf awareness in the justice system and to allow deaf people to have access to justice with reasonable accommodations. That is, to be allowed to have access to sign language interpreting while having proper access to justice." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate).*

*"I wanted to sell land. The government said to me 'deaf people can't sell land' I show them I can communicate well and am well educated but it doesn't matter to them. They still refuse." (Deaf male participant, Baghdad Governorate)*

33. United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), (2019) [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities discusses the impact of the armed conflict on persons with disabilities in Iraq](#). OHCHR, accessed 5 November 2021.

34. UNAMI/OHCHR (2016) Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Iraq

35. The Parallel Report for Government's Report on The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability

Many deaf children and adults in Iraq experience chronic isolation and have no language to communicate with. International research indicates this can increase their risk of abuse.

Globally, deaf people (particularly women and girls) often face isolation and are hidden at home by their families and are not permitted to leave their homes. This cohort of deaf people are more likely to be targeted (due to the fact that they have no language), abused and exploited.<sup>36</sup> This is compounded by the fact that language deprived deaf children don't have the language required to disclose to a safe person or seek help.<sup>37</sup> Globally, seeking redress for such crimes is unlikely to occur when children have no method to tell their story, so it is less likely to stand up in court.<sup>38</sup>

Deaf people in Iraq who have not had access to sign language, experience enduring difficulties and 'are forced to communicate by lip-reading and gestures, which are non-reliable methods of communication and accessing information.'<sup>39</sup>

*"The situation is worse for deaf women and girls. Many of them (mostly adult women) are confined to their homes." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Karbala Governorate)*

Deaf-blind people were noted to be particularly isolated:

*"It is frustrating for deaf people with low vision. They have no guide, and they don't get to go out to a deaf society or club. They are isolated they have no education. I met about 20 deaf-blind people. They used tactile Iraqi Sign Language." (Deaf male leader of deaf-led OPD, Baghdad Governorate)*



Figure 5: (From left) Sha'aban, Mariam and Hashim participating in findings validation workshop.

36. Humphries, T., Kushalnagar, P., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., Rathmann, C. and Smith, S., 2016. Op. Cit.

37. Handicap International and Save the Children (2011), Out from the Shadows: Sexual violence against children with disabilities and Humphries, T., Kushalnagar, P., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., Rathmann, C. and Smith, S., 2016. Op. Cit.

38. *Ibid.*

39. International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2021) *Persons with disabilities and their representative organizations in Iraq: Barriers, Challenges, and Priorities*, IOM

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been informed by key findings of the rapid consultation and desk review. They are designed to tackle barriers, strengthen sign language, and promote participation and inclusion. The following overarching considerations apply to all recommendations and suggested actions:

- In line with the disability movement slogan 'nothing about us, without us', all recommendations must be adopted and implemented in collaboration with deaf people in Iraq. Government, local and international humanitarian and development agencies should consult with deaf people when designing and delivering programs and services to ensure that they are inclusive of deaf children and adults.
- Implementing and strengthening Federal Law 38 and KRG Law 22, and other legislation will be an integral part of enacting the recommendations, along with implementing recommendations made by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the Federal Government of Iraq.<sup>40</sup>
- Collecting reliable data on the numbers of deaf children and adults in urban and rural areas of Federal Iraq including KRI will assist to plan and resource inclusive programs and services (such as Deaf education, access to sign language interpreters).

Furthermore, all recommendations and suggested actions with require the provision of [reasonable accommodations](#) for deaf people including:

- When a deaf person does not know sign language: examples include creating additional visual materials to assist with communication; scheduling extra time for communication and inviting a family member to attend if requested by deaf person.<sup>41</sup>
- When a deaf person knows sign language: confirming which sign language they use and engaging a sign interpreter.

### A. Address stigma and isolation through Deaf awareness

Suggested actions include:

- Encourage and promote awareness and acceptance in families of deaf children and adults and establish meaningful communication between them by teaching sign language to the whole family.

