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# Country Profile

## Introduction

The Kurds are an ancient people with thousands of years of tribal history. They are the fourth largest non-Arab ethnic minority group in southwestern Asia, and they represent the largest ethnic group in the world without a country.<sup>1</sup> There is no exact figure for the population of the Kurds, but it is believed to be over 25 million.<sup>2</sup>

The land where the Kurdish people live is divided among several countries in the Middle East: northwestern Iran, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and small parts of Armenia. This area covers 230,000 square miles (595,700 sq km).<sup>3</sup> The use of the term “Kurdistan” for this region makes a political statement. You should not use this term unless you are referring to a province in Iraq that is officially named Kurdistan. It is best to refer to the land where the Kurds live as the Kurdish region.



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Landscape in southeastern Turkey

The Kurdish region is rich in natural resources, thus population growth has been on a steady course for all Kurdish tribes for millennia, except for the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During that time economic hardship, health care problems, deportations, and famine slowed down proliferation and progress. Since the middle of the 1960s, Kurdish population has been on the increase and now Kurds yet again represent 15% of the overall population in southwestern Asia.

## Government

Since the Kurdish region includes a number of countries, there are several unofficial or informal capitals. Diyarbakir is the unofficial capital city in Turkey. Kermanshah is the unofficial capital in Iran and Qamishli is the unofficial capital in Syria. The capital of the Iraqi Kurdish region is Arbil, where the Kurdistan Regional Government is seated.

Although most Kurds live in Turkey, Iraq is where the Kurds are most involved politically. They have fought for self-rule there, ever since Iraq gained independence in 1932. Since the Iraqi Kurds have established the Kurdistan Autonomous Region within Iraq, tensions have grown significantly in other Kurdish areas as well.

## Geography

The Kurdish region stretches over 230,000 square miles or 596,000 square kilometers. Its size is comparable with that of Texas. The Kurdish region is mostly mountainous and irrigated by large rivers. The region includes the Zagros Mountains, the eastern third of the Taurus and Pontus mountains, and the northern half of the Amanus Mountains. The

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1 <http://selenasol.com/selena/struggle/kurds.html>

2 <http://www.answers.com/topic/kurdish-people>

3 <http://www.oswego.edu/~baloglou/anatolia/kurds.html>

highest points in the Kurdish region are Mt. Alvand in Iran (3,571 m/11,716 ft), Mt. Halgurd in Iraq (3728m/12,249 ft), and Mt. Ararat in Turkey (5,137m/16,853 ft).

There are two major rivers in this region, the Tigris and the Euphrates; both main sources of fresh water. The area also has some of the largest oil reserves in Southwestern Asia.<sup>4</sup>

The Kurdish region includes areas of Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Armenia. Kurds live in about 21 provinces or *walayat* in Turkey, five provinces or *ostan* in Iran, four provinces or *muhafadha* in Iraq, and one province or *muhafadha* in Syria.



© 2006 DLIFLC  
Map of the Kurdish region

## Climate

The climate in the Kurdish region is characterized by hot and dry summers, cold and wet winters, and short springs and autumns. Compared to the rest of the Middle East, rainfall is plentiful. The average annual precipitation is 1,524-2,032 mm (60-80 inches) in the highlands and 508-1,016 mm (20-40) inches in the lower elevations.<sup>5</sup> The summers are hot in these low-lying areas, with temperatures reaching 45°C (113° F). Dust storms are common. A northeasterly wind, called the *shamal*, often brings droughts and extremely hot temperatures. In the higher elevations, summers are mild, but winters are among the harshest in the world. Temperatures may drop as low as -15° C (5° F). Snow frequently falls six months out of the year. A consequence of these extreme temperatures is the formation of permanent glaciers. The runoff from heavy snowfalls is the source for numerous rivers located in the valleys, such as the Tigris and the Euphrates.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/geography/geo-land/land.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://selenasol.com/selena/struggle/kurds.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.agrometeorology.org/index.php?id=63>

# History

## Early history

The Kurdish lands have supported civilizations as far back as 12,000-8,000 B.C.E. Many of the ancient artifacts found throughout the Kurdish region belong to the Hurrians, an ancient people of the third millennium B.C.E. These people lived in the area around the Zagros-Taurus Mountains.<sup>7</sup> Around 2000 B.C.E., Indo-European speaking tribes conquered the region, and by 850 B.C.E., the Hurrians were defeated. During the third century B.C.E., mountain tribes living in the region were described by the Greeks as being the “Kurti” or “Carduchi”.<sup>8</sup>

## The Spread of Islam

In the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, the Arabs took control of the region, and Islam became the dominant religion for all people in the area, including the Kurds.<sup>9</sup>

