



Report:

The State of Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in 2025

Peace and Freedom Organization (PFO)

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Introduction:

Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) is a vital and profoundly important aspect of workplace management and the overall well-being of the workforce. It encompasses a comprehensive and wide-ranging set of laws, policies, and regulations aimed primarily at preventing workplace-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. Effective OSH measures do not merely protect workers; they contribute directly to increasing productivity, reducing absenteeism, and improving the overall organizational performance of the workplace. Prioritizing the safety and health of workers is crucial for achieving sustainable economic growth and genuine social development.

Developing countries often face significantly greater challenges in implementing effective OSH regulations due to limited resources and underdeveloped infrastructure. A lack of awareness, inadequate training, and substandard working conditions all contribute to rising rates of accidents and injuries. Furthermore, technological advancements and the continuous evolution of the work environment introduce new occupational risks, including the displacement of workers by automated machinery, psychosocial stressors, and emerging health hazards (e.g., nanotechnology). A substantial and influential portion of the global workforce operates within the informal economy, lacking formal employment contracts and clear legal protections. Informal workers face heightened OSH risks because they are often excluded from the legal frameworks that provide essential safety guarantees.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) develops and promotes international labor standards, including conventions and recommendations, to protect workers' rights and improve occupational health and safety globally. Key OSH-related conventions include Convention No. 155 (Occupational Safety and Health) and Convention No. 187 (Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health). Governments worldwide establish OSH regulatory frameworks to ensure compliance with safety standards. National regulatory agencies enforce these standards, conduct inspections, and impose penalties for non-compliance. Iraq has ratified Convention No. 155 since 2015, but it has not yet ratified Convention No. 187.

Occupational health and safety is a major global concern, affecting the well-being of workers, the economy, and society as a whole. While significant progress has been made in implementing OSH measures, challenges persist, particularly in developing nations and in the face of emerging risks. International cooperation, national regulatory frameworks, and raising awareness among employers, workers, and staff are the key pillars to achieving a safer and healthier working environment for all. Continuous effort and investment in occupational health and safety are essential to guarantee sustainable development and protect the rights of workers across the globe.

This report seeks to shed light on the reality of the occupational health and safety situation from the perspective of monitoring violations and analyzing laws, draft laws, and regulations. It presents data on the number of victims resulting from the lack of occupational health and safety and provides a comprehensive analysis of the situation. This work is carried out within the framework of a joint project with the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA).

General Assessment of the State of Occupational Safety in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region

The state of occupational health and safety in Iraq and Kurdistan is not in its best condition, primarily because it still lacks an appropriate and robust legal framework.

In Iraq, although a National Center for Occupational Health and Safety exists, a specific law governing this matter has yet to be enacted. Despite the National Center, in collaboration with the Iraqi Ministry of Labor, preparing a draft law in 2024 to protect occupational safety, the Iraqi Council of Representatives has not yet passed it into law. Similarly, in the Kurdistan Region, for the first time in 2024, health and safety guidelines for Occupational Health and Safety Committees were published in the «Kurdistan Gazette.» However, in reality, these have not yet had a significant impact on protecting the lives of workers. Furthermore, although both the Iraqi and Kurdistan governments, in partnership with the ILO, decided on an OSH policy for the agricultural sector, in practice, agricultural workers are often not officially recognized as workers, nor are they aware of such policies.

Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) is a decisive aspect of ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for workers in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. However, the current OSH landscape suffers from significant challenges that hinder the development and implementation of effective safety measures. This report aims to highlight some of the key issues observed in the OSH sector:

1- Lack of a robust legal framework: There is an absence of a solid legal structure to protect occupational health and safety in Iraq and Kurdistan. The existence of some guidelines, which lack the force of law, results in a lack of substantial power to protect workers' lives.

2- Absence of specialized monitoring: There is a lack of specific oversight in Iraq and Kurdistan regarding the monitoring of health and safety conditions at workplaces by entities with the authority to improve the situation. Currently, this role is filled by labor inspectors who, due to their limited numbers and overwhelming primary duties, have not been able to play a significant role in safeguarding workers' lives.