- Deaf-led OPDs to be resourced to run Deaf awareness campaigns to address stigma and promote inclusion using a rights-based approach.<sup>42</sup> Target messages could include:
  - Deaf people being members of a cultural-linguistic community.
  - Livelihoods opportunities, employment and social protection.
  - The right to access and learn sign language and education
  - Stigma and exploitation to promote equality and inclusion.
  - Legal capacity of deaf people to make their own decisions about accessing education, marrying, divorcing and selling or buying land.
- Encourage and promote awareness and acceptance in families of deaf children and establish meaningful communication between them by teaching sign language (see Early intervention support for details).
- Resource deaf people to mark International Week of Deaf People and the International Day of Sign Languages in multiple locations as a tool to generate awareness (and empower deaf people).<sup>43</sup>
- In addition, ensure deaf people can access Mental Health and Psychosocial Support programming.

### B. Strengthen deaf communities and deaf representation

Suggested actions include:

- Support deaf people to come together for social and sport activities to build deaf community.
- In governorates that do not have deaf-led OPDs, work in partnership with deaf-led OPDs from other governorates to mentor and build the capacity of deaf people to establish deaf-led OPDs and informal groups.
- Work with deaf-led OPDs and general OPDs to target isolated deaf people living at home.
- Resource deaf-led OPDs to run activities for isolated deaf people at their local deaf OPDs.

40. OHCHR (2019) [Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities discusses the impact of the armed conflict on persons with disabilities](#).

41. When a deaf person requests a family member is invited to assist their communication, consideration must be given to what topics are raised by staff to ensure that the deaf person is not put at risk by the family member knowing what has been discussed.

42. Deaf Awareness: Develop an explicit change strategy that encompasses both capacity building and awareness raising with regards to understanding and supporting the rights and capabilities of deaf children and adults. Draw on multiple methods in partnership with deaf people to challenge community perceptions.

43. WFD (2021) [International Week of Deaf People 2021 and International Day of Sign Languages 2021](#), WFD, date accessed 22 January 2022

- Partner with deaf-led OPDs to identify deafblind people and the required supports.
- Actors in IPD camps to work with deaf IDPs to establish opportunities for deaf IDPs to meet in safe spaces and community centers. This will enable deaf children and adults to meet, provide peer to peer support and to access information, resulting in protective peer networks that are often missing for deaf people.
  - Resource further investigation into specific situation of deaf people in Iraq who do not know any sign language.
- Support existing and future deaf-led OPDs by:
  - Providing resources so they can carry out specific advocacy & support activities as deemed a priority by deaf people.
  - Build capacity of deaf leadership of emerging deaf leaders of all genders, to strengthen deaf-led OPDs and develop deaf identity, deaf community and sign language.
  - Establish mentoring for deaf-led OPDs by WFD or national deaf OPDs from other countries.
  - Translating critical statements from WFD into Arabic and Kurdish written and sign languages.
- Support Deaf awareness (cultural competency) for other community groups, including MOLSA front-line staff and humanitarian and development organisations.
- Establishing sign language ‘hubs’ (example locations include deaf-led OPD offices or deaf institutes) in areas outside the KRI and KRG where sign language can be taught and developed and where future sign language linguists can be based.
- Invest in a sign language linguistic study to understand and strengthen both Iraqi and Kurdish sign languages. From this, dictionaries can be developed (where required) through a consultative process as outlined by the WFD.<sup>44</sup>
- Recognition of Iraqi and Kurdish Sign Languages as legitimate and official languages by Federal Government of Iraq and KRG.

#### D. Increase access to information including through trained and accountable sign language interpreters

Suggested actions include:

- Recognizing that many deaf people in Iraq have not had the opportunity to learn sign language ensure that important information is available in multiple formats, and is disseminated in a variety of ways.
- Recruit ‘[deaf relay interpreters](#)’ and ‘adult children of deaf adults’ and train them to become sign language interpreters to assist to fill the shortage of sign interpreters.
- Develop and implement a sign language interpreter strategy that includes the following elements.
  - The development and implementation of a national training program supported and endorsed by relevant authorities, where deaf persons are engaged in the teaching of sign language and in the certification of sign language interpreters.
  - The development of a sign language association which would include:<sup>45</sup>
    - Development of a memorandum of understanding for mutual support between the deaf community and future sign language interpreter association.
    - A code of ethics that interpreters will be accountable to and a mechanism for deaf people to lodge a complaint and investigation if there is a breach of ethics.<sup>46</sup>

Support general OPDs by:

- Building capacity of general OPDs to be inclusive of deaf members through Deaf awareness. Deaf awareness training to include a rights-based view of deaf people, their cultural and linguistic rights, sign language awareness and tips for communication.
- Supporting general OPDs to facilitate deaf leadership and prioritize advocacy outcomes for deaf people in OPD action plans.
- Explore options where OPDs and deaf-led OPDs can partner to carry out joint advocacy or capacity building work

#### C. Legitimize and strengthen sign language development and use in Iraq.

Suggested actions include:

- Support sign languages classes for deaf children, deaf adults who are isolated or have not had the opportunity to learn sign language, government employees, humanitarian and development staff, teacher training institutions, general OPDs and disability-specific civil society.

44. WFD outlines clear steps to be taken to document sign languages. See WFD (n.d.) *Manual for Sign language Work within Development Cooperation*, WFD, accessed 12 January 2022.

45. World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) outlines clear steps for developing a sign language interpreter association. See WASLI (n.d.) *Setting up a national association*, with *Arabic version*, WASLI, accessed 15 January 2022.

46. See WASLI website for examples of Code of Ethics from other countries

- Resource technical support from WASLI, other professional sign language interpreting organizations and sign interpreters from MENA region including for the development of the training program.
  - Promote professional learning and development by sending one or two sign language interpreters along with deaf people to attend sign language interpretation themed conferences such as the WFD's World Congress that will take place in 2023.
  - Each Ministry and Governorate to create and fund a budget line for sign language interpreter costs.
    - Prioritize and explore strategies in partnership with health, justice and education sectors to resource and engage sign language interpreters.
    - Then resource additional interpreters to support employment/vocational interviews, OPD and public/cultural events.
  - Ensure that deaf people can access public information, including public health information on COVID 19. In addition, work in partnership with deaf OPDs, the media, humanitarian organizations and health services to improve the health literacy of deaf people on topics such as MHPSS, non-communicable diseases and sexual and reproductive health.<sup>47</sup>
- ### E. Strengthen Deaf education
- Suggested actions include:
- Resource early intervention support (Deaf awareness, deaf mentors and sign language tuition) to families of deaf children to learn sign language at an early age. Explore cost effective methods of delivery (of both early screening and early intervention services).
  - Develop and resource a Deaf education strategy as part of the National Policy Framework for Promoting Equity and Inclusion in Education for learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities in Iraq (2019-2028) Action Plan in order to improve the quality and longevity of education available to deaf students.<sup>48</sup> The Action Plan should be developed with technical support from a national or international 'teacher of the deaf' consultant and deaf people in Iraq. Key components include:
    - Engage deaf people, a 'teacher of the deaf' consultant and deaf consultants to explore the most contextually suitable methods of Deaf education to promote bilingualism.<sup>49 50</sup> Meaning that deaf students are taught in sign language, and Arabic, Kurdish, and English are to be taught to deaf students as a second (foreign) language. Explore mainstream education options for hard of hearing students with education support.
    - Support hearing and deaf teachers to become qualified and capable of communicating and teaching effectively to deaf and hard of hearing students.
    - Explore the development and implementation of a post-graduate qualifications for 'Teacher of the deaf' (including sign language) for all teachers of the deaf.
    - Recognize the importance of the role of deaf teaching assistants in Deaf education and resource in their professional development in teaching methods. Develop and implement a teacher assistant certificate.
  - In the interim, strengthen teaching capacity at deaf institutes through technical support and regular training.
    - Resource technical support from a teacher of the deaf to develop visual teaching resources and training to support ministries of education and teachers to teach deaf children language and literacy.
    - In deaf institutes where there are no deaf staff, employ deaf staff in classrooms (to facilitate language acquisition and role modelling). Strengthen the capacity of teachers and assistants to support hard of hearing students in mainstream education facilities.
  - Support adult Deaf education to enable deaf adults to learn literacy, attend vocational training and continue their primary, secondary and tertiary education.

47. Recommendations for disability specific targeted health information for hard-to-reach groups such as deaf people are found in World Health Organization (WHO) (2011) [World Report on Disability](#), WHO.

48. British Council: A National Policy Framework for Promoting Equity and Inclusion in Education for learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities in Iraq (2019-2028)

49. Deaf education may include Deaf education facilities that are shared with a mainstream institute, so that deaf students can benefit from specialist education but enjoy the facilities and subjects offered in a mainstream setting. This would also encourage more inclusive communities.