Saladin (1137?–1193), one of the greatest warriors of the Islamic world, was of Kurdish descent. Saladin successfully fought against the Crusaders occupying Jerusalem and founded the Ayyubid dynasty.<sup>10</sup> From the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were continuous conflicts between the empires of the Iranian Safavids and Ottoman Turks. The Safavids declared Shia Islam as the official religion of the land. The Ottoman Turks fought to keep Sunni Islam as the official religion. As fighting continued, most of the land went to waste, and the Kurds were forced to move to the mountains.<sup>11</sup>

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century

World War I brought an end to the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The 1920 Treaty of Sèvres called for the formation of an independent Kurdish state, but that plan was canceled three years later in the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>12</sup>

In 1946, Mustafa Barzani founded the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) with the goal of creating an independent Kurdistan. Amidst the regional conflicts following World War II, a State Republic of Kurdistan with a capital in Mahabad (Iran) was established. Qazi Muhammad was named president. Kurdish was proclaimed to be the official language used in government and education, and several Kurdish publications were launched. The Republic lasted just one year before being toppled by Iranian troops.<sup>13</sup> In 1958, the royal government of Iraq was overthrown and replaced by a republican government led by Abdul Karim Qasim. For



Courtesy of wikipedia.org  
Mustafa Barzani

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.answers.com/topic/hurrians>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/khist.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://berclo.net/page03/03en-notes-kurds.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0843183.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://countrystudies.us/iraq/18.htm>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ku/Kurds.html>

<sup>13</sup> [http://lexicorient.com/e.o/kurdistan\\_republic.htm](http://lexicorient.com/e.o/kurdistan_republic.htm)

two years, the Kurdish people were guaranteed rights. Kurdish was spoken in schools and in radio broadcasts. However, the Iraqi government soon revoked these freedoms. In 1961, Barzani led a revolt against the Iraqi government which initiated the fighting between the government and the Kurds. As the Baath Party gained power, “Arabization” became more predominant. For the next 15 years, the Iraqi government deported Kurds, destroyed villages, and moved Arabs into the Kurdish region.<sup>14</sup>

In 1975, the leader of the KDP, Jalal Talabani, left the KDP and founded the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). This split resulted in years of fighting between the KDP and the PUK.<sup>15</sup>

In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan created the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). This organization is classified as a terrorist group by the U.S. State Department. PKK guerrillas fought with government forces in southeastern Turkey during the 1980s. By 1992, Turkey retaliated by attacking the Kurdish people and the PKK base camps. Up to 30,000 people died in this 15-year battle.<sup>16</sup> Öcalan was captured in 1999. He is presently in a Turkish prison, his death sentence having been commuted to life in prison due to Turkey’s abolishment of the death penalty in 2002.



DoD image  
Kurdish refugees, 1991

In the 1980s, the Kurds supported Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq retaliated by killing thousands of Kurds. Chemical weapons were used on Kurdish soldiers as well as on civilians. The Iraqi Kurds sought safety in the mountains of Iraq or fled to Turkey, Iran, or Syria to avoid the armies of Saddam Hussein.

After the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the Kurdish people took control of many of the cities in the Kurdish region.

Saddam Hussein ordered his Republican Guard to take back this area, forcing many Kurds to flee to Iran and Turkey. Iran allowed the refugees in but Turkey closed its border to them. Thousands of Kurds died in the freezing temperatures of the mountains where they were stranded without food and shelter.<sup>17</sup>

The United States and Gulf War Allies established Operation Provide Comfort to help the stranded Kurds. The Kurds were persuaded to come down from the mountains and to occupy an area above the 36<sup>th</sup> parallel, which was declared “a no-fly zone.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1994, the KDP and PUK began fighting for this autonomous region. In 1998, they reached an agreement and fighting ceased.<sup>19</sup> The alliance, called the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan, won almost 26% of votes during the January 2005 elections. He

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/khist.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/kurds3.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://berclo.net/page03/03en-notes-kurds.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/khist.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/khist.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/kurds3.html>

alliance jointly won 75 assembly seats. Strengthened by the elections, the Kurds were able to obtain the two-thirds majority needed and confirmed Talabani as president of Iraq.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/48376.pdf>



# Economy

## Introduction

Since the beginning of the war in Iraq in 2003, the free-market economy of the Kurdish region has flourished. Foreign businesses, as well as businesses from the Arab region of Iraq, have moved to the safety of the Kurdish region. The police department and the military have created a safe haven for the population, by restricting insurgent activities. This region is growing with new jobs, airports, and a feeling of normalcy. People of all ethnic groups are moving to the region for work, money, and stability.<sup>21</sup> Funds from international NGOs and tariffs on merchandise from Turkey and Iran, in addition to 13% of the funds of the Food for Oil program, have played key roles in the reconstruction of over 3,000 villages destroyed under Saddam Hussein.<sup>22</sup>

The Kurds live in a region rich in minerals, water and petroleum. Numerous oil fields as well as the sources of Euphrates and Tigris make this area very attractive. Moreover, the construction of dams has ensured the production of electrical energy, while improved irrigation has quadrupled the agricultural production in eastern Turkey.

