



DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

# **”CEDAW IS OUR HOLY TEXT, OUR HOLY BOOK”**

Combating gender-based violence in a de facto state: The case of Iraqi Kurdistan

**Såma Salih**

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## **Abstract**

The Kurdistan region in Iraq, also known as KRI, has gained semi-independence over the decades and is today recognized in the Iraqi constitution as an autonomous part of the federal country. While still belonging to Iraq, it has been declared that the KRI performs better than its parent state in terms of security, stability and promoting international norms such as gender equality. Nonetheless, the Region still faces struggles linked to its work of combatting gender- and honour-based violence (GBV and HBV), which delays the process of achieving gender equality.

This thesis aims to examine which indicators of cooperation and conflict exist in the partnership between de facto states and domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV. In doing this, the KRI has been chosen as an example of a de facto state and will be the subject of this case study. The dynamic between the two actors will be discussed based on a theoretical framework of different concepts regarding NGO-government partnership, comparative advantages and international norms, in order to gain more detailed knowledge on the NGO-government cooperation and interdependency in a de facto state when striving towards gender equality. The chosen method is a qualitative case study, using semi-structured informant interviews with professionals from regional NGOs working with women's issues and cooperating with the Kurdish government.

The results show that the partnership between the KRG and the domestic NGOs consists of several indicators of cooperation and fewer indicators of conflict. Both actors have comparative advantages towards one another, and international norms and organisations did not play a remarkably large role in the work of the informants when combatting GBV and HBV. However, it was confirmed that they frequently do use international conventions such as CEDAW in their work and found it important that the KRG implemented the convention and other gender-related agreements correctly. One important contribution to the literature is that Iraqi legislation, i.e. the legislation of the parent state, was perceived as a posing obstacle to the work against GBV and HBV in the KRI.

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This thesis is dedicated to those affected by gender- and honour-based violence all around the world; to generations of people who have lost their freedom, lives or loved ones to it, and to those who are tirelessly fighting against it.

May your souls rest in peace, your wounds healed and your battles never forgotten.

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## Abbreviations

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	CEDAW
Female Genital Mutilation	FGM
Gender-Based Violence	GBV
High Council of Women's Affairs	HCWA
Honour-Based Violence	HBV
Islamic State	IS
Kurdistan Regional Government	KRG
Kurdistan Region of Iraq	KRI
Women, Peace and Security Agenda	WPS

# 1. Introduction

The widespread phenomenon of gender-based violence (GBV) is damaging in many ways; socially, economically, and politically. Nonetheless, it affects the daily lives of hundreds of millions of people worldwide and restrains them from living the lives they are entitled to by international law. Although progress has been made within this field, there is still much work left to do both on the community level but also on the political level. According to the World Health Organization (2021), approximately one in three, or 30 %, of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner abuse or non-partner sexual violence at some point in their lives.

Achieving gender equality has become an international task and is subject to goal no. 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2022). Scholars within the field of international relations have for many decades studied why states and nations commit to international norms, such as the above-mentioned goal, and find ways to adopt them into their domestic politics. State behaviour and their obedience to international norms is a fascinating phenomenon, not least in our increasingly globalised world. Another phenomenon, one that is often left out of the equation, is the behaviour of de facto states and how they work with international standards. Although de facto states can face the same problems as sovereign states, their struggles are often included in those of their parent states, in spite of different conditions in some cases.

Knowledge of the dynamics of combatting GBV in a de facto state to achieve gender equality can help increase our understanding of the aspiring states and how they relate to international standards. Keeping these factors in mind, this study will focus on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which performs better than its parent state in terms of gender equality, but still faces challenges according to the statistics. By conducting a qualitative study through interviews with professionals from domestic NGOs in the KRI, the aim is to gain more knowledge on opportunities and challenges in a de facto state when striving towards gender equality and essentially add to the literature on the aspiring states.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 Gender equality and honour-based violence in the KRI

The KRI is considered to perform better than other regions in Iraq regarding areas concerning human development, such as civil freedoms and gender equality (Anti Corruption Research Centre, 2015). The difference in performances between the two does however not equate with the KRI being flawless. Women's rights and gender equality stand as a challenge to the KRI, although the political parties label themselves as women-friendly and supportive of gender equality in general. In 2003, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had 20 ministers in charge of different responsibilities, of which two were women. In 2013, the number of female ministers was one out of 21, and three out of 25 in 2021 (Ranharter, 2013: 93 & Kurdistan Regional Government, 2021). These numbers show that even if the political parties seek to promote gender equality, it has not been reflected in the different governments throughout the years.

Kurdish women have historically not only suffered from war and conflicts but also from emotional, physical and sexual abuse posed by men. Moreover, there exists a strong patriarchal system in the KRI and Iraq as a whole that hinders women from living independent lives because they are not provided with enough economic and social protection and support. Women and girls in the Kurdish region hold significantly higher risks than men regarding exposure to deprivation of liberties, gender-based violence, domestic violence and forced marriages (Ranharter, 2013: 59, 64-65).

After 1991, there was an increase in the number of honour killings within families in the KRI due to two reasons: the reinforcement of old tribal and religious rules, and more public acknowledgement because of raised awareness. Following a civil war both within the Kurdish region and against Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, many Kurdish women were suspected of having non-marital sexual relations with Arab men and were killed by their family members. Honour-based violence (HBV) and killings stand to this day as a problem in the KRI despite stricter laws and measures. Activists working to combat the issue have complained that there are few prosecutions and consequences for those who choose to kill female relatives and family members (Ranharter, 2013: 66 & 94).

There are different types of GBV and HBV in the KRI, each type affecting women and girls in its way. Among these are the following:

- Honour-protecting murders: Cases where murder is used as a means to “restore” a family’s honour, which has been degraded due to the actions of a female family member. In terms of physical violence, this is the most violent form of assault against women.
- Suicide: Many individuals view suicide as a way to get out of complicated situations. Due to pressure from society and social conditions, many women feel they have no choice but to commit suicide, which has led to a high suicidal rate in the KRI.
- Burning: Both burning imposed by others and burning as a form of self-harm or suicide are common in the KRI.
- Female genital mutilation (FGM): Although this is a decreasing social phenomenon, FGM is still practised in certain areas within the KRI.
- Forced marriage: Marrying off young girls, oftentimes under the age of 15, is a commonly occurring practice in the KRI.
- Sexual assault: Sexual assault is practised both in the workforce and in political conflicts, affecting women and girls of different ages (KRG High Council of Women Affairs, 2017).

### 1.2.2 Combating gender- and honour-based violence in the KRI

In 2011, the KRG passed the Act of Combating Domestic Violence, which is legislation targeting both practitioners and victims of domestic violence. The act defines domestic violence as violence “[...] based on gender within family relationships or blood [...], which may harm an individual physically, sexually and psychologically and deprive his/her freedom and liberties” (Kurdistan Region Law to Combat Domestic Violence, 2011)

One year later, the Supreme Council for Women Affairs - now called the High Council of Women Affairs - adopted a five-year plan intended to combat discrimination between men and women in the KRI and narrow down the obstacles that hinder women from actively participating in society. In doing so, the Supreme Council for Women’s Affairs cooperated with a large number of civil society organisations; NGOs, media specialists, activists and governmental institutions. Pakhshan Zangana, the former president of the Supreme Council for Women’s Affairs, names the issue of gender inequality in the KRG as “[...] a serious



problem and issue of society” and believes that the responsibility of implementing strategies to combat the issue “[.] falls upon the shoulders of all the governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as all the humanitarian and liberal-minded individuals" (KRG Supreme Council for Women Affairs, 2012).

The resources for the National Strategy to Confront Violence against Women in Kurdistan were many, including national and international frameworks but also a collaboration framework between the government and the UN. Thus, both the Iraqi Constitution, the CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights laid the basis for the strategy. Several studies, reviews of documents, seminars, meetings and workshops were made before the formation of the strategy, which at last came together with the help of joint methodology and consultancy from the involved parties. In order for a strategy like this to have successful results, it is believed that the government must have the willingness to combat violence against women; that the efforts must have support in the legislation; that women hold policy-making positions, and that civil society organisations as well as international organisations are active and have the commitment to cooperate with the government. On the other hand, societal gender norms and views on women pose an obstacle to such a successful strategy. Moreover, a lack of knowledge within the government and judicial system regarding combating violence against women, a high percentage of illiteracy among women, and a lack of cooperation between the relevant actors, are also considered obstacles, among others (KRG Supreme Council for Women Affairs, 2012).

Although the National Strategy to Confront Violence Against Women was set for five years and was intended to end in 2016, the initial plan was prolonged in 2017. This time, it is a ten-year plan that will be finalised in 2027. Much similar to the original strategy, the aim is to ensure a legal ground for the reduction of discrimination against women, create a societal consciousness about violence against women, protect women from violence, and provide services for survivors of violence (KRG High Council of Women Affairs, 2017).

In its efforts to combat GBV and HBV, the KRG has taken different measures. In April 2022, for instance, the government signed a memorandum together with the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA). The memorandum will enable both parties involved to raise awareness on the issue and engage the youth population in this process, as they will conduct joint advocacy campaigns (Rudaw, 2022). Moreover, in December 2021, the KRG launched

the SafeYou app in cooperation with the UNFPA, seeking to prevent women from falling victim to domestic violence, GBV and HBV. The app, which is free for its users, aims to make it easier for women and girls to report gender-based violence and has previously been launched in Georgia and Armenia with good results. One of its main functions is to send the user's exact location information to a trained security officer and up to three pre-programmed emergency contacts selected by the user (Moussa, 2021).

### 1.3 Research aim and questions

This thesis aims to examine what indicators of cooperation, conflict, comparative advantages and social impact there are in the partnership between de facto states and domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has been chosen as an example of a de facto state and will be the subject of this case study. Furthermore, the aim is to examine how international agreements are used in this setting and which effects the de facto statehood is perceived to have on the work of combatting GBV and HBV in the KRI. The results will be discussed based on a theoretical framework of different concepts regarding NGO-government partnership, comparative advantages and international norms.