50. WFD have released the following statement on bilingualism: 'Becoming bilingual in the national sign language and the written language of one's country of residence is a fundamental right for deaf children. National sign languages are the mother tongues of deaf people and the only language they can acquire fully and effortlessly. To function in society, it is essential for deaf children to become proficient in the respective (written) language of the country. Therefore, meaningful bilingualism must be ensured in education as early as possible and throughout the course of the whole educational path, including Lifelong Learning programmes.' WFD (2011) [Bilingualism as a basic human right for deaf children in education](#), WFD, accessed 2 December 2021



## F. Increase access to livelihood opportunities, employment and social protection

Suggested actions include:

- Raise awareness on rights and abilities of deaf people in Iraq, to challenge negative attitudes amongst public and private sectors employers along with humanitarian and development agency human resource teams.
  - Then, develop relationships between deaf job seekers and the government, private sector and humanitarian and development agencies.
- Humanitarian and development agencies take proactive measures to ensure that deaf people can access livelihoods programming including vocational training, employment and business development opportunities.
- Develop and disseminate a public awareness campaign to showcase deaf people participating in various jobs in Iraq.
- Ensure that information about job opportunities is accessible to deaf people.
- Government to explicitly ensure deaf people can access and participate in all Vocational Training Centres through ensuring that curriculum is accessible and budgeting for sign language interpreters.
- Raise awareness on the rights and abilities of deaf people in Iraq, to challenge negative attitudes amongst public and private sector employers along with humanitarian and development agency human resource teams.
  - Then, develop relationships between deaf job seekers and the government, private sector and humanitarian and development agencies.

- Increase the number of deaf people employed in government and the private sectors along with humanitarian and development agencies. Work towards creating accessible and inclusive workplaces to meaningfully include deaf employees as colleagues.<sup>51</sup>
- In partnership with the Federal Government of Iraq and KRG, address existing barriers deaf people experience in applying for and maintaining social protection payments.

## G. Empower and safeguard deaf people and improve access to the justice system.

Suggested actions include:

- Raise awareness of rights of deaf people and build capacity of deaf-led and general OPDs and protection actors to develop and implement empowerment and safeguarding efforts.
- Collaborate with deaf-led OPDs to raise awareness amongst deaf children, families and deaf adults of steps to take to keep themselves safe (and avenues to access support and redress when discrimination, abuse or exploitation occurs).
- Together with deaf-led OPDs, build the capacity of the justice system staff to recognize the full legal capacity of deaf people in Iraq.
- Legislate the mandatory requirement to ensure deaf people have access to sign language interpreters in police interviews and court.

## CONCLUSION

Deaf people, a cultural-linguistic minority, actively participated in this consultation as participants, data collectors and advisors. Deaf participants shared their opinions, often for the first time. This report shares their perspectives and aims to improve the understanding of the barriers deaf people face, in order to strengthen policies and responses to address them. It is an-

tipated that these findings, and the recommendations they produced, will inform effective action for the inclusion of deaf people in Iraq, and that Government, International and local humanitarian and development agencies will take these actions forward in future in close partnership with deaf people and their deaf-led representative organizations.

51. Federal Government of Iraq Law No. 38 of 2013: Chapter 6, Article 16 states the public sector shall allocate no less than five per-cent of jobs for persons with disabilities, mixed sectors must employ one worker with a disability in a workplace less than 30 employees and at least three per-cent of all jobs must give given to persons of disabilities where there are more than 60 employees.

## ANNEX A: TERMINOLOGY

The following key terms are used throughout the report. They are listed in alphabetical order.

### Assistive Technology

Assistive hearing technologies such as hearing aids and cochlear implants remain a challenge to implement in developing countries. A broad range of infrastructure, staff and training is required to be in place for a successful roll out of hearing aids or other technologies.

### Deaf<sup>52</sup>

Deaf people identify as a cultural and linguistic group with rich and complex sign languages.<sup>53</sup> Deaf people often use the capital D in Deaf to culturally identify with the deaf community. Whilst Deaf people's identity is rooted in culture and language, their rights are enshrined through the CRPD.<sup>54</sup>

This report refers to deaf and hard of hearing people as deaf people, except in a few circumstances when there is a specific reference to a hard of hearing individual.