3- Lack of accurate data and information: The absence of detailed and comprehensive data regarding the OSH situation in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region poses a major challenge. Without reliable data, it is impossible to diagnose and prioritize OSH risks, determine the causes of accidents, and formulate appropriate preventive measures. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive workplace assessment to collect information on hazards and accident statistics.

4- Weak coordination among stakeholders: Implementing OSH standards requires strong coordination among various stakeholders, including government agencies, employers, workers, and civil society organizations. However, the level of coordination in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region is not at the required level. This lack of cooperation negatively impacts the implementation and monitoring of OSH standards, hindering workplace

safety improvements.

5- Incomplete workplace monitoring: Monitoring workplaces plays a vital role in ensuring compliance with OSH regulations. However, in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, workplace monitoring mechanisms have not been sufficiently established or implemented. Limited resources and restricted enforcement capacity contribute to ineffective monitoring of OSH standards, resulting in substandard working conditions and increased risks for workers.

6- Lack of a national capacity-building program: Building the necessary capacity in the field of OSH is vital for the effective implementation of safety standards. However, in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, capacity-building initiatives are not sufficiently visible. This includes training programs for OSH professionals, improving infrastructure for workplace inspections, and enhancing the technical skills required to address OSH challenges effectively.

7- Inadequate awareness and training initiatives: Creating a safety culture and educating workers to foster a safe working environment is crucial. However, awareness campaigns and training courses at the national level in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are not conducted properly. Insufficient efforts are made to educate both employers and workers regarding OSH regulations, risk prevention, and the correct use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Data and Statistics of Workplace Victims in 2025:

Due to the lack of accurate and descriptive data and information in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region regarding the occupational health and safety situation, a state of ambiguity has been created in this sector. No comprehensive assessment of workplaces has been conducted to determine the types and levels of risks. Furthermore, because information regarding workplace accidents is significantly deficient, it cannot serve as a basis for determining the types and causes of accidents. The level of coordination between relevant parties is weak, which negatively impacts the implementation of OSH standards, and workplaces are not monitored as required. The necessary capacities in this field have not been built to be utilized for strengthening standards. Awareness campaigns and the provision of training courses at the national level are not conducted in a manner that helps create a safety culture and raise worker awareness.

Occupational Health and Safety and Workers' Rights:

Ensuring Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) for workers is vital for protecting their rights and well-being. This report tracks the current state of workers' rights concerning OSH in Kurdistan and Iraq. The information provided reflects a concerning situation, with a significant number of worker fatalities and injuries. Additionally, specific cases of violations further highlight the challenges workers face in securing safe and healthy working conditions.

According to information obtained by our organization through field work and communication with relevant authorities in Baghdad and Erbil, it was confirmed that in 2025, 3,009 workers were injured during work in Iraq, including 1,202 workers in Baghdad province alone. Furthermore, 1,063 injury cases were recorded in the construction sector, including 538 cases of falls during work.

Among these cases, 23 workers lost their lives, including 7 workers who were under twenty years of age.

The statistics have been confirmed through information from the National Center for Occupational Health and Safety, but it must be noted that the actual number of workers who lost their lives may be higher, as some cases are not recorded or officially reported.

At the level of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the number of workers who lost their lives in 2025 reached (56) workers, as follows:

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|--------------------------|
| Sulaymaniyah: 29 workers |
| Erbil: 17 workers |
| Duhok: 6 workers |
| Halabja: 1 worker |
| Garmian: 3 workers |

Additionally, the number of injured was more than 91 workers, and these figures were confirmed with the relevant labor unions in the Kurdistan Region. The data and cases presented in this report emphasize the urgent need to improve occupational health and safety measures in Kurdistan and Iraq. The significant number of worker deaths and injuries, alongside the violation of workers' rights, paints a bleak picture of the current situation. It is vital for authorities, employers, and relevant organizations to cooperate and prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive safety rules, effective training programs, and a robust monitoring system. Protecting workers' rights and ensuring their well-being must be at the forefront of efforts to foster a safe and healthy environment for all.