The overarching question that I seek to answer is the following:

- *How do de facto states and domestic NGOs cooperate and use international agreements on gender equality to combat gender- and honour-based violence?*

In doing so, the following sub-questions have been developed:

- *Which indicators of cooperation and conflict are there in the partnership between the KRG and domestic NGOs striving for gender equality?*
- *Does the KRG and the domestic NGOs have any comparative advantages when cooperating?*
- *Is the partnership between the KRG and the domestic NGOs enabling greater social impact?*
- *How is de facto statehood perceived to affect the work of domestic NGOs when combatting gender- and honour-based violence in the KRI?*

## 1.4 Disposition

The introductory chapter gives a brief understanding of the subject and disposition of the thesis that consists of seven different chapters. After the introductory chapter, which also contains a description of the research aim and questions, follows the second chapter with previous research on the selected subject along with the research gap. Chapter three describes the theoretical framework that will later form the basis for the analysis. In chapter four, the methodological design is described together with the material and chosen case. The fifth chapter presents and analyses the empirical data. Chapter six contains a discussion of the subject and lastly, chapter seven concludes the thesis and gives examples of avenues for future exploration.

## 2. Previous research

The findings from previous studies within the field of gender equality, external actors and de facto states will be described in the following sections. Furthermore, previous research on the chosen case will also be described.

### 2.1 Gender equality

While certain normative principles remain unchanged, others develop towards institutionalisation and are applied on a global level. This is the case of what is commonly known as “international norms”, which are different ideas concerning fundamental values turned into policies, treaties, and other binding regulations. Through this institutionalisation, international norms influence domestic politics and play an important role in understanding state behaviour (Krook & True, 2012).

Gender equality is today viewed as a global norm, as it has gone through the process of institutionalisation by international organisations and nation-states. One of the most important actors regarding the globalisation of gender equality is the United Nations. Although the spread of gender equality is closely associated with the UN, it is also important to remark that women have been organising themselves all across the world to advocate for their rights and promote equality long before the UN was established. Nonetheless, the UN charter has since its formation included references to women’s rights and gender equality, however, the organisation did not have a clear framework for how to work with these issues until 1946 when the UN Sub-Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was created. The organisation’s work with gender equality has gone through many stages and developed through the decades. In 1967, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was produced and published by the initiative of the CSW. Furthermore, the CSW initiated the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well, which was more legally binding than the former declaration. As the name suggests, the convention seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in every aspect, but it also seeks to achieve global gender equality and puts the responsibility on the member states to complete the assignment (Zwingel, 2019). Thus, gender equality and the elimination of injustices against women and girls is a global task that requires changes in domestic politics and international cooperation.

## 2.2 De facto states and international norms

### 2.2.1 Obeying international laws and norms

One question challenging scholars within the field of international relations is state behaviour and why nations tend to obey or disobey international laws and regulations. Evidently, states and nations must feel that there is something in it for them to follow global norms and adopt them into their national legislations. Harold Hongju Koh (1997) argues that there are differences in state obedience due to moral, legal and normative reasons. When a state adopts an international norm into its domestic legislation, it becomes more prone to obey that norm as it has now become an internal obligation according to its jurisdiction. Hence, by integrating international law into their internal affairs and thus legitimising it, states are more likely to follow that law. This "transnational legal process" (Koh, 1997) can help create a normative dynamic and eventually lead to changes in both national interests as well as identities.

### 2.2.2 The normalisation of de facto states

One factor distinguishing de facto states from de jure states is the lack of international legitimacy. Although de facto states can build and maintain relations with established and sovereign states and seek to enjoy full sovereignty themselves, the unsuccessful attempts to achieve recognition led to a perception held by the international society that de facto states are illegitimate. However, in the process of normalising de facto states, international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have had significant roles to the detriment of the de facto states. This neglect has led to a sense of frustration among the de facto states, all while it has also contributed to the continuation of their existence. While some may argue that the international community has not only had an indecisive approach but also an inconsistent one regarding resolving de facto state conflicts, others argue for a shift away from international recognition. The latter-mentioned argument is one that Dov Lynch has developed and rests on an acceptance of de facto states, which does not necessarily have to be equated with recognition. Lynch states that the efforts made thus far by the international community are contradicting and maintaining the status quo, and no efforts have been made to guide de facto states in how to establish themselves according to international law (Berg & Toomla, 2009).

### 2.2.3 External actors and de facto states

De facto states have usually gained their status as aspiring states following war or state collapse in their regions. Examples of previous de facto states are for instance Chechnya which belonged to Russia, Republika Srpska which belonged to Croatia, and Eritrea which belonged to Ethiopia. Other examples, which are still in de facto statehood, are Nagorno Karabakh under the rule of Azerbaijan and Somaliland under the rule of Somalia. Although they lack full international recognition, several de facto states have been able to run effective institutions, and others have even managed to introduce democratic reforms. Achieving this without external recognition has led to the arguments made by some de facto states that neither effective statehood nor sovereignty are dependent on recognition from the international community, because they have managed to show state behaviour without it. Caspersen (2009) highlights that this argument does not acknowledge the crucial role of external support and actors. Agreeing with previous scholars, she states that it is "impossible to understand the creation and survival of de facto states without reference to external actors, and the entities are, more often than not, dependent on support from a patron state." (Caspersen, *ibid.*). This relationship creates a notion where the de facto states are viewed as "puppets of external actors", but Caspersen (*ibid.*) argues that it is more complex than merely a puppet-patron dynamic.

To gain external, or international, recognition and preserve their limited independence, de facto states usually adopt a dual strategy where they receive support from an external actor and highlight their successful democratic institution-building. According to Caspersen (2009), the creation of institutions with democratic elements in the hope of gaining recognition is a strategy that more or less requires external support, meaning de facto states cannot have one without the other. Considering that most de facto states stem from war-torn situations, they are usually in a reality that is far from being secure and peaceful. Having most of their infrastructure, land, and economy destroyed, they have an urgent need for resources to rebuild everything. However, apart from emergency aid, not many resources are allocated to the de facto states since they are not attractive targets for external actors (Caspersen, 2009).

#### 2.2.4 Gender inequality used as an international norm in the KRG

In 2017, researcher Zeynep N. Kaya conducted the working paper “Gender Equality and the Quest for Statehood in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq” where the KRG’s approach to CEDAW and other international agendas regarding women’s rights was studied. This was done by analysing legal texts and policies, interviewing representatives from NGOs and the government itself, and looking into statistics.

The results showed that the KRG has implemented more laws and regulations related to gender equality compared to the Iraqi central government. For instance, there are more gender quotas at the parliamentary, legislative, provincial and governorate levels in the KRG, which in turn has led to higher numbers of female representation in the Kurdish parliament. Furthermore, it has also led to more legislation aligned with international norms concerning women’s rights (Kaya, 2017).

Kaya (2017) describes how local women’s organisations in Iraq are putting pressure on the government to update their laws based on the international treaties and resolutions the state has ratified. Additionally, international actors are also pressuring the government to reform its institutions and legislation. The KRG, however, has established several institutions aimed to work with women’s rights and to help make the policies more gender-mainstreamed. The High Council of Women’s Affairs was specifically established for this purpose, and the three Kurdish governorates in the Region have each their own domestic violence courts on the initiative of the government. Nonetheless, the judicial instances are not problem-free, since many male judges can tend to overlook the laws and regulations that seek to bring gender equality. Although honour-killing is legally viewed as any other type of murder in the KRI, this form of violation is continued at an increasing pace, according to women’s organisations (Kaya, 2017).

Moreover, Kaya (2017) finds that many of the new local NGOs in the Kurdish Region are funded and supported by multilateral organisations and states, which has made them less dependent on the government at least from an economic point of view. A high number of the local NGOs working with women’s issues claim they put the UN and the government in the same category and complain that the government only uses UN funding to support organisations that are not against its policies. On the other hand, UN agents and international

organisations find it easier to work in the KRI than in other parts of Iraq, as the Kurdish Region is considered to be safer and the government more receptive.

In conclusion, Kaya (2017) states that the KRG has implemented the principles of CEDAW and the WPS to a larger extent than what can be said for Iraq. She further explains this as a part of the KRG's strategy to gain credibility in the eyes of the international community, in order to eventually become fully independent from its parent state. The KRG's international commitment has thus far led to an increase in its autonomy from the central government, attracted international actors, and fed into the notion that external connections are needed for the Region to become independent.

Another study, conducted by Yaniv Voller (2014) explores the events and the activism that caused the KRG to take action against different forms of violations against women in the Region, such as honour killings and FGM. More specifically, Voller (ibid) examines what role the Region's transnational women's rights networks have played in this process.

According to Voller (2014), the shift in the KRG's attitude towards gendered violence and the policies the government has implemented can be explained through the women's rights networks' reliance on international "norms, ideas and practices" (ibid.). As these ideas are closely associated with statehood and sovereignty, the networks have been able to use them as a bargaining chip against the KRG when advocating for new policies. Voller (ibid.) calls this a "well-calculated strategy" since it focuses on the KRG's aspirations and interests. He further explains the success of their efforts as caused by two reasons; competence within the women's rights networks, and their transnational behaviour and access to resources such as the media.

To summarise, the relationship between the KRG and the women's rights networks is described by Voller (2014) as something that rests on a mutual understanding of the matter that the KRG seeks external recognition. Thus, the networks put pressure on the KRG with the support of international ideas and norms, and the KRG in turn implements policies targeting GBV and HBV.



## 2.3 Research gap

Previous literature suggests that the KRG performs better than Iraq regarding gender equality, an achievement accomplished through policy implementations and a stronger approach to international standards. By enforcing the principles of international conventions such as CEDAW and the WPS Agenda, the KRG has managed to gain a credible status in the eyes of the international community, as well as increased autonomy and more external support. The establishment of the High Council of Women's Affairs and the domestic violence courts in the governorates show that the enforcement of the principles from international conventions has also led to the establishment of new institutions working to promote gender equality and combat gender-related issues.

Furthermore, previous research also suggests that the relationship between the KRG and the NGOs operating in the Region is dependent on international norms and standards. The NGOs use the norms set by the international community to put further pressure on the KRG to implement laws and regulations linked to gender-related issues, as these norms are associated with statehood and sovereignty - something the KRG strives towards. This is something that both Kaya (2017) and Voller (2014) explain in their studies.

Voller (2014) mainly examines the history and development of the KRG's GBV-related attitude and policies, while also deep-diving into the transnational behaviour of the women's rights networks. This study will differ by offering a broader perspective of the relationship and cooperation between the two actors, one that is partly but not solely focused on the transnational aspect. Moreover, as nearly a decade has passed since the publication of Voller's article, this study will be able to detect and take into account more up-to-date events and influencing factors. The study can further increase our understanding of de facto states and, more specifically, of their approach to gender equality as an international norm and inform us about how much they are willing to cooperate with domestic NGOs to work against a specific problem. It intends to also contribute to the general literature on de facto states and their behaviours, by using theories concerning sovereign states and examining if they are applicable to aspiring states as well. Lastly, the study aims to fill a research gap on which effects parent states have on the work of combatting GBV and HBV in a de facto state.