### Hard of hearing

Hard of hearing refers to late 'deafened adults, people who lost their hearing due to conflict, industrial deafness, or people who experience tinnitus, Meniere's disease, hyperacusis and auditory processing disorders'<sup>55</sup>, and do not identify with a cultural and linguistic minority group.

It is difficult to differentiate between deaf and hard of hearing people in Iraq due to multiple circumstances related to social stigma as many deaf children and adults, particularly deaf girls and women are kept hidden in their homes due to stigma and overprotection, leading to a lack of access to sign language and inability to connect with the deaf community. While they are socially hidden, many deaf persons or late 'deafened' adults that lost their hearing from war have been isolated without access to communication in speech or sign language. On a similar note, in areas and families with low income generated and limited access to services such as assistive technology, people who are hard of hearing are often 'grouped' with deaf people.<sup>56</sup> In terms of education, hard of hearing people are reported to be placed in deaf institutes with no option to access mainstream educational settings, that being said, students that would have traditionally identified as hard of hearing may now identify with the deaf community and consider themselves culturally deaf.

### Deaf Relay Interpreters/ Deaf Interpreters

Deaf relay interpreters are best placed to ensure accuracy and intelligibility to the widest range of deaf sign language users. Deaf relay interpreters are most often used to interpret the news on television. A hearing interpreter sits out of the screen and interprets the spoken language in front of the deaf interpreter. The deaf relay interpreter then relays this information in a more 'deaf friendly' way to be more inclusive of deaf people with limited sign language.

### Home sign

A home sign system is often developed when deaf children have no access to formal language (including sign and spoken languages). A home sign system uses a combination of gestures (like pointing) and characterizing signs (such as a sign to indicate a family member). As home signs are unique and developed within the family, they are unlikely to be understood by others, and they are extremely limited, and they are not the equivalent of a formal sign language.<sup>57</sup>

### International Sign

International Sign (IS) is a "pidgin-like" language with vocabulary of signs adopted from different sign languages (most commonly American Sign Language) that help foster communication and facilitate mutual understanding in a setting where deaf people from different linguistic backgrounds meet. International Sign is often used in international and regional settings, physically and virtually, such as conventions, workshops, training sessions, sporting events, and so forth.

52. The report acknowledges the intersectionality's that deaf people experience, whether that be related to color, gender, age, ethnic groups, disability, religion and sexuality. When referring to Deaf people, the report is being inclusive of the diversity of multiple layers that shape deaf individuals' experiences and priorities. Recognizing that in contexts where stigma crosses over these multiple identities, oppression can be compounded.

53. WFD (2017) Op. Cit.

54. Ibid.

55. IFHOH (n.d.), Op. Cit.

56. It is unconfirmed if there is limited access to assistive technology for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Iraq due to the lack of information available.

57. Tomaszewski, P.I.O.T.R., 2001. Sign language development in young deaf children. *Psychology of language and Communication*, 5(1), pp.67-80. and Mylander, C. and Goldin-Meadow, S., 1991. 3 Home Sign Systems in Deaf Children: The Development of. *Theoretical Issues in Sign Language Research, Volume 2: Psychology*, p.41.

## Language deprivation

There is a critical window of time related to the brain's plasticity in early childhood, where children require exposure to language.<sup>58</sup> A deprivation of exposure and acquisition of language in the early years can lead to a range of difficulties for deaf children. This includes the potential to never acquire a language to a fluent level and 'development of the cognitive activities that rely on a solid first language might be underdeveloped, such as literacy, memory organization, and number manipulation.'<sup>59</sup> Language deprivation leads to 'multiple personal harms as well as harms to society (in terms of costs to our medical systems and in loss of potential productive societal participation).'<sup>60</sup>

## Organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs)<sup>61</sup>

The CRPD General Comment No. 7 describes OPDs as any organizations or associations led, directed, and governed by persons with disabilities that are entrenched, committed to, and fully respect the principles and rights recognized in the CRPD. They are established predominantly with the aim of collectively acting, expressing, promoting, pursuing and/or defending the rights of persons with disabilities and bring a unique perspective to speak on their own behalf. OPDs disabilities include umbrella and coalition organizations, impairment specific organizations, formal organizations or informal groups, organizations including family members and/or relatives of persons with disabilities, self-advocacy groups, organizations of women with disabilities or organizations of children and youth with disabilities, among others.<sup>62</sup>

The term deaf-led OPDs is used in this report to signify deaf specific OPDs as compared to cross-disability OPDs, that are called general OPDs in this report.