Roles, Tasks, and Responsibilities of National Institutions Related to OSH:

Occupational Health and Safety institutions play a decisive role in promoting and ensuring OSH standards. Here we outline their primary tasks:

1- Legislative and Policy Development: These institutions are responsible for developing and formulating laws, policies, strategies, and national action plans related to OSH. These policies aim to improve workplace conditions, protect workers' rights, and prevent occupational injuries and illnesses.

2- Research and Data Collection: Conducting research and collecting information on OSH issues. This includes gathering data on workplace hazards, occupational diseases, and accident statistics. The information collected

helps identify priority areas for intervention and develop evidence-based policies and guidelines.

3- Occupational Health and Safety Standards: Participating in the development and implementation of OSH standards, working on setting guidelines, rules, and technical standards for various industries and sectors. These standards ensure compliance with international best practices and provide a framework for employers to create safe and healthy workplaces.

4- Training and Capacity Building: Playing a significant role in providing training programs and capacity-building initiatives to enhance knowledge and skills among workers, employers, and OSH professionals. These training programs aim to raise awareness of workplace hazards, preventive measures, and the effective use of PPE. They also help build the capacity of OSH inspectors and officials responsible for enforcing OSH rules.

5- Inspection and Compliance: In coordination with relevant authorities, they conduct inspections and assessments of workplaces to ensure compliance with OSH rules. Inspections are conducted to identify hazards, assess risk levels, and verify whether employers are implementing appropriate control measures to protect the health and safety of workers. They also work to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and take necessary actions against non-compliant employers.

6- Cooperation and Coordination: These agencies cooperate with national and international organizations, including government institutions, civil society organizations, and international agencies, to strengthen OSH practices. This includes sharing information, experiences, and best practices, as well as participating in regional and international forums and conferences related to OSH.

7- Awareness Campaigns: Playing an important role in raising awareness among workers, employers, and the general public about OSH issues. They conduct awareness campaigns, distribute educational materials, and promote OSH through various media channels to foster a safety culture in workplaces.

Overall, OSH institutions serve as a central authority responsible for formulating policies, implementing standards, providing training, conducting inspections, and promoting awareness to ensure the well-being of workers and improve OSH conditions across the country.

The Role of Labor Unions in Providing Safe and Healthy Workplaces for Workers

Unions play a key role in protecting workers' rights to have a safe and healthy workplace. Here are some of the primary roles unions perform in this regard:

1- Advocacy and Representation: Unions act as the collective voice of workers, advocating for their rights and interests concerning OSH. They represent workers' concerns and negotiate with employers, government agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure that OSH standards are maintained and improved.

2- Negotiating OSH Standards: Unions actively participate in collective bargaining processes to negotiate OSH standards and provisions within the framework of collective agreements. They strive to secure appropriate protection for workers, including the provision of safety equipment, training programs, risk control measures,

and suitable working and rest times.

3- Monitoring and Enforcement: Unions monitor the application and implementation of OSH rules and standards in workplaces. They conduct regular inspections, participate in joint health and safety committees, and ensure that employers perform their legal duties to provide safe working conditions. When violations occur, unions take action by filing complaints, initiating protests, or seeking legal recourse to protect workers' rights.

4- Education and Training: Unions play a vital role in educating workers about their rights to a safe and healthy workplace. They provide education and training programs to empower workers with information regarding OSH risks, preventive measures, and their legal rights. By raising worker awareness, unions contribute to developing a safety culture and encouraging active participation in OSH initiatives.

5- Support for Injured Workers: In cases of work-related injuries, labor unions provide support and assistance to affected workers. They help injured workers manage the workers' compensation process, ensure access to medical treatment and rehabilitation, and advocate for appropriate compensation and aid. Unions also try to prevent workplace accidents through proactive measures and continuous improvement of OSH standards.