### 3. Theoretical framework

The following section will initially explain the partnership between the NGOs and the government, providing an understanding of the interdependence between the actors when seeking to achieve societal impact. Further on, the section presents more research on the concepts of cooperation and conflict regarding NGO-government relationships. Lastly, the section includes an operationalisation of the theory.

#### 3.1 NGO-government interdependence

Partnerships have increasingly been considered valuable when delivering social services to the public. This is a perception that rests on the notion of partnerships being built on comparative advantages and complementary skills, which in turn will increase the value of the different partners' contributions. Governments use the term 'partnership' when describing the relationship they have with the civil society organisations within that sector to label the cooperation between government agencies and NGOs (Owen, 2000). Stroup (2019: 37) argues that states' characteristics affect the relationship it has with NGOs. Different factors such as development level, type of regime and domestic structures can all have an impact on the dynamics. While NGOs in developed countries can mainly focus on advocating for i.e poverty reduction, their equivalents in developing countries are delivering services to communities, promoting social and/or political change, and helping with the government's capacity-building.

Many scholars agree with the notion that social development cannot be achieved if a government acts single-handedly. Governments that seek to achieve change on a national level are often not capable enough to do this on their own, especially in low-income countries. Even though public policies are implemented to target specific groups and explain what needs to be done, the outcome of these policies is not as effective as they were planned to be. To prevent this from happening, governments can use the help of NGOs to test and develop different programmes on smaller scales. If the programmes are proven to be effective in practice, a partnership between the government and the NGOs can be initiated if they both share common objectives (Pick, Givaudan & Reich, 2008).

One difficulty for NGOs to implement these programmes is that they might not have the ability to mobilise their resources to turn local projects into broader, national projects. Thus, their efforts remain on the local level and lack impact on the national level. However, if succeeded, these efforts can be valuable and beneficial for the community in which they are operating. A larger social impact can then be achieved if the NGOs choose to cooperate with official national agencies, and they can both benefit from the partnership they engage in (Pick, Givaudan & Reich, 2008).

NGO-government interactions are described in the literature through a number of different concepts and traits. However, much like Bahçecik and Turhan (2022: 981) have explained, many of the concepts either tend to make the analysis over-complicated or are too case-specific. It has therefore been decided to limit the discussion of NGO-government interactions in the study to include *cooperation* and *conflict*, which are two recurring concepts that stand in clear contrast to each other.

Additionally, the concept of social impact will also be discussed, as it relates to the work the domestic NGOs in the chosen case perform.

### 3.1.1 Cooperation

While there are different approaches in academia about whether the terms *cooperation* and *collaboration* should be used synonymously, a distinction between the two will not be made in this study as their differences are close to non-existent. Moreover, the few characteristics that distinguish them from one another, such as symmetrical power relationship, will not be examined in this study (Najam, 2000: 384; Coston, 1998: 362).

When there exists a shared commitment to goals and consensus on how to reach those goals, NGO-government relationship can be categorised as cooperative (Stroup, 2019: 34).

Cooperative behaviour is much less likely to occur if either party consider each other's goals and methods to not be aligned with those of their own (Najam, 2000: 385). In cases where governments do not comply with the normative or legal principles they have committed themselves to, the NGOs can cooperate with them to affect their position and make them more compatible with the principles (Stroup, 2019: 34).

During the early 2000's in Bangladesh, for instance, the government initiated a partnership with domestic NGOs to deliver health care services mainly targeting the most vulnerable population groups. This time, their specific aim was to develop tuberculosis control in the

country, and the project was preceded by other successful and effective instances of NGO-government cooperation concerning health care. These collaborations have succeeded as the government and the NGOs have “complementary roles” when working towards national health goals (Zafar Ullah et al., 2006).

There are several different reasons why governments perceive NGOs as beneficial partners in civil society. One of these reasons is according to Owen (2000) strictly economical; NGOs are in many cases effective in this matter because they tend to have low administrative costs and an extensive network of volunteer workers. Another reason is that individuals with a strong sense of commitment and engagement are usually attracted to NGOs working with causes they are passionate about, which is advantageous for the government. These reasons are, among other things, what leads to the organisations’ comparative advantage vis-a-vis the government. On the other hand, the governments’ comparative advantages are more resource- and policy-based. The resources they can provide are valuable for the targeted groups, and the policies they implement are expected to be favourable for those it concerns. Thus, governments and NGOs are engaged in a relationship where they have complementary roles; one provides resources, policies and guidelines, but does not have the capacity or the channels to perform the on-ground work that the other is able to execute. Owen (2000) uses the case of immigration and settlement to exemplify the relationship and dynamics between governments and NGOs. Throughout history, the latter mentioned has shown a good ability to reach out to and interact with different groups and targets in need of help within society. Oftentimes, governments have trouble reaching out to these groups because of lacking channels. Here, NGOs are perceived as intermediaries between the government and the targeted groups, for instance, immigrants and refugees that are outside of society and have limited access to public services.

### 3.1.2 Conflict

The NGO-government relationship can be characterised as a conflictual one if the actors have both different goals and ideas. Nonetheless, conflict is also likely to occur when governments behave in ways that are not compatible with the legal or normative principles to which they have committed themselves. In this situation, the NGOs can be keen to hold the government accountable (Stroup, 2019: 34). Sometimes also described as “confrontation”, the characteristics of both *conflict* and *confrontation* are identical (Stroup, 2019:34; Najam, 2000:

385). A conflictual relationship is oftentimes a matter of different or opposing values, which puts the actors in greater opposition to each other (Johnson, 2016: 745).

In the literature, many of the documented conflicts between NGOs and governments concern the area of human rights, and usually involve NGOs working with advocacy (Stroup, 2017:34). An example of this is when the British organisation Oxfam and other international NGOs accused a wide range of Western states of remaining neutral instead of intervening to stop a genocide in Central Africa (Hocking & Cooper, 2000: 364).

Another instance of conflict between NGOs and states is the one exemplified by Bahçecik and Turhan (2022). Focusing on humanitarian NGOs operating in Turkey, the relationship between the two actors is discussed using Stroup's (2017) definitions of conflict, cooperation, co-optation and competition. The findings showed that conflict was specifically present with regard to the interactions between the organisation İHH and the Turkish government. In 2010, the İHH initiated an action to send a flotilla with humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, breaching the blockade set by the Israeli government. The action escalated the already intense Turkish-Israeli relationship, as it led to the death of 10 civilians on board of the flotilla, caused by Israeli forces. When Turkey and Israel agreed to reconcile six years later, it was not appreciated by the İHH. The İHH and the Turkish government, who previously had good ties that rested on mutual ideological beliefs and a shared understanding of how different issues should be dealt with, were now in a conflictual relationship. Essentially, the changed relationship was a matter of separated interests; Turkey's need to maintain commercial relations with Israel, and the İHH's commitment towards their ideological beliefs (Bahçecik and Turhan, 2022: 986).

## 3.2 Operationalisation

The following themes will be utilised throughout the analysis of the data to more easily identify various indicators of relevant concepts discussed both in previous research and in the theoretical framework. By operationalising different concepts into something measurable and abstract, one can "provide a measure of a concept". This can be executed through interview questions, which is what I aimed to do in the interview guides (Bryman, 2004: 66). The traits of the concepts are specified by using other, more well-known theoretical approaches, which is where the theoretical framework is used for support (Esaiasson et al., 2017: 22).

### 3.2.1 Cooperation, partnership and comparative advantages

The purpose of this theme is to explore the different ways and dynamics of the interactions between the domestic NGOs and the KRG. In doing so, *cooperation* and *conflict*, as described in sub-chapters 3.1.1 and 3.1.2, will be used as identifiers. Cooperation refers to a shared commitment to goals without disagreements on how to reach them. On the contrary, conflict refers to both different goals and different ideas among the actors.

Additionally, comparative advantages as described in chapter 3.1 will also be used as an identifier. As Kaya (2017) and Voller (2014) have found, women's rights NGOs in the KRI use the principles of international norms and conventions to put pressure on the government to implement certain policies. While the KRG can implement these policies and make a broader impact that spreads across the Region, the women's rights NGOs have the leverage of competence and are more rooted in international standards. Thus, one can draw the conclusion that these traits pose comparative advantages on both sides, which makes cooperation between the two of them beneficial, similar to what Owen (2000) stated regarding complementary roles. Hence, this theme will also explore the conditions upon which the cooperation is based, in order to find out what specific traits, i.e. comparative advantages, the actors possess in addition to those Kaya (2017) and Voller (2014) have already found.

### 3.2.2 Social impact

For a programme or an effort to have a larger influence, a wide range of resources is required. Although both the KRG and the NGOs can have the financial means, research from other case studies shows that governments need NGOs to develop programmes, and NGOs need governments to mobilise their resources. Hence, cooperating with national agencies can be more fruitful for NGOs (Pick, Givaudan & Reich, 2008). Here, the aim is to find more knowledge on how the NGO-government cooperation in the KRI is set out to achieve social and cultural change or impact. Do the NGOs develop programmes on the initiative of the KRG, or does their cooperation intend to achieve social impact through other means than developing programmes?

### 3.2.3 External actors and international norms

Based on previous research, it is clear that the KRG's relationship with local and regional NGOs working on women's issues is to some extent based on the mutual understanding that the KRG seeks recognition from external actors. As Kaya (2017) and Voller (2014) have found, women's rights NGOs in the KRI use the principles of international norms and conventions to put pressure on the government to implement certain policies. This theme focuses on the approach the domestic NGOs have to international norms and conventions, such as CEDAW, and how they interact with external actors such as international organisations. While there already exists research on this topic, the purpose is to explore if there are other factors to the topic that previous research does not touch upon.

### 3.2.4 De facto statehood

Here, the interviewees go from being informants to becoming respondents. This is because they will get the opportunity to share their thoughts and perceptions of whether the KRI's de facto statehood affects the work against GBV and HBV in the region - in which the domestic NGOs play a key role. The aim of this theme is to gain insights into a rather unexplored field.