## Reasonable Accommodations

Reasonable accommodation is the necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments, not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>63</sup>

## Sign Language

Sign languages (also known as signed languages) are languages that are visual to convey meaning. Sign languages are expressed through movement of the body and hands in combination with facial expressions. Sign languages are full-fledged natural languages with their own grammar and lexicon. Sign languages are not universal and are usually not mutually intelligible with each other, although there are also similarities among different sign languages. Sign language users with exposure to other sign languages often can adapt to incorporate each other's lexicon, gesture use and other strategies to improve intelligibility across the two sign languages.

Children who are born deaf or become deaf before they acquire spoken language require access to a language they can learn, otherwise the child will suffer from language deprivation. The easiest language for a deaf child to learn is sign language as it is a language they can see.

## Tactile Sign Language

Tactile sign language is used by deaf-blind people. One person will put their hands over the other person's hand while they are signing. This allows the deaf-blind individual to feel the shape, location and movement of the other signer's hand. In conversation between two people, the individuals take turns signing hand over hand.

A note about language that refers to deaf people

Language is still being used in Iraq to refer to deaf people that is derogatory and not rights based. Examples translated into English include mute and dumb. Associations for deaf people are still commonly using these terms in the organizational title. The CRPD Committee has requested that the government of Iraq take action to adopt rights-based language and ensure derogatory terms are not used.<sup>64</sup>

58. Humphries, T., Kushalnagar, P., Mathur, G., Napoli, D.J., Padden, C., Rathmann, C. and Smith, S.R., 2012. Language acquisition for deaf children: Reducing the harms of zero tolerance to the use of alternative approaches. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 9(1), pp.1-9.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid. p. 1.

61. This report uses the term "Organizations of persons with disabilities;" other common terms include Disabled Persons Organizations, DPOs, representative groups of persons with disabilities and the disability movement.

62. CRPD General Comment No. 7, 2018a.

63. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 2

64. OHCHR (2019) Op. Cit.

## ANNEX B: EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

**Jordan:** Jordan has educated deaf students at Holy Land Institute for the Deaf (HLID), from in the city of Salt. HLID has provided educational services to deaf refugees residing in Jordan. Jordan has progressed the rights of deaf people and people with disabilities more generally through the following avenues; Code of Conduct and Ethics for a Sign Language Interpreter for Deaf People in Jordan was published by the Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>65</sup>; Translation of Law No. (20) for the Year of 2017: Laws on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Jordanian Sign Language<sup>66</sup>; Ministry of Justice has an online Jordanian Sign Language dictionary of legal terminology<sup>67</sup> and a webpage, provided by HCD, dedicated to academic lessons in Jordanian Sign Language to help deaf students have access to lessons during COVID-19 lockdown<sup>68</sup>

**Lebanon:** Learning Centre for the Deaf is well resourced.<sup>69</sup> They run a range of programs that include early intervention, early detection, a nursery, awareness programs, sign language courses, workshops, audiometry preparation and secondary education. Of note, the director of the institute is deaf.

**Afghanistan:** The School of the Deaf in Kabul, Afghanistan is one of the few schools for deaf children in the country.<sup>70</sup> The school is reported to continue to operate with the current government takeover and it has 600 students attending. Like in Lebanon, the School is run by the deaf. Abdul Gafar, the school's director, is deafblind. The school trains and employs individuals who were once students, half of the teachers are deaf themselves.<sup>71</sup>

**Pathways to university and leadership:** The Gallaudet University (a university in the United States of America that is run by and for deaf people) offers an English Language Institute for deaf adults from the MENA region. The English tuition offers a pathway for deaf students to then undertake tertiary studies in an accessible environment. In addition, Frontrunners (based in Denmark) offers a leadership and capacity building course for young deaf adults for international students. Subjects include deaf studies, Deaf education, bilingualism, project management and organizational change.

