

Literacy in Iraq Fact sheet

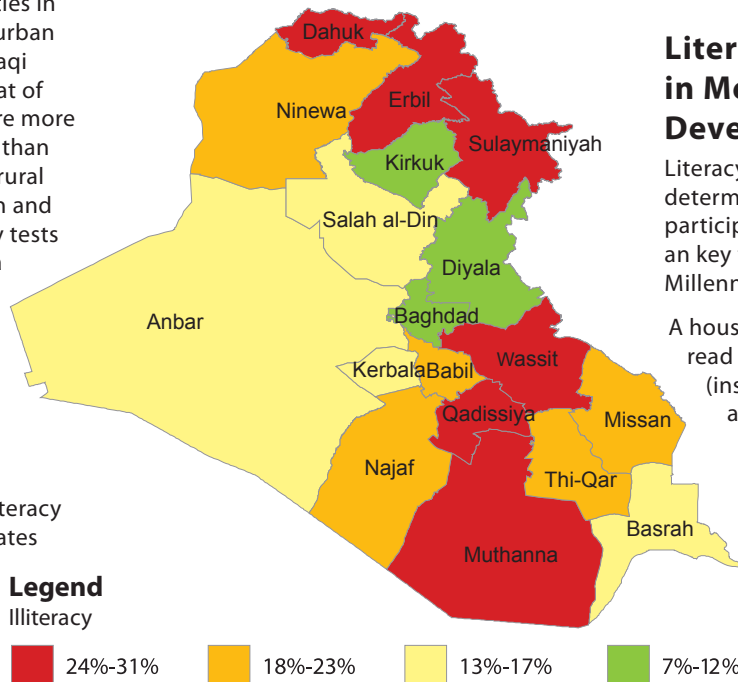
Facts and Figures

One in five Iraqis, aged 10 – 49, cannot read or write. There are significant disparities in literacy rates across gender, age and urban versus rural areas. Illiteracy among Iraqi women (24%) is more than double that of Iraqi men (11%).¹ Rural populations are more adversely affected by illiteracy (25%) than urban (14%) populations, and within rural areas the literacy divide between men and women is wider. In functional literacy tests amongst youth (when asked to read a sentence out loud), this disparity is further pronounced: less than 50% of women aged 15-24 living in rural areas were found to be literate, compared with 72-80% literacy rates for women of the same age group in more urban areas.²

There are significant differences in illiteracy rates amongst the different governorates of Iraq. The *lowest* rates of illiteracy appear to be in Diyala, Baghdad (centre) and Kirkuk (north), while the *highest* are estimated to be in

Illiteracy Rates by Governorate

Source: World Food Programme Comprehensive Food Security Vulnerability Analysis (WFP CFSVA) 2007



Legend



Dahuk and Sulaimaniyah within the Kurdistan Region in the north, and Muthanna, Missan and Qadissiya in the south.³

Literacy: A Key Component in Meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Literacy impacts every facet of life. A critical determinant of employment, health, civic participation and social attitudes, literacy is an key factor in achieving each one of the Millennium Development Goals.

A household headed by an Iraqi who cannot read or write is more likely to be deprived (insufficient water, sanitation, food, assets and electricity) than a household headed by a literate individual.⁴ Households with illiterate mothers have higher incidence of disease than those households where a mother can read.⁵

The effect of literacy also impacts social participation and civic attitudes. Iraqi youth who cannot



read and write feel their voice much less heard in social and political institutions.⁶

Challenges to Literacy

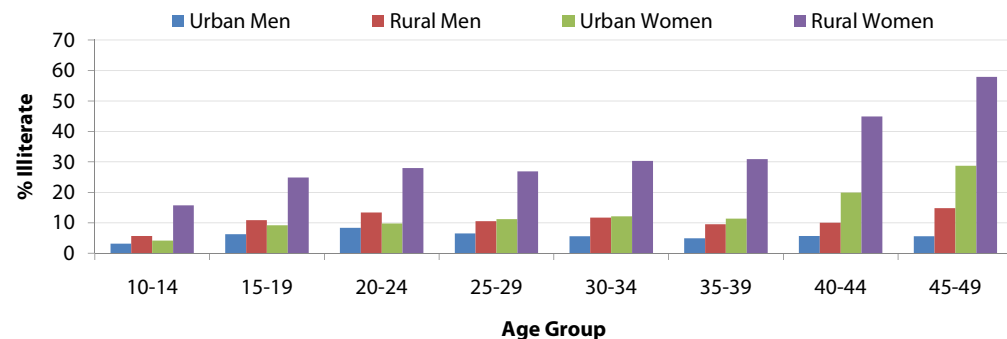
There are many challenges to literacy at the household, community and structural level.