Theme	Identification
Cooperation, partnership and comparative advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shared strategies and goals (cooperation)</li> <li>- Different goals and ideas (conflict)</li> <li>- Types of services delivered</li> <li>- Different capacities of the KRG and the domestic NGOs</li> <li>- The KRG's implementation of regional GBV-related policies</li> <li>- The actors' access to different resources</li> </ul>
Impact expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ways of achieving social and cultural change or impact through NGO-government cooperation</li> </ul>

<p>External actors and international norms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The domestic NGOs' approach to international conventions in their work against GBV/HBV</li> <li>- The role international organisations play in (1) the domestic NGOs' work, (2) the NGOs' relationship with the government</li> </ul>
<p>De facto statehood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Perceptions of whether de facto statehood has any effects on the work against GBV/HBV in the KRI</li> </ul>

Table 1: Analytical scheme



## 4. Method

In the following section, the method of the study is discussed in more detail. The section is divided into five parts: choice of method, delimitations, selection of participants, considerations, validity and reliability, and case selection. These parts include essential aspects of the study's method and approach.

### 4.1 Choice of method

John Gerring (2007: 24) describes case studies as "[...] an intensive study of a single case with an aim to generalise across a larger set of cases.", which is precisely where the focus of this study lies, using a qualitative and exploratory method.

The research question of the study will be answered by executing informant interviews with representatives of NGOs in the KRI working with issues related to gender equality. To fulfil the research aim, it is important to gain a deep understanding of the subject, which can be achieved through this choice of methodological design by analysing NGO representatives' and employees' experiences in practice.

Using interviews as a method of data collection will make it possible for the researcher to form an idea of how phenomena are interpreted by people, and the interview questions aim to enhance the participant's thoughts and experiences as they can be used as a conversation opener and increase the understanding of the subject (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 1; 52). Considering the study's research questions, interviews are the best data collection method when the goal is to gain knowledge of the participants' experiences regarding the KRG's work against GBV and HBV. The method makes it possible for one to catch different impressions and experiences to a larger extent than if closed-ended questionnaires were to be used, for instance (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 2). The interviews will moreover be semi-structured, allowing space for the informants to reflect and share their experiences. By having both structured and more 'open' questions, I aspire to gain more knowledge on how the KRG's work against GBV and HBV is perceived by the informants and hopefully capture observations a strictly structured interview could not have (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 84).

The results of the study will not be definitive, nor are they meant to be in that manner. The informants cannot speak for every employee within their organisation or institution. However, one can conclude from their responses and find similarities or differences. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that although I will study one single case, the results might have the ability to be applied to other similar cases (Gerring, 2007: 24), as there are not many de facto states. Although they may differ in certain aspects, many of them are in similar situations since they are not considered independent states, or have similar aspirations in seeking sovereignty from their parent states. (Caspersen, 2009).

Esaiasson et. al. (2017: 116, 231) state that both deductive and inductive approaches are suitable when conducting a study that seeks to develop existing theories, which has been the case for this study. Hence, dual approaches have been used during the writing process, with support from conclusions of previous research as well as discovered patterns and behaviours from the data collection for the analysis.

The interview questionnaire was produced in two languages, Kurdish (sorani-dialect) and English. The questions and content were however identical in both versions of the questionnaire. The purpose of the questions was to allow the researcher to tap into the theoretical framework, and in doing so, different questions generated answers that could fit into the categories under the results section. The questionnaire was divided into three subcategories, in order to extract answers related to the themes in the analytical scheme by asking questions linked to them. For instance, when asking the question “Is your work affected because the KRG is not a recognised sovereign state?”, the informants provided answers that generated data to analyse under the category “de facto statehood, external actors and international norms”. The question “What resources does the government have that are useful for the NGOs?” helped gain data related to the comparative advantages theme, while “Are there any benefits that come from working with the KRG?” could generate answers linked to the theme of cooperation and partnership. Furthermore, in some instances, questions asked from the “background” category in the questionnaire generated data that could also fit under different themes. When asking the question “What measures have the organisation you work for taken in order to combat gender- and honour-based violence?”, the informants could touch upon aspects of their work that related to the themes in the analytical scheme. Here, it was extra important to read the indicators for each theme and see if the answers matched any identification of the themes.

## 4.2 Delimitations

Many international norms can be used as an example to investigate how de facto states cooperate with NGOs. In this study, an active choice to only use gender equality as an example of international norms has been made. Gender equality has increasingly gained attention from states and international actors and it has developed into a goal which many states, including de facto states, strive for. Furthermore, it is something many states, institutions, and organisations also struggle with, as discrimination against women is a worldwide issue requiring many solutions and approaches up to this date. Considering gender equality as a broad concept with many different elements, this study will only focus on the aspect of GBV and HBV and thus eliminate all of the information operating outside this framework. The choice of limitations is not only taken with consideration to the case itself but also due to the feasibility of the study and with regards to what is achievable (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 30).

## 4.3 Selection of participants

The informants for the interviews have been approached through chain referral, also known as snowball sampling (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 38). First, I interviewed a representative for a local organisation operating in the KRI, which I found online. The organisation works with issues related to gender equality and strives to help eliminate the struggles of women, youths, and the LGBT+ community in the region. From there, I ended the interview by asking the informant if he or she can suggest the names of potential participants for the study, preferably colleagues from other organisations. Since this was a request and not a demand, there was a risk that the informant might not have been prone to assist me in this matter, which was a possibility I was aware of (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015: 38). However, the informants were more than willing to assist me in finding additional participants for the study, and provided both telephone numbers and e-mail addresses to potential participants. The remaining informants were all approached through phone messages, as I quickly learned that e-mails were not the most effective way of approach.

The requirements for the participants were that they had to be professionals working with GBV and/or HBV-related matters within non-governmental or civil society organisations in the KRI, and be able to participate in a digital interview either in English or Kurdish. All of the informants were women, although there were no gender or age-specific requirements.

Four of them were directors and/or co-founders of women’s organisations, and three of them had advisory roles within different organisations. Two of the advisors worked for development organisations that did not solely focus on women’s issues, and the rest of the informants were directors or advisors for organisations that were exclusively working to promote gender equality and combat GBV and HBV. Five of the interviews were conducted in Kurdish, and two were conducted in English at the request of the informants.

Moreover, the informants could choose between a phone interview and an online interview. Due to their hectic schedules, as described by them, six informants chose to be interviewed through phone calls, including one video call, and one preferred to be interviewed using video on Skype.

<b>Informant alias</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Years of professional experience</b>	<b>Province</b>
Ranya	Director and founder of a women’s rights organisation	F	Less than 15 years	Erbil
Banaz	Director and co-founder of a women’s rights organisation	F	Less than 15 years	Erbil
Venos	Protection Technical Advisor in GBV for a development organisation	F	Less than 10 years	Suleymaniyyah
Helin	GBV advisor for a women’s rights organisation	F	Less than 5 years	Erbil
Kwestan	Co-founder of a women’s rights organisation	F	Less than 20 years	Suleymaniyyah
Nishtiman	GBV advisor for a development organisation	F	Less than 10 years	Erbil
Sara	Director of a women’s rights organisation	F	Less than 15 years	Erbil

Table 2: Overview of participants

## 4.4 Considerations, validity and reliability

To present the results of the study as trustworthy and unbiased as possible, it is important to use authentic sources. When performing informant interviews, the participants are viewed as sources because they represent the organisation they work for. Therefore, the collected information has been critically assessed under source-critical rules, since this will help increase the credibility of the study (Esaiasson et al., 2017: 288). As a researcher, it was also important to hold a critical view and prepare for ethical challenges one might face during the study (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). In practice, this required me to think of my role as a researcher, who the study will benefit and if it is worth the while.

Since I was to conduct an interview study, it was important to constantly consider if I would put the participants at risk as well (Roth & Von Unger, 2018). Both GBV and HBV can be viewed as sensitive subjects, not least in KRI and Iraq, which required careful consideration on my part. Although the informants were given the choice of remaining non-anonymous, and five out of seven gave me their consent to use their real names in the study, it has retroactively become a decision of mine to not disclose their identities or the organisations they represent. The informants have been asked for consent to publish their responses and use them for research purposes and were also allowed to interrupt the interview or skip questions they were not comfortable with answering after the interview had commenced. After transcribing the interviews, the audio files were erased from the recording device to not preserve unnecessary personal data and minimise any risks regarding the audio files being spread to unauthorised persons.

Conducting a majority of the interviews in Kurdish required me to use my mother tongue, which might pose challenges in terms of losses in translation and difficulties in formulating identical interview questions in both English and Kurdish. To avoid this as much as possible, I made sure to use dictionaries when translating words that were important to the study, such as “international norms”. Additionally, I fact-checked the translation with two other native Kurdish speakers. During the interviews, it could occur that the informants used Arabic loanwords no matter if the interview was conducted in Kurdish or English. In these few instances, I asked for further clarification from the informants and ensured with them that my interpretation of their explanation was correct.

It is also worth mentioning that the initial aim of the study was to compare the NGO representatives’ practical experiences with the ones of civil servants working with

gender-related issues in the KRI. Several attempts were made during the course of the study to contact government officials and representatives for an interview, without any further results. The conducted interviews have therefore only been executed with different NGO representatives and employees, which is an aspect one should bear in mind when drawing conclusions from the results. As the aim of the study is to explore how the NGO-government cooperation in a de facto state is in practice, rather than exploring how both sides perceive each other, the participating informants could still provide valuable information since they make up one-half of the partnership. Although the government officials were expected to provide more nuance to the results, there was also a risk of receiving over-biased information from them as anything they would say could affect the image of the government and the KRI as an aspiring state.

In terms of bias, there was also a risk that the informants would lean to one side more than the other. The NGOs receive their funding either from the government, international partners, or both, which leads to higher incentives of describing their relationship with the government or international actors in a favourable way. Although it is nearly impossible to fact-check everything the informants mentioned, I have attempted to fact-check as much as possible to hinder the study from consisting of incorrect information. Several examples of cooperation with the government or approaches to international norms could later be fact-checked through online searching. This was done either by reading news articles, official government statements or the NGO's annual reports and strategy outlines. It is also important to keep in mind that due to the anonymity of the informants and the organisations they represented, many details and specifications have been excluded or described in more general terms in the empirical analysis.

Furthermore, obstacles were faced when attempting to reach out to the NGO informants as well. A high number of e-mails were sent to different organisations, with only two responses that later did not lead to any interviews. Later on, the number of responses was higher when reaching out to organisations by phone messages. However, there were still difficulties from the informants' side with finding the right date and time for the interview to take place, and long time spans between their responses. This is the reason why there is a gap of several months between some of the interviews.