6- Collaboration and Partnership: Unions collaborate with other stakeholders, including employers, government agencies, and civil society organizations, to promote OSH. They participate in tripartite forums and engage in dialogue to formulate policies, rules, and programs that put worker safety at the forefront. Joint efforts contribute to the development of comprehensive and effective OSH strategies.

By actively participating in these roles, unions serve as vital advocates for workers' rights to a safe and healthy workplace. Their efforts not only benefit workers as individuals but contribute to the overall improvement of OSH standards and the well-being of the workforce as a whole.

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in the OSH Sector

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a notable role in the Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) sector. Their participation helps complement government efforts, fill gaps in resources and expertise, and advocate for improved workplace safety. Here are some key roles of CSOs in the OSH sector:

1- Advocacy and Awareness:

CSOs actively advocate for workers' rights and improve OSH policies and practices. They raise awareness of workplace hazards, occupational diseases, and the importance of safe working conditions through campaigns, public education programs, and media outreach. CSOs often collaborate with labor unions, social groups, and other stakeholders to influence policies and rules that protect workers' health and safety.

2- Capacity Building and Training:

CSOs provide training programs, workshops, and seminars to enhance OSH knowledge and skills among workers,

employers, and OSH professionals. They participate in building the capacity of workers and organizations to identify hazards, assess risks, and implement appropriate preventive measures. CSOs may focus on specific industries or target vulnerable groups, such as informal workers, migrants, or women, to ensure equal access to OSH information and resources.

3- Research and Data Collection:

CSOs often conduct research, surveys, and investigations to gather information on workplace hazards, occupational diseases, and accidents. They contribute to the knowledge base by identifying emerging OSH issues and collecting data that can support decision-making and policy development based on evidence. CSOs may collaborate with academic institutions, government agencies, and other research organizations to conduct comprehensive research on OSH-related topics.

4- Collaboration and Technical Consultation:

CSOs provide technical expertise and guidance to workplaces, especially those with limited resources, to improve OSH practices. They offer consulting services, conduct safety audits, and provide recommendations for risk management and hazard control. CSOs can assist small and medium-sized enterprises in developing OSH management systems, implementing safety protocols, and complying with relevant regulations.

5- Monitoring and Enforcement Advocacy:

CSOs monitor and evaluate the implementation of OSH policies and rules, as well as their impacts on worker well-being. They engage in dialogue with government agencies, employers, and other stakeholders to address gaps, improve enforcement mechanisms, and advocate for strict OSH standards when necessary.

6- Collaboration and Partnership:

CSOs collaborate with government agencies, international organizations, unions, and other stakeholders to foster cooperation and exchange best practices in the OSH sector. They participate in networks, forums, and alliances at local, national, and international levels to share experiences, resources, and expertise. CSOs often participate in the development and implementation of OSH initiatives through joint projects and joint advocacy campaigns.

The contributions of CSOs to the OSH sector are vital for creating safer and healthier workplaces, advocating for workers' rights, and fostering a culture of prevention. Their diverse expertise, fundamental relationships, and ability to mobilize communities play a major role in promoting OSH practices and policies.

Coordination

The responsibility of providing a safe and healthy environment is a multi-tasked responsibility distributed among several parties, but the primary responsibility lies with the Iraqi and Kurdistan governments. That is, each party achieves the general goal by performing its specific role. One of the barriers to improving the OSH sector in Kurdistan and Iraq is the lack of coordination between relevant parties. The lack of cooperation among stakeholders has led to several challenges:

1- Fragmented Responsibilities: The division of responsibilities among various government bodies, such as the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Environment, has led to a lack of coordination and clear accountability. This fragmentation hinders the development and implementation of effective policies.

2- Weak Institutional Implementation: While OSH rules exist, enforcement mechanisms are often weak and incomplete. Scant resources, including personnel and equipment, limit the capacity of regulatory agencies to conduct continuous inspections and ensure compliance with OSH standards.