To ensure literacy, Iraq will need to increase school attendance and address the causes of absenteeism and drop-out. Nearly one-fifth (19%) of children, aged 10 – 14, are not currently attending school.⁷

School attendance alone does not guarantee literacy. Only 55% of those women (aged 15 – 24) who reported attaining a primary education were found to be literate.⁸

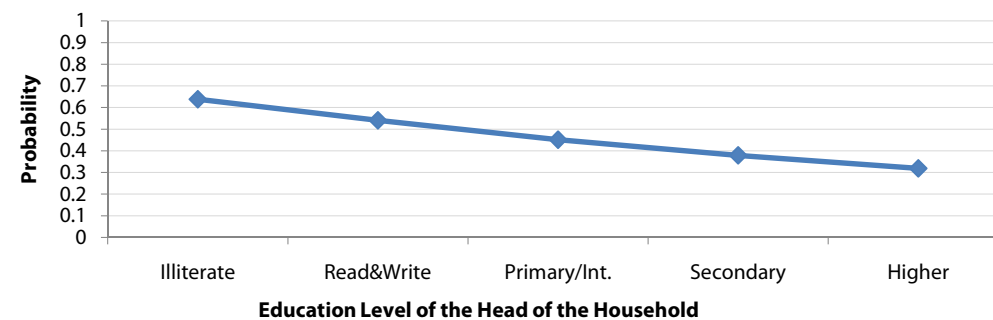
Illiteracy Rates by Gender and Location

Source: World Food Programme Comprehensive Food Security Vulnerability Analysis (WFP CFSVA) 2007



Probability of Living in a Deprived Household in Rural Areas

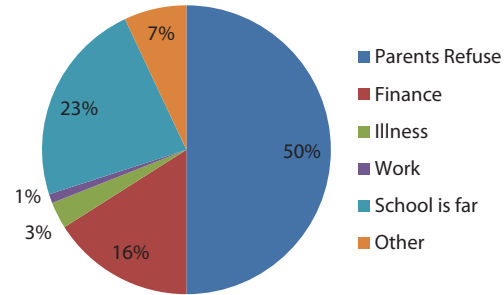
Source: Inter-Agency Information & Analysis Unit (IAU) analysis of World Food Programme's Comprehensive Food Security Vulnerability Analysis data, (WFP CFSVA) 2007



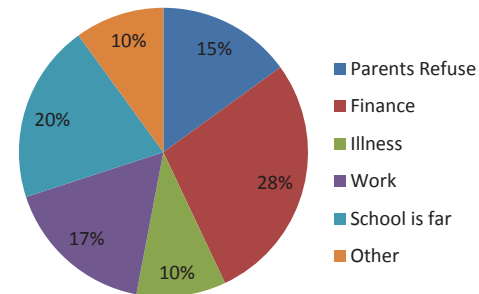
Reasons for Not Attending School

Source: Government of Iraq, Iraq National Youth & Adolescents Survey (GoI NYS) 2009

Young Illiterate Women



Young Illiterate Men



Additional challenges to literacy, identified by the Government of Iraq include:

- No governing law or comprehensive national strategy for literacy in Iraq and limited institutional capacity or accurate data to develop the them.
- Not enough funding for literacy programming.
- Inefficient administrative structure at central, governorate and community levels for literacy initiatives.
- Lack of coordinated action amongst stakeholders, including Government of Iraq, civil society, NGOs and the private sector.
- Need to develop a thorough curriculum for literacy that is relevant for targeted beneficiaries and tied-in to the formal system of education.
- Need for additional training and practice in the use of modern methodologies for literacy learning.
- Need for additional awareness of the needs of literacy learners, to develop relevant and innovative programming.
- Lack of public awareness on the benefits of literacy programming, and the types of programmes that are available.

UN and Government Response

Currently, there are a number of UN-supported and government-operated literacy programmes in Iraq:

The Literacy and Adult Learning Programme: This programme is intended for students aged 15-45 who did not attend formal education. A certificate equivalent to grade four of formal education is provided upon completion of a 14 month programme. New textbooks for Arabic language, Mathematics and General Culture have been developed with the technical support from UNESCO.

The Accelerated Learning Program: This programme is intended for students aged 12-18 years who can re-enter formal education. This is a three year programme and those students who complete it can move into the formal education system to continue their studies. This programme has been supported by UNICEF as a pilot initiative and is now being extended to all Iraq.

Community Learning Centres: There are currently eight of these pilot centres, established by UNESCO in coordination with the Ministry of Education. They offer a variety of training in vocational and life skills and are operated in close cooperation with the local communities. This programme, targeting mostly women aged 15-45, will be expanded in the coming years to cover all the governorates of Iraq.

In 2010, UNESCO launched the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) for Iraq with funding from the Office of Her Highness Sheikhha Moza bint Nasser Al-Missned, First Lady of Qatar. LIFE will contribute to strengthening the capacity of the Government of Iraq and civil society to deliver sustainable and empowering literacy for all.

What is Literacy?

Literacy is internationally recognized as the capacity to use reading and writing skills in daily life.

In the Education for All 2000 Assessment, UNESCO defined literacy as: "The ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes basic numeric skills"

This definition affirms that literacy is a necessary tool for individual and community development.

(Endnotes)

- 1 World Food Programme CFSVA 2007
- 2 United Nations Children's Fund MICS, 2006
- 3 World Food Programme CFSVA, 2007
- 4 Inter-Agency Information & Analysis Unit, Vulnerability Analysis, August 2010
- 5 Inter-Agency Information & Analysis Unit analysis of World Food Programme CFSVA data, September 2010
- 6 Government of Iraq, Iraq National Youth & Adolescent Survey, 2009
- 7 Government of Iraq, Iraq National Youth & Adolescent Survey, 2009
- 8 United Nations Children's Fund MICS, 2006