The operationalisation of the theoretical framework has not only facilitated the conduct of the study but also helped increase the study's validity and reliability (Bryman, 2004: 66). While it

is worth mentioning that the findings from the study can be used to form a better understanding of other contexts with similar characteristics, i.e. other de facto states, wider generalisability and external validity has not been prioritised due to the study being case-specific (Bryman, 2004: 383-384).

As previously mentioned, the data collection consisted of responses from a total of seven interviews. The informants that participated in the interviews came from organisations with gender equality and women's rights as their main areas of activity. While two of them represented development organisations that did not exclusively label themselves as women's rights organisations, gender equality was still a large pillar of their work and the informants were solely working with GBV. For the remaining five informants that were founders, directors or advisors for different women's rights organisations, combatting GBV and promoting gender equality in the KRI was their only target. With up to almost 20 years of relevant professional experience, the informants were assessed to be in a good position to express themselves on the matter. Moreover, although this will be discussed more in the empirical analysis, there is an ongoing cooperation and exchange of experiences between several of the organisations in question, as well as other organisations that were not part of the study. This implies that the informants are to some extent aware of the overall situation of other organisations working within the same field. The informants gave different but also similar responses to the questions, and after the seventh interview, it was decided not to make any further attempts to interview additional participants. Since it was not the aim to draw broad conclusions from the results, but rather find indicators that pointed in one direction or the other, it was assessed that the data collected from the seven interviews was enough to answer the research question and fulfil the research aim.

The main reason for having informants instead of respondents was to gain actual knowledge on the matter, excluding their personal opinions and feelings as much as possible. However, when the informants gave responses to how the de-facto statehood has affected their work, the lines between the role of an informant and respondent became more blurry. The part of the empirical analysis that focuses on de facto statehood, external actors and international norms brought forth answers which can be more in character with those of a respondent, as the interviewees spoke of their own experiences and/or assumptions. Although the assumptions arose from actual facts, such as Iraqi laws being superior to Kurdish laws, the interviewees still do not know how their situation would differ if the KRI were to be a

sovereign state, as that has never been an actuality. It has therefore been decided to view the responses related to de facto statehood and sovereignty as those of a respondent and not an informant.

## 4.5 Case selection

### 4.5.1 The Kurdistan Region of Iraq as a de facto state

Following a no-fly zone established in the north of Iraq during the end of the first Gulf War, the KRI held its first free and fair election in 1992 and formed its first official government, the KRG. Not long after, a civil war broke out between the two most dominating political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), with each of them controlling separate parts of the region. More than two thousand were killed in the civil war, which ended in 1998.

When the US-led coalition sought to overthrow Saddam Hussein from power in 2003, they received help from Kurdish forces on site. Ever since, the KRI has maintained semi-independence and is today recognised in the Iraqi constitution as an autonomous part of federal Iraq (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019). On September 25, 2017, the KRI held an independence referendum as a step in the direction of becoming fully independent from Iraq and building a separate nation-state. Although approximately 92 % of the citizens in the Kurdish region voted in favour of a Kurdish state, the referendum was not appreciated by the central government in Baghdad. The Iraqi Supreme Court later ruled the vote unconstitutional under Iraqi law, and several measures with negative impacts on the KRI were taken (BBC News, 2019). Moreover, the referendum did not please the KRI's neighbouring countries as well. Both Turkey and Iran - countries with high numbers of Kurdish populations of their own - expressed clear dissatisfaction with the conduct of the referendum. Turkey and Iran were concerned that the initiative from the Iraqi Kurds to become fully independent from Iraq would spark similar interests within their own Kurdish communities and thus destabilise the whole region. To mark their positions in this question, both countries prepared with Iraqi forces to plan joint exercises (Klain & Hintz, 2017).

The KRI is described as a de facto state by Johannes Jude (2017) and is considered to perform better than its parent state Iraq regarding security and stabilisation. When the civil



war ended in 1998 and the dominating parties initiated cooperation instead, more room for state-building was created as a result. Jude (ibid.) further describes the establishment of the KRG as something that was "derived from external incentives", as it was important to demonstrate unity between the dominating parties to attract support in terms of loans and protection from the outside. With the war against the Islamic State (IS) culminating in 2017, the KRG saw an opportunity to maximise its territory and gain support from the international community. The Region's success in fighting IS caused a shift in the perceptions of its functionality from the outside; it was now seen as a functioning de facto state rather than a fragile one (Palani et al., 2019).

## 5. Results

In the following chapter, I seek to provide and analyse the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. With inspiration from the interview guides and the analytical scheme, the responses have been divided into three categories, all touching upon the thesis' subject and closely linked to the theoretical framework.

The informants will be referred to by the aliases previously given to them in the method chapter.

### 5.1 Cooperation, partnership and comparative advantages

Several instances of cooperation were given by the informants when discussing their interactions with the Kurdish government. In order to end GBV and HBV in the KRI, Kwestan admitted that it requires efforts and cooperation among all actors, as it is not an issue the domestic NGOs can combat by themselves. Her organisation had extensive cooperation with *“the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, with High Council of Women, the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Peshmerga.”* (Kwestan, December 28th, 2022). Banaz mentioned that her organisation was part of a task force created by the Prime Minister and the President of the KRG who called for a reform in KRI's education sector, and their role was to ensure that gender equality was included in the reform process. Ranya emphasised that when her organisation asks for help from the government, they receive it. For instance, if they require data regarding GBV, they can get it easily.

Capacity-building with the KRG and training the government's staff was a recurring part when asking the informants how they cooperated. Sara said that her organisation does *“a lot of training and capacity building of the government staff who are working in institutions that relate to women issues or issues that relate to the gender-based violence, such as the police, security forces, health sector employees, education sector employees”* (Sara, June 14th, 2022). Banaz also mentioned her organisation's work with the ministries, stating that since 2016, they are *“working with the Ministry of Education and support them to form a gender unit within the ministry. And after that, the government made a decision that all ministries should form a gender unit. [...] we are coordinating with them, building capacity of the gender unit*

*members, and also supporting them to develop some policies like PSE policy for Prevention from Sexual Exploitation, and also annual plans for some gender units of some ministries.”* (Banaz, May 21st, 2022). Venos spoke on capacity-building as well, saying that the organisation she works for is *“trying to build the capacity of the government entity with combatting GBV. [...] the government does not have the capacity to build knowledge and skills for their staff[...] so we take the responsibility of creating whole programmes for them in terms of providing assistance and how to respond to such a case”* (Venos, August 18th, 2022)

Based on these examples, one can find that there exists both shared ideas and goals between the two actors which have led to cooperation in terms of capacity building, among other things. The KRG seems rather aware that it does not have the full capacity by itself to implement certain guidelines or ways of working towards gender equality, which is where the NGOs can cooperate with them to increase their capacity and knowledge on certain issues.

When the government and the NGOs have different goals and ideas, one can characterise their relationship as a conflictual one (Stroup, 2019: 34; Najam, 2000: 385). In the data collection, no signs of conflict between the NGOs and the KRG itself could be detected. Nonetheless, there were instances where conflict had occurred with members of the parliament<sup>1</sup> or influential community leaders. All of the mentioned conflictual cases involved politicians with extremist religious and ideological standpoints. Helin said that *“there are a lot of campaigns against us from conservative men, from religious - Muslim religious leaders - so there are a lot of campaigns against us because they think that we are changing the culture of the society.”* (Helin, August 25th, 2022). Furthermore, she explained that in conferences and political meetings, the same leaders appeal to the women’s rights organisations to divert women from following actions which are not compatible with their religion, instead of empowering them to be independent. This indication of other political and influential - but still non-governmental - actors attempting to divert the work of the women’s rights NGOs, is however not to confuse with the concept of conflict as described in the theoretical framework. The reason for this is that the conflict is not with the ruling government itself, but with other stakeholders who are either elected members of Parliament or working with the ruling government, i.e. the KRG, in other contexts. However, much like

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<sup>1</sup> Not to be confused with government officials, such as ministers. In this context, the term *members of parliament* refers to politicians that have been elected to represent the people in the Parliament but are not part of the government’s cabinet or the political parties that make up the government, i.e. the KRG.

the case of Turkey and the İHH (Bahçecik and Turhan, 2022), this conflict is also a matter of separated interests as well as different goals and ideas. What the women's rights organisations in this case believe is best for society, and how they have approached their goals, have not been compatible with the views of their opponents in this case. Thus, they have diverging interests and are in conflict regarding what they believe will benefit society the most.

Owen (2000) viewed NGOs as intermediaries between the government and the targeted groups, as they have easier ways of interacting with different groups in society. In this case, this was confirmed by Kwestan, saying that "*When the organisations were formed, they were formed to be a bridge of communication between the government and the people. The needs of the people are communicated through us to the government*" (Kwestan, December 28th, 2022). This can be viewed as an indicator of the domestic NGOs operating as intermediaries and easing the communication between the government and society.

When asked "*What resources do your organisation have that are useful for the government?*", the informants provided a wide range of examples that had, according to them, been advantageous in the eyes of the KRG; human resources, experience, technical assistance, knowledge of procedures, training, guidelines, research, and lastly, the connection to international actors. These traits can pose as the NGOs' comparative advantages in this case, as they could provide the government with needed resources through these skills. In return, the organisations gain from the government what they cannot achieve on their own. In their responses to the question "*What resources does the government have that are useful for the NGOs?*", the informants admitted that the KRG's resources facilitated and benefited their work. The most prominent government resource was in terms of information sharing, such as data and statistics, but also in terms of personal connections. Similar to the NGO-government cooperation in Bangladesh (Zafar Ullah et al., 2006), the NGO-government in the KRI shows signs of complementary roles as each actor possesses skills that the other can benefit from, or that the other lacks.

"Believe me, here, relationships play a very important role. Perhaps even a bigger role than what you as an organisation do. Personal relations. If you do not have it, it can be difficult to get a hold of what you need, or it might be delayed and take longer than necessary" - Ranya (May 17, 2022)

As per the quote above, having the right connections in the government could speed up and ease rather slow processes according to Ranya. Banaz shared this view, as her organisation also has benefitted from building personal relations with governmental employees, for instance. In one case, talking to a governmental employee at a reception held by an international consulate in Erbil speeded up the process of renewing an administrative registration that had already taken eight months up until the time of the encounter. Furthermore, Banaz was the only informant mentioning how international connections were something her organisation possessed that had proven to be beneficial for the government, stating that she has connected governmental actors with international actors many times.

