

# People Centered Justice: Iraq's Right of Access to Information Law and Legal Aid Law



The Protection and Rule of Law (PRoL) team at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Iraq, in strategic partnership with the Parliamentary Development Institute (PDI) of the Iraqi Parliament, are continuing to strengthen the justice system through technical dialogue, consensus-building discussions and advocacy. This is evident with the work IRC and PDI did on two prominent Iraqi Laws, the Legal Aid Law and the Right of Access to Information Law.

| Free Legal Aid for All in Iraq! On January 30, 2024, the Iraqi Parliament achieved a significant milestone by passing the long-pending Iraqi Legal Aid Law. This development holds immense historical importance, as the law had been stalled in the Iraqi Parliament since 2014, facing strong opposition from the Iraqi Bar Association and other justice sector stakeholders.

With the passing of the Legal Aid Law, centers can now be established at the governorate and district levels to provide free legal aid for people whose justice needs are the most urgent. Lawyers will be hired for the centers who will provide legal assistance and information, as well as court representation. Free legal aid services are critical for crisis affected people to be able to take control of their lives. The high cost of litigation has left many Iraqis unable to access the formal justice system and achieve legal remedies to their problems. This has resulted in a reliance by people on NGOs to provide legal services. However, due to Iraq's humanitarian transition, the services by NGOs have been significantly reduced over the years. Adopting the legal aid law and implementing free state-led legal aid services was crucial to ensuring the most vulnerable Iraqis can access justice services and exercise their rights.

**IRC Iraq has been advocating for the adoption of the legal aid law since 2022.** Through technical dialogues, facilitating consensus building discussions and roundtable events with key justice sector stakeholders, and advocating for the importance of a state-led legal aid system, the passage of this important legislation was possible. Some key milestones to achieve this included the IRC facilitating a comprehensive learning exchange session in December 2022, bringing together international legal aid experts and orienting justice sector stakeholders on best practices and legal aid systems from various jurisdictions. The IRC Iraq's senior management and the PRoL team conducted a comprehensive stakeholder engagement in March 2023, actively involving key justice sector stakeholders such as the Parliament, Bar Association, the Presidency, and the High Commission on Human Rights. The purpose of this engagement was to enlighten decision-makers on the significance of the legislation, its implications and importance.

Further, in August 2023, the IRC organized a dialogue forum in partnership with the Iraqi Parliament to develop consensus among key stakeholders on the draft Iraqi Legal Aid Law. Acknowledging the concerns raised by justice sector stakeholders and the Iraqi Bar Association, the Legal Committee of the Iraqi Parliament revised the draft law. The revised version, approved on 30 January 2024, has received the endorsement of the Iraqi Bar and other stakeholders.

**The IRC Iraq remains committed to collaborating with the Iraqi Parliament and the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights for the enactment and implementation of the legal aid law.** This ongoing partnership aims to ensure that the legal aid system becomes an integral part of Iraq's justice framework, promoting fairness, accessibility, and the protection of human rights.

The adoption of the Legal Aid Law was commemorated by Iraqi Media and TV platforms, a distinguished example of this is the article posted on [Sumariyah News Website](#).

| On April 30, 2024, the Iraqi Parliament held a high-level dialogue forum to build consensus for the Right to Information Law. Sponsored by Speaker Mohsen Al-Mandlawy and organized by the Parliamentary Development Institute in collaboration with the Culture and Media Committee and supported by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the event aimed to refine the draft law with stakeholder input and build consensus among stakeholders for its adoption.

The dialogue forum in the Iraqi Parliament was attended by representatives of the Presidency, Supreme Judicial Council, General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, various ministries, civil society organizations, and activists.

Saad Fayyadh, Director General of the Parliamentary Development Institute, emphasized the importance of a clear and robust law to meet societal needs and uphold human rights.

The draft law, developed with UNDP Iraq's technical assistance, has passed its first reading. Members of the Iraqi Parliament highlighted the law's role in promoting transparency, fighting corruption, ensuring public accountability, and its necessity for democratic participation and anti-corruption efforts.

Representing the IRC, Mohammed Idrees, the Senior Governance and Rights Coordinator, emphasized the IRC's commitment to supporting local communities, enhancing human rights, justice system strengthening, and promoting people-centered justice through strategic partnerships with governmental bodies and civil society organizations.

Salwa Al-Ghazwani from Article 19 discussed the [international framework for the Right to Information](#), emphasizing mandatory criteria for civil and political rights and suggested further improvements in the current draft.

The forum concluded with recommendations for further legislative hearings, workshops on international standards, and dialogue forums with civil society organizations. An electronic feedback mechanism was also proposed to refine the law.

The IRC's PRoL has been providing legal aid services in Iraq since 2009 with a focus on matters related to legal identity, housing, land and property, detention, and family laws. To strategically contribute to the transition in Iraq to development, in 2023 the PRoL program repositioned itself as a key rule of law stakeholder in Iraq by expanding its portfolio to include justice system strengthening. This involves strategic areas of policy and regulatory reforms, justice sector capacity strengthening and community empowerment.