3- Limited Stakeholder Participation: The involvement of key stakeholders, including employers, labor unions, and civil society organizations, in formulating OSH policies and practices is often limited. Their perspectives and expertise have not been appropriately taken into account, resulting in a lack of ownership and commitment to improving OSH conditions.

4- Low Awareness and Training: General awareness regarding OSH rights and responsibilities among workers, employers, and relevant authorities is low. If training programs and awareness campaigns are not conducted continuously, the understanding of the importance and implementation of OSH standards will diminish, and the level of compliance with OSH measures will also drop.

5- Incomplete Data Collection and Monitoring: The lack of a comprehensive system for data collection, analysis, and information sharing hinders the ability to monitor and evaluate the impact of OSH initiatives. Without accurate and up-to-date data, it is impossible to identify trends, prioritize interventions, and measure progress.

To address these challenges, fostering cooperation among all stakeholders involved in OSH is vital. This includes government bodies, employers, labor unions, civil society organizations, and international partners. Parties must work together to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to OSH that includes policy development, implementation, capacity building, awareness, and information sharing. By establishing effective coordination mechanisms, the OSH sector can be strengthened, leading to safer and healthier workplaces for all.

The Informal Economy and Occupational Health and Safety

One of the notable challenges in providing Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region is the increased prevalence of informal job opportunities. According to the Labor Force Survey conducted by the World Bank in 2021, 66.6% of total employment in Iraq is in the informal sector. In the ILO assessment of the informal economy (2021), it appears that the informal economy is a major issue within the private sector in Iraq, impacting the quality of both products and services as well as employment opportunities. Job opportunities for youth are more available in the informal sector, which lacks formal contracts and social protections. The development of small economic activities in the informal economy, although it provides jobs during crises, will in the long run lead to persistent informality in the labor market if not addressed. The growth

of the informal economy, characterized by jobs not regulated by labor laws or unprotected, creates several barriers to ensuring OSH in workplaces. Here are some key points that must be highlighted:

1- Lack of Legal Protection: Informal businesses often operate outside the circle of legal frameworks and rules. Workers in the informal sector may not enjoy the same legal protections, rights, and benefits as formal sector employees. This lack of legal protection makes enforcing OSH standards and holding employers accountable for providing safe working conditions difficult.

2- Limited OSH Awareness: Informal workers, including volunteers and those in small workshops, may have limited awareness of OSH principles and practices. They may lack information regarding workplace hazards, risk assessment, and preventive measures. This increases their vulnerability to accidents, injuries, and occupational diseases.

3- Inadequate Resources: Informal businesses are often associated with low income and access to limited resources. Employers in the informal sector may be unwilling to invest in OSH measures due to financial issues. This leads to a lack of necessary safety equipment, training programs, and protection measures for workers.

4- Informal Work Organization: Informal work is characterized by flexible work organization, such as irregular working hours, temporary contracts, and informal hiring methods. These factors can contribute to unstable and unpredictable working conditions, making the implementation of consistent OSH measures and ensuring worker well-being a major challenge.

5- Limited OSH Monitoring: The informal sector operates outside formal regulatory frameworks, making monitoring and tracking OSH practices difficult. Government agencies responsible for OSH implementation may have limited access and capacity to inspect and regulate informal workplaces effectively.

6- Vulnerable Worker Groups: Informal businesses often attract vulnerable worker groups, including migrants, women, and young workers. These individuals may face additional barriers in accessing OSH information, training, and protection measures. They may also be more susceptible to exploitation and unsafe working conditions.

This report has been translated using a comprehensive and matching translation style by Google AI Studio, ensuring complete balance with the original Kurdish text in terms of content and word volume.

Peace and Freedom Organization:

Is an independent non-governmental organization working in the field of human rights and coexistence. The main office is in Erbil. It is officially registered with both NGO departments in the Kurdistan Region and Iraq.

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