*“As I mentioned they have the capacity to attract the experts as well to work with them,”* said Venos (August 18th, 2022) when talking about how the NGOs consist of professionals that are dedicated to their work, in line with Owen’s (2000) statement on how individuals with a strong sense of commitment and engagement are attracted to NGOs working with the causes they are passionate about. When asking the informants about their professional and educational background, they had between 3-19 years of work experience within the field of gender equality and had all studied at the university level. Not only can this confirm their capacities and competence, but also their commitment to the work they are performing.

### 5.3 Social impact

Changing social and cultural norms, shifting attitudes and promoting social change were frequently mentioned in the interviews. Helin spoke about how this needs to be done from the roots, starting by changing the curricula in the elementary schools in the KRI and making sure they include gender-related aspects and equal opportunities for boys and girls, men and women. According to her, many organisations have advocated this to the government, but they were not fully satisfied with the results and the efforts made thus far. However, Ranya acknowledged the development during her professional years. She exemplified this by reminiscing upon a period in 2010-2011 when she and her colleagues were subjected to threats and violations from different groups in society for having the word “gender” in their organisation name, and rumours were spread that they were promoting actions that were non-compatible with the Islamic religion. Now, she stated, the word “gender” has become widely accepted and much has changed since 2010. The KRG has integrated a gender perspective in all areas of activity and a majority of the ministries, universities and other

institutions. This development has required a lot of advocacy and education from the NGOs, which led to a regional impact on the initiative of the KRG. As Pick, Givaudan and Reich (2008) claimed, a larger social impact can be achieved when NGOs choose to cooperate with national, in this case regional, agencies.

“If you look at the statistics at the Ministry of Interior about the women, and sometimes boys and men too, who are reporting gender-based violence, it comes from all this advocacy and raising awareness among women about how they should report when facing violence at home or anywhere” - Nishtiman (January 16th, 2023)

Nishtiman was confident that the work of the women’s rights organisations had been fruitful in raising awareness among the people about their rights in terms of reporting GBV to the authorities. Besides providing legal services, psychosocial support, health services and representing victims in the court of law, they also attempt to raise awareness among society through campaigns and advocacy. The advocacy was both on the societal level and also on the governmental level, by having high-level discussions, proposing draft laws and suggesting amendments to articles in the legislation. She specified how changing laws or opening discussions on certain issues could help normalise certain questions that were otherwise taboo to speak about, such as abortion for instance. Although it is the government that has the final say, Banaz said “*we consider it as an achievement of our work and the work of other organisations that are working in the same field*” (Banaz, May 21st 2022), regarding social change. Venos admitted that it “*is not something we can implement easily [..], it’s more about changing the norms [..], we’re trying to change the existent laws as well as trying from our side to advocate people to change by raising their awareness*” (Venos, August 18th, 2022), explaining how it is a slow but steady process.

This evidence from above confirms Pick, Givaudan and Reich’s (2008) conclusion on impact expansion. However, there is a small difference here between what the literature says and the facts on the ground in the KRI. In Pick, Givaudan and Reich (2008), one can read that “*governments can use the help of NGOs to test and develop different programmes on smaller scales*” (ibid., 2008). In this case, no informant mentioned specific small-scale programmes on the initiative of the government. Rather, there seemed to exist a mutual understanding between the two that in order to achieve a broader impact in changing mindsets and norms, they were in need of each other. The organisations needed the KRG to implement laws and regulations, and the KRG needed the organisations in order to change the mindsets of the

people. Expanding the social impact and changing the norms in the KRI had, according to the informants, been achieved through a wide range of measures; providing service and assistance to communities, different types of advocacy, amending laws, and high-level discussions to normalise certain topics.

The informants highlighted the importance of cooperating with like-minded organisations to combat GBV and HBV with a more vital force. According to Sara, there was a sense of women's grassroots organisations being the only real actors in preventing GBV and HBV as their sole purpose is to serve this cause. That is why in 2019, many women's organisations came together and began the work of starting the Kurdistan Women Alliance (Grûpî hawpeymanî jinanî Kurdistan), of which many of the women's organisations and women's rights activists are a part.

Kwestan mentioned the work with the Kurdistan Women's Alliance as a collective work with a high level of cooperation between the different NGOs working with women's rights. Before this collective effort, the organisations were not cooperating as much and they were each combatting the issue on their own, leading to the work against GBV and HBV not reaching its full potential. Five out of seven informants brought up the foundation of the Kurdistan Women Alliance and some mentioned how it has streamlined and coordinated their efforts. Nishtiman highlighted that while it may still be the objectives of for instance human rights organisations or development organisations to combat GBV and HBV, it is the women's grassroots organisations that are fully and wholeheartedly dedicated to the cause since their sole purpose is to eradicate the problem and they do not have other project areas. Banaz stated that cooperation within these grassroots organisations was important as it would allow them to approach the problems more effectively.

Considering that the organisations' work in the KRI is focused on promoting social or political change, delivering services to communities, building the government's capacity and that they have formed this network to streamline their efforts, Stroup's (2019: 37) argument about states' characteristics affecting the relationship with NGOs can be considered true in this context. The level of development and the structure in the KRI, where GBV and HBV are major societal issues, is why the domestic NGOs' work needs to be designed the way it is. Thus, the argument that NGOs in developing countries focus on delivering services to

communities, promoting social and/or political change, and helping with the government's capacity-building (Stroup, *ibid.*) is therefore also applicable to the KRI as a *de facto* state.

#### 5.4 *De facto* statehood, external actors and international norms

The political status of the KRI, and especially the fact that the region belongs to Iraq was perceived to have different but also similar effects on the work of the informants. As mentioned by Kaya (2017), the KRG has implemented international conventions such as the WPS and CEDAW to a greater extent than Iraq, its parent state. Furthermore, Voller (2014) explained that much of the KRG's shift in attitude towards these conventions has been dependent on the women's rights networks' reliance on international norms, which has led to more autonomy from Iraq (Kaya, 2017).

When asked "*Is your work affected because the KRG is not a recognised sovereign state?*", all of the responses were mentioning negative perceptions of non-sovereignty. The most prominent experienced effect was in terms of national laws and regulations; as Iraqi law is above Kurdish regional law, there are many acts preserving GBV and HBV that are technically legal under federal legislation. Kwestan and Ranya both presented Article 398 of the Iraqi Penal Code as an example of this, which is a law that allows a perpetrator to get away with sexual offences if he marries the victim. Ranya stated that in some cases, it can end up going from one victim to two or more, as the perpetrator can father children with his initial victim and then assault the children as well.

"It is not logical that a man can continue to commit crimes against a woman in the name of marriage. Because what the man does must be punishable and result in prison. But instead, a solution is found where the man marries the woman so she does not embarrass her family" - Ranya (May 17, 2022)

According to Kwestan, many NGOs in the KRI have advocated for the elimination of article 398 under Kurdistan Regional Law. There had been many meetings and discussions both with government ministries as well as individual politicians, and a vast majority had agreed that Article 398 needed to be eliminated from the KRI. However, the uncertain political situation at the time, where parliament was in a weak stage and had difficulties gathering and agreeing on certain matters, delayed the process of eliminating the article. This shows that women's rights organisations have a role in the KRG's legislation regarding gender equality, as stated



by Kaya (2017). Nonetheless, its ability to implement or eliminate certain laws is also dependent on the political situation and what priorities the KRG has.

Another instance where belonging to Iraq was illustrated as a problem was in terms of authority and capacity. Banaz made it clear that her organisation does not want to work in the south or central of Iraq due to the organisation's lack of competence in those regions, as the contexts may differ a lot from the Kurdish areas. However, the disputed areas of Kirkuk, the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar, are all areas where her organisation possesses the competence and capacity to carry out work, but are not allowed to do so due to only being registered to work within the official borders of the KRI. Seeking registration from the federal government of Iraq to operate in the disputed areas is a process that takes estimated three years, which was discouraging for Banaz's organisation. Venos was on the same track here, saying that if someone tells her organisation to respect an area due to political or bureaucratic reasons, they have no option but to obey, as they do not want to cause any problems with any actor. In their case, they were not able to carry out work in Mosul which belongs to the Nineveh Plain, since there was already another actor operating there. Here, one can find that essentially, the parent state plays a key role in the authorities the NGOs have.

“So all the attention goes to these conflicts with Bagdad. I imagine if we are a state and independent, I think all our attention will be for our own issues, like women's issues” - Helin (August 25th, 2022)

In terms of political instability, Helin and Nishtiman testified how the relationship between the Iraqi government and the KRG also had effects on the work of their organisations. Whenever there had been issues between the two governments, such as disagreeing on the state budget, oil and petrol issues, or other matters, they experienced that women's issues were more and more overlooked by the KRG. On the same topic, Banaz had written a comparative research article together with a colleague on why women in the KRI were calling for independence, comparing Iraqi federal laws with Kurdish regional laws. Although she could not remember the results of the study in detail, she mentioned how they showed that women's issues would improve if the KRI became a sovereign state, since the federal legislation of Iraq was more to the detriment of women than what could be said for the KRI's legislation. While Kaya (2017) explained the KRG's commitment to international norms as part of a strategy to become fully independent, for the women's rights organisations, Kurdish independence was perceived to bring greater success in NGOs' work against GBV and HBV.

“We have some laws which are really good for women, and the implementation is a big challenge because we are still part of Iraq” - Nishtiman (January 16th, 2023)

Surprisingly, and contrary to what was said in Berg and Toomla (2009) regarding greater support among the international organisations for status quo in the de facto states, Banaz testified how many of the international organisations tend to look over the autonomy of the KRI and behave as if they are solely working within an Iraqi context. Furthermore, the KRI has been referred to as “Iraq” by international organisations’ representatives during meetings, and she has had to correct them several times. Lastly, various international organisations have distinctly told her that they cannot work with her organisation despite good project proposals. The reasons behind their reluctance were that Banaz’s organisation is not working in Iraqi provinces and have made it clear that the KRG and the KRI are their priority areas. These are rather examples of international organisations promoting full submission of the KRI to Iraq, instead of promoting the status quo as argued by Lynch in Berg and Toomla (ibid.). This experience was however not brought up in the rest of the interviews.