**World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)** has set out a series of position papers and toolkits relating to strategies for adoption to support the human rights of deaf children and adults.<sup>72</sup> These include position papers on the language rights of deaf children, educational rights for deaf learners and accessible communication for deaf and hard of people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WFD developed a best practice and ethical framework for consideration when developing deaf specific projects within international development. This framework privileges the knowledge and priorities of by deaf people living in the location of where a potential project that (involves deaf people) is planned, recognizes contextually derived sign languages and strategies as of utmost importance and outlines strategies to promote local ownership and sustainability of projects. The framework recommendations include; 'Ideas for projects needs to have the strong acceptance, ownership and agreement of the (local) communities themselves by consulting with the local organization/ association (preferably a WFD Ordinary Member) representing the deaf people.' And Projects with deaf communities need to be designed by people who understand local sign language and culture, are situated within the community or have relationships with the community and have a rigorous understanding of deaf people and their networks or organizations.<sup>73</sup>

**World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)** recommends that each country sets up their own sign language association and they have shared a series of steps to take during the establishment of such an association.<sup>74</sup> To assist in professionalizing the sign language interpreter role and ensuring that deaf peoples' human rights are upheld, WASLI suggests that a country association develop a code of ethics and standards, the identification and development of training along with ongoing professional development. In addition, WASLI shares practice papers for special interest areas such as deaf relay interpreters and deaf-blind interpreters. WASLI has an Arab regional representative and there is an Arab Organization for Sign Language Interpreters.<sup>75</sup>

65. Higher Council for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2017) [Translation of Law No. \(20\) for the Year of 2017: Laws on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Jordanian Sign Language](#), Kingdom of Jordan, accessed 19 January 2022.

66. Kingdom of Jordan (2017) [Translation of Law No. \(20\) for the Year of 2017: Laws on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Jordanian Sign Language](#), Kingdom of Jordan, accessed 19 January 2022.

67. Ministry of Justice (n.d.) [LIU dictionary of legal terminology](#), Ministry of Justice, accessed 19 January 2022.

68. Higher Council for the Rights of persons with Disabilities (n.d.) [School Curricula for Deaf Students](#), Kingdom of Jordan, accessed 19 January 2022.

69. Learning Centre for the Deaf (n.d.) [Home](#), Lebanon, accessed 27 January 2022.

70. Walker, N (2021) [School for the Deaf, Kabul Afghanistan](#) [video], Vimeo, accessed 30 October 2022.

71. Daily Moth (2021) [Updates with deaf people in Afghanistan](#) [video], Daily Moth, accessed 28 January 2022

72. WFD (n.d.) [Knowledge Base Category: Statements and Position Papers](#), WFD, accessed 18 January 2022

73. Ibid.

74. World Association for Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) (n.d.) [Setting up a national association](#) and [Arabic translation](#), WASLI, accessed 22 January 2022.

75. WASLI (n.d.) [Regional representatives](#), WASLI, accessed 4 January 2022.

ANNEX C: LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS<sup>76</sup>

Organization
<b>Deaf-led OPDs in Iraq</b>
The Iraq Deaf and Mute Association - Baghdad
Kurdistan Deaf & Mute Association - Dohuk
Karbala Holy Association for the Deaf - Karbala
Al-Mosul Al-Hadbaa Association for Deaf - Mosul
Deaf and Mute Association – Sulaymaniyah
<b>General OPDs in Iraq</b>
Iraqi Alliance for Disability ( IADO )
Short Statured Association - Sulaymaniyah
<b>Deaf Institutes</b>
Al Amal Institute for the Deaf - Baghdad
Al Amal Institute for the Deaf - Basrah
Al Amal Institute for the Deaf - Sulaymaniyah
Al Karama Institute - Baghdad
Hiwa Institute for Deaf – Sulaymaniyah
<b>Institutes</b>
Amaday Pishay Zansty IT Institute - Sulaymaniyah
<b>Authorities</b>
Special Needs Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Federal Government of Iraq – Baghdad
Special Needs Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Federal Government of Iraq – Basrah
Special Needs Department, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, KRG -Sulaymaniyah
Commission of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs, Federal Government of Iraq
<b>Global</b>
World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI)

76. Individual deaf people and independent sign interpreters also participated





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