“The international conventions, one of its main goals for this century is to achieve gender equality. And our work goes along with the conventions” - Sara (June 14th, 2022)

The informants had generally a positive attitude toward the international norms and conventions regarding gender equality, and many made sure to clarify that they work extensively to follow the international standards set to achieve global gender equality. Sara described the international norms as guidelines for how her organisation carries out their work against GBV and HBV, but not leaving out the fact that they always adapt their work to the context in which they operate. Adapting the content of international conventions, such as CEDAW, to the needs of the people and the culture in the KRI was a subject that each informant touched upon. For Venos, the reason behind this was that she was not trying to create a conflict of interest between what the people believe and what she, the organisation she works for, and the international conventions think is the best. Therefore, she preferred to adapt the organisation’s work to the legislation, customs and traditions of the KRI.

“CEDAW is our holy text, our holy book” - Banaz (May 21st, 2022)

For Banaz, who described CEDAW as a holy scripture to highlight how important the convention was for her organisation, it was not only important to adapt the international conventions to the Kurdish context, but also important to advocate the KRG to adapt its laws and regulations according to the international conventions. Banaz and Helin were the only informants mentioning this. Every four years, the KRG writes a report on the implementation of CEDAW in the region. Additionally, there is a network of civil society organisations writing a shadow report on the same matter, and releasing it at the same time. Banaz's organisation was part of this network, as well as the organisation Helin works for. Having a dialogue with the KRG on the implementation of CEDAW and sharing the concerns of civil society was further mentioned by Helin. This goes back to Voller's (2014) claims concerning how the women's rights networks put pressure on the KRG with support from international ideas and norms, in order to turn them into policies.

The women's grassroots organisations in the KRI have throughout the history of time had ongoing cooperation with international actors, such as the UN and its sub-organisations. The cooperation has revolved around the issues they work with, for instance combatting FGM. Overall, the interviewees had a reserved attitude towards the UN while still acknowledging that much of their successful results have come from the cooperation they have with the international actors. Although the UN was said to play an important role in combatting GBV and HBV in the KRI, it was not viewed as the main organisation that kept the wheels turning. The organisation's lack of follow-up on its projects is something that was gravely criticised by Ranya and Nishtiman. While Ranya acknowledged that the UN's role is to make things happen - her professional experience was that they only do so for a fixed period and do not follow up on their projects as they should.

However, the efforts from the UN and its sub-organisations regarding combatting FGM seemed to be highly appreciated amongst the informants. As many girls and women were victims of FGM in the late 1980s and early 1990s, these efforts were very much needed. The presence of international organisations in the KRI was not very high during the rule of Saddam Hussein - something that changed after the uprising of 1991. Then, international organisations such as Unicef cooperated with regional grassroots organisations to reduce FGM in the KRI. This cooperation showed effective results in society, and it even led to FGM being part of the legislation against GBV and HBV, making it a punishable act with legal consequences. This was, according to Sara, one of the achievements in which the UN

played a major role along with other actors, both regional/national and international. The phenomenon still exists in the KRI, but on a much smaller scale than before.

Aligning with what Voller (2014) wrote on how the women's rights networks can use their access to resources and the media to promote their cause, Banaz mentioned another area where support from the UN had been crucial - advocacy and support. In instances where the security and the lives of activists or organisational staff had been threatened due to hate campaigns imposed by others, the UN agencies have been able to advocate for them either with the government or through social media. Moreover, they visited their offices and expressed their support to the activists and asked if they can help them in any other way. As an example of this, Banaz reminisced about a demonstration that had taken place during International Women's Day on the 8th of March. Several women's rights activists and professionals had gathered to collectively express their concerns and rage regarding the killing of women in the KRI and were met with aggressive resistance from opposing groups. While the government remained silent on this matter, her organisation reported these incidents to the UN office and informed them that their lives could be in danger, which in turn led to them contacting the government and advocating for their safety.

Additionally, Sara, claimed that the local NGOs become stronger with the help of international organisations and that the international community plays a good role in supporting women's organisations that are working on feminist issues and GBV in the area. However, she also stated that the NGOs' work would be difficult without this support, but it would not be impossible since the ideas and the efforts still come from grassroots organisations, which was a common impression judging from the interviews. The professionals were more than willing to put in the efforts that were required to combat GBV and HBV, but were consistently highlighting that they were in need of support due to the fragile environment they are operating in.

Ranya mentioned that the UN's and other international organisations' main support was through funding, partnerships and implementing projects together. Venos brought in another aspect that none of the other informants spoke about. She highlighted that international agencies would sooner or later always work in collaboration with the government, as they need the consent of the official government in order to operate in the area they intend to implement projects. This could lead to bureaucratic matters that would delay projects and

programmes, but by directly empowering local NGOs and organisations, the ball would get rolling much quicker.

## 6. Discussion

The thesis commenced with the overarching research question “*How do de facto states and domestic NGOs cooperate and use international agreements on gender equality to combat gender- and honour-based violence?*”. The aim was to examine what indicators of cooperation, conflict, comparative advantages and social impact there are in the partnership between de facto states and domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV, how international agreements are used in this setting, and how the de facto statehood is perceived to effect on the work of combatting GBV and HBV. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq was chosen as the subject of the case study, contributing to the existing literature on de facto states and NGO-government cooperation, and filling a research gap on which effects parent states might have on the work of combatting GBV and HBV in a de facto state.

The study showed that cooperation and comparative advantages in the partnership between the KRG and the domestic NGOs were highly present. The NGOs in the study have an ongoing dialogue, capacity building and training with the KRG regarding gender-related issues in general and GBV in particular. By strengthening the government’s capacity, the work against GBV can be more effective and have a broader impact on society. Moreover, getting help from the NGOs in terms of the implementation, elimination or amending of laws and regulations has also shown effective results in practice, which is an advantage the organisations have.

In terms of conflict, one internal challenge is the existence of opposing groups, such as religious leading figures, individual parliamentarians, and extremist forces. Though the conflictual actors in this case were not said to be part of the KRG cabinet itself, this still poses a threat to the professionals in the non-governmental sector and can either put their lives in danger or slow down their capacities. However, this type of conflict can fade away with time, as some of the informants had witnessed a positive social change during their years of experience and did not specifically mention anything that would stall the development. No conflicts between the ruling government itself and the domestic NGOs were detected.

Judging from the results of the study, the de facto statehood is perceived to have caused barriers in terms of the parent state’s superior legislation, political instability and some of the international organisations’ attitudes towards the domestic NGOs. These circumstances were

all said to have affected the on-ground work performed by the domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV. While the facts are that the KRI performs better than Iraq regarding gender equality, one cannot help but wonder if the Region would have performed even better if these obstacles were non-existing. Although the general perception was that the de facto statehood has only hindered the development, one cannot completely draw the conclusion that the KRI would perform better in terms of combatting GBV and HBV if it were to be a sovereign state, as there are no guarantees that the KRG or the NGOs would have the same incentives once independent.

Interestingly enough, the international norms and the international organisations did not play a remarkably large role in the work of the informants and the organisations they represented. Although it was confirmed that they in fact do use international conventions such as CEDAW frequently in their work, they did not mention it in terms of gaining recognition and sovereignty. On the contrary, criticism regarding the lack of follow-up from the UN was brought up, while also recognising its successful efforts in combatting FGM in the region. This could indicate that the domestic NGOs care more about how the international standards can facilitate their efforts in combatting GBV and HBV, rather than how their organisations can work to fulfil the KRG's sovereignty aspirations. On the other hand, if the use of these international standards' main purpose was to facilitate the process of transitioning to a sovereign state, it is also possible that the informants are not very keen to confess to such an agenda.

The thesis brings several contributions to the existing research on the KRG in particular and de facto states in general. First, it increases our knowledge of how the cooperation between domestic NGOs and a de facto government is designed when seeking to combat GBV and HBV, in accordance with the global norm of gender equality. More specifically, it teaches us about what circumstances the domestic NGOs may encounter when cooperating with the de facto government, promoting social change and advocating for new or improved policies. In doing so, the findings also contribute to a research gap on what perceived effects de facto statehood and parent-states, in this case Iraq, has on the work of the domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV. Lastly, the results indicate that theories on NGO-government relationships and cooperation, as used in this thesis, can also be applied to de facto states.

## 7. Conclusions

The research aim of this thesis was to examine what indicators of cooperation, conflict, comparative advantages and social impact there are in the partnership between de facto states and domestic NGOs when combatting GBV and HBV. Furthermore, the aim was to examine how international agreements are used in this setting and what effects the de facto statehood is perceived to have on the work of combatting GBV and HBV in the KRI, which was chosen as the case for this study. A qualitative method with semi-structured interviews has been used to answer the research questions, with the informants being representatives of domestic NGOs in the KRI working to combat GBV and HBV. The results show that the partnership between the KRG and the domestic NGOs consists of several indicators of cooperation and fewer indicators of conflict. Both actors have comparative advantages towards one another and international norms and organisations did not play a remarkably large role in the work of the informants when combatting GBV and HBV, although the informants used international agreements such as CEDAW in their work. One important contribution to the literature is that Iraqi legislation, i.e. the legislation of the parent state, was perceived as a posing obstacle to the work against GBV and HBV in the KRI.

Similar to other developing states, the NGO-government relationship in the KRI is based on promoting social or political change, delivering services to communities, and building the government's capacity. Here, one can find that Stroup's (2019: 37) argument about states' characteristics affecting the relationship with NGOs is also applicable to the de facto state context. In regard to cooperation, the results show that the partnership between the KRG and the women's rights NGOs is based on complementary roles and comparative advantages, just as was the case in Bangladesh regarding the NGO-government cooperation in delivering health care services (Zafar Ullah et al., 2006). However, no specific conflicts with the KRG were mentioned by any of the informants. Instead, conflicts with other actors, such as individual parliamentarians or influential religious leaders were brought up. As these are not part of the ruling government, i.e. the KRG cabinet, the conclusion cannot be drawn that there exists a conflictual relationship between the NGOs and the government (Stroup, 2019: 34; Najam, 2000: 385), which was the case for Turkey and the İHH (Bahçecik and Turhan, 2022). The conflictual relationship exists with other actors that have their own affiliations to the government.



Concerning social impact, the partnership between the NGOs and the KRG is set out to have an effect on society. As Pick, Givaudan and Reich (2008) claimed, a larger social impact can be achieved when NGOs choose to cooperate with national, in this case regional, agencies. What distinguishes this case from the literature is that no informant mentioned specific small-scale programmes on the initiative of the government. Rather, there seemed to exist a mutual understanding between the two that in order to achieve a broader impact in changing mindsets and norms, they were in need of each other. In terms of de facto statehood and external actors, the results showed that the informants generally had a positive attitude towards international standards and norms, in line with Kaya (2017) and Voller's (2014) conclusions. Criticism towards international organisations was brought up regarding the lack of follow-up on projects and one informant specifically mentioned that she had experienced how many of the international organisations tend to look over the autonomy of the KRI and behave as if they are solely working within an Iraqi context. This experience goes slightly against what Lynch stated in Berg and Toomla (2009) regarding greater support among the international organisations for the status quo in the de facto states.

In terms of generalisability, this study can add empirically well-founded knowledge to previous existing literature, but further studies may be needed in order to characterise the subject as fully analysed. A way of doing this would be to conduct a broader field study, with qualitative data in terms of a large number of interviews with informants across several de facto states, or quantitative data such as questionnaires and statistics. As described in the method section, conducting interviews digitally has caused barriers both in reaching out to informants and receiving responses from them.

For future research, one can focus solely on the experienced consequences of non-sovereignty when seeking to combat GBV and HBV. Since the subsection in the analysis regarding de facto statehood was the most content-rich part of the study with the least grounding in theory, there is still much to explore in this area that could enrich the knowledge of de facto states and add to the existing theories and research. One example of doing this is to execute a large-scale interview study with representatives from the de facto government, domestic NGOs and international NGOs to further explore how the legislation of the parent state affects the work on the ground. This type of research could also increase knowledge of which ways de facto statehood impacts civil society.

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## **Interviews**

Banaz, May 21st, 2022. *Director and founder of a women's rights organisation*. [Phone interview]

Helin, Aug 25th, 2022. *GBV advisor for a women's rights organisation*. [Phone interview]

Kwestan, Dec 28th, 2022. *Co-founder of a women's rights organisation*. [Phone interview]

Nishtiman, Jan 16th, 2023. *GBV advisor for a development organisation*. [Phone interview]

Ranya, May 17th, 2022. *Director and founder of a women's rights organisation*. [Phone video interview]

Sara, Jun 14th, 2022. *Director of a women's rights organisation.* [Phone interview]

Venos, Aug 18th, 2022. *Protection Technical Advisor in GBV for a development organisation.* [Skype video interview]

# Appendices

## 8.1 Appendix 1 - English interview guide

I am studying the Master's programme "International Administration and Global Governance" at the University of Gothenburg. For my thesis, I intend to examine gender- and honour-based violence in the KRG and will therefore ask questions on this matter. Your identity can be anonymous throughout the whole process and will then not be exposed to any other person except for me. If you want your identity to be anonymous, please let me know. I would like to record the interview for research purposes only, as it will help me conduct the study and enables me to go back and listen to the answers I might not have time to take notes of. Recording of the interview will only be done with your permission. The audio record will be stored on my telephone devices and will later be deleted when the study is finished and graded. You are not obliged to answer all of the questions, or any questions, and have the freedom to interrupt the interview or decide if you do not want to participate in the study any longer.

### **Background**

- a) What is your profession?
- b) What are your tasks?
- c) How long have you been working at your current job?
- d) What is your educational background?
- e) What role does the organisation you work for play in combatting gender- and honour-based violence?
  - Have the measures shown any results? Good or bad?
- f) What measures have the organisation you work for taken in order to combat gender- and honour-based violence?
- g) Has the work against gender- and honour-based violence changed in any way during your employment?
  - If yes, why?

### **De facto statehood, external actors and international norms**

- a) Do external actors such as the UN play any role in your work against gender- and honour-based violence?
- b) Have you received any response or feedback from international actors regarding your work?
- c) When working to combat gender- and honour-based violence, do you adapt to international norms and conventions?
- d) Is your work affected because the KRG is not a recognised sovereign state?
- e) What is your organisation's approach to these international actors?

### **Cooperation and partnership**

- a) Does the organisation you work for cooperate with the KRG?
  - If yes, what can such a cooperation look like?
  - If no, why not?
- b) Can your organisation cooperate with the KRG even if they do not share the same views?
  - If no, why not?
- c) Are there any benefits that come from working with the KRG?
- d) Can the NGOs use the help of KRG to test and develop different programmes?
- e) What resources does the government have that are useful for the NGOs?
- f) What resources do your organisation have that are useful for the government?

### **Closing**

- a) Is there anything you would like to mention that we have not covered in this interview?



## 8.2 Appendix 2 - Kurdish interview guide

من پرۆگرامی ماستەر هه‌که‌م له زانکۆی گۆتینبیرگ ده‌خوینم. ئه‌رکی من ئه‌وه‌یه‌ که بابه‌تی ره‌گه‌زی و توندوتیژی له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای شه‌ره‌ف له‌ هه‌ریمی کوردستان بپشکنم و به‌و هۆیه‌وه‌ پرسیار له‌و باره‌یه‌وه‌ بکه‌م. ناسنامه‌ی تۆ ده‌توانیت به‌ درێژایی هه‌موو پرۆسه‌که‌ نه‌ناسراو بێت و پاشان جگه‌ له‌ من بۆ که‌سی تر ده‌رناکه‌ویت. ئه‌گه‌ر ده‌ته‌ویت ناسنامه‌که‌ت نه‌ناسراو بێت، تکایه‌ ئاگادارم بکه‌وه‌. من ده‌مه‌ویت چاوپێکه‌وته‌که‌ تۆمار بکه‌م ته‌نها بۆ مه‌به‌ستی توێژینه‌وه‌، چونکه‌ یارمه‌تیم ده‌دات لیکۆلینه‌وه‌که‌ ئه‌نجام به‌دم و توانام پێ ده‌دات بگه‌ریمه‌وه‌ و گوێ له‌ وه‌لامانه‌ بگرم که‌ له‌وانه‌یه‌ کاتم نه‌بیت بۆ وه‌رگرنتی تیبینی. تۆمارکردنی چاوپێکه‌وته‌که‌ ته‌نها به‌ مۆله‌ته‌که‌ت ئه‌نجام ده‌دریت. تۆماری ده‌نگ له‌ ته‌له‌فۆنه‌که‌م خه‌زن ده‌کریت و دواتر ده‌سپێته‌وه‌ کاتیک خویندنه‌که‌ ته‌واو ده‌بیت و نمره‌ ده‌دریت. تۆ ناچار نیت وه‌لامی هه‌موو پرسیاره‌کان یان هه‌یچ پرسیاریک به‌ده‌یه‌وه‌ و ئازادیت هه‌یه‌ چاوپێکه‌وته‌که‌ بچڕنیت یان بریار به‌ده‌یت ئه‌گه‌ر ناته‌ویت چیتر به‌شداری توێژینه‌وه‌که‌ بکه‌یت.

### باکگراوند

- a. پشه‌که‌ت چییه‌؟
- b. ئه‌رکه‌کانت چین؟
- c. ماوه‌ی چه‌نده‌ له‌ نیشی ئیستادا کار ده‌که‌یت؟
- d. باکگراوندی په‌روه‌ردی تۆ چییه‌؟
- e. ئه‌و ریکخراوه‌ی که‌ بۆی کار ده‌که‌یت، چ رۆلێکی هه‌یه‌ سه‌بارت به‌ به‌ره‌نگار بونه‌وه‌ی توندوتیژی ره‌گه‌زی و نامووسی؟
- f. ریکخراوه‌که‌ت چ رێوشوونێکی گرتووته‌ به‌ر بۆ به‌ره‌نگار بونه‌وه‌ی توندوتیژی ره‌گه‌زی و نامووسی؟
- g. له‌ کاتی دامه‌زراندنی تۆدا، ئایا کاری دژ به‌ ره‌گه‌ز و توندوتیژی له‌سه‌ر بنه‌مای شه‌ره‌ف گۆراوه‌؟

### ده‌وله‌تی دیفاکتۆ، نه‌که‌تری ده‌ره‌کی و نۆر مه‌ نیوده‌وله‌تیه‌کان

- a. ئایا نه‌که‌تره‌ ده‌ره‌کیه‌کانی وه‌که‌ نه‌ته‌وه‌ به‌که‌گرتووه‌کان هه‌یچ رۆلێک ده‌گیرن له‌ کاره‌کانتان دژی توندوتیژی ره‌گه‌ز و شه‌ره‌ف؟
- b. ئایا ریکخراوه‌که‌ت هه‌یچ وه‌لامیک یان کاردانه‌یه‌کی لهم نه‌که‌ترانه‌ وه‌رگر تووه‌ سه‌بارت به‌ کاره‌که‌ت؟

له کاتی کارکردن بۆ بهرهنگاربوونهوهی توندوتیژی جێنڤهر و ناموس، ئایا لهگهڵ نۆرم و پهیمانه c. نیودهولتهتییهکاندا دهگونجین؟

ئایا کارهکهت به ههر شتیهیهک بێت کاریگهری ههیه چونکه حکومهتی ههریمی کوردستان دهولتهتیکی d. نهاسراوه؟

ریبازی ریکخراوهکهتان بۆ نۆرم و نهکتهره نیودهولتهتییهکان چیه؟ e.

### هاوکاری و هاوبهشی

ئایا ئه ریکخراوهی که کارهکهیت بۆ هاوکاری لهگهڵ حکومهتی ههریمی کوردستان؟ a.

ئایا ریکخراوهکهت دهتوانیت هاوکاری حکومهتی ههریمی کوردستان بکات تهنا تهته نهگهر ههمان بۆچوونت b. نهیت؟

ئایا ههچ سوودیک ههیه له کارکردن لهگهڵ حکومهتی ههریمی کوردستان؟ c.

ئایا ریکخراوه ناحکومیهکان دهتوانن یارمهتی حکومهتی ههریمی کوردستان بهکاربینن بۆ تاقیکردنهوه و d. پهڕهپیدانی بهرنامهکان دژی توندوتیژی رهگهزی؟

حکومهت چ سهڕچاوهیهک ههیه که سوودبهخشه بۆ ریکخراوه ناحکومییهکان؟ e.

ریکخراوهکهت چ سهڕچاوهیهکی ههیه که سوودی ههیت بۆ حکومهتی ههریم؟ f.

### داخستن

ئایا شتیک ههیه که دهتهویت باسی ئهوه بکهیت که ئیمه لهم چاوپیکهوتنهدا قسهمان لهسهڕ نهکردوه؟ a.