## Agriculture

The economy of the Iraqi Kurdish region is based on livestock and agriculture. Despite its mountainous terrain, Iraqi Kurdistan has a higher proportion of arable land than most other Middle Eastern countries. The region also has an abundance of good pasture lands.<sup>23</sup> The Kurds who live high in the mountains are nomadic herders. They travel with their goats and sheep in search of the best pastures there. The animals provide milk, meat, and wool. Other mountain Kurds are loggers, who provide wood for people in the urban and rural areas for building homes and for fuel.



DoD image  
Young shepherd

The rural Kurds who are not nomadic herders support the farming community. Kurdish farmers grow vegetables and cereals, such as wheat, barley, and rice, which has become a staple. Many types of fruit are also grown, including apples, peaches, pears, apricots, pomegranates, strawberries, and melons. Cash crops include tobacco, sugar beets, and cotton. The tobacco grown here is of good quality and is used in water pipes throughout the Middle East. Cotton is fast becoming a cash crop in this area; it is expected to play a major role in the economy of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq in years to come.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4145110.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4145110.stm)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.lexpansion.com/art/6.0.81399.0.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.vietop.net/economy/015.php>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/economy/agriculture/the\\_agriculture.html](http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/economy/agriculture/the_agriculture.html)

## Industries

In the large cities, industry provides jobs for the population. Cement factories can be found in Sulaymaniyah and textile factories are located in Dohuk and Arbil. Other industries in the region include food processing, sugar refineries, cigarettes production, and dairy products. Most of the goods produced in this region are consumed locally. Although there is an abundance of oil in this region, Kurds do not have the rights to exploit these reserves.<sup>25</sup>

## Ethnic Groups

Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the region, but many Turkmen and Arabs also live there. It was during the Ottoman era when Turkmen settled around Kirkuk, whereas the Arab population grew significantly under Saddam. The presence of these three ethnic groups in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk today creates a volatile situation.<sup>26</sup>

## Languages

Kurdish is a branch of the Indo-European languages and is similar to Persian. Modern Kurdish is divided into two major groups: 1) the Kurmanji group and, 2) the Dimili-Gurani group. There are also many sub-dialects as well.

Most Kurds speak Kurmanji. Kurmanji is divided into North Kurmanji (also called Badihani), spoken by almost 65 percent of all Kurds (ca. 15 million), primarily in Turkey, Syria, and the former Soviet Union; and South Kurmanji (also called Sorani), with about six million speakers, primarily in Iraq and Iran.

Eighty percent of the Kurds in Turkey speak Northern Kurmanji, especially those living in the provinces of Badihan, Hakkari, Siirt, and Mardin. It is also spoken by Kurds in Syria, Lebanon, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. In Iraq only 35% of the Kurds speak Northern Kurmanji; they live in the cities of Dahuk and Zakho. Additionally, Northern Kurmanji is spoken in Iran North and West of Lake Urmia.

Central or Southern Kurmanji, known more commonly as Sorani<sup>27</sup>, is spoken by 60% of the Iranian Kurds. They have settled south of Lake Urmia in an area that stretches roughly to the city of Kermanshah in midwestern Iran. The majority of the Kurdish population in this city is Shi'a Muslim. In Iraq, 55% of Kurds speak Sorani. Most live around Arbil, which is one of Iraq's largest cities and seat of the Kurdistan Regional Government. Sulaymaniyah is a city in the southeast of the Kurdish-speaking region; it is the capital of Sulaymaniyah Province, which is also part of the Kurdish Autonomous Region.



DoD image  
Elderly woman at a clinic

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/economy/industries/the\\_industries.html](http://www.kurdistanica.com/english/economy/industries/the_industries.html)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47641-2005Jan29.html>

<sup>27</sup> According to Encyclopaedia Britannica. Online and the Kurdish Institute in Paris, Sorani is a Central Kurmanji language, while Ethnologue classifies Sorani under Southern Kurmanji.

The old branch of Kurdi Pehlawan has survived through several dialects, including Gurani and Dimili. Dimili is mainly spoken in the Elazig, Bingol, and Diyarbakir provinces of eastern Turkey. Sub-dialects of Gurani, such as Laki and Hawramani, are spoken in Iran's western provinces of Kermanshah and Ilam as well as in southern Iraqi border towns south of Xanaqin, Kirind and Qorwaq. Speakers of these dialects are Shi'a Muslim. Most speak Farsi as well. The Laki language especially is evolving to resemble the dominant Farsi language, although the Lak people consider themselves to be Kurds.

Since the land where Kurdish people live encompasses several countries, they speak other languages as well. Most Kurds in Turkey speak Turkish and northern Kurmanji. A large number of Kurds in Iraq also speak Arabic. Almost all the Kurds in Iran speak central Kurmanji and Farsi. All the Kurds in Syria speak Arabic, as well as northern Kurmanji. Most Kurds in Armenia speak Armenian and northern Kurmanji.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.oswego.edu/~baloglou/anatolia/kurds.html>

# Religion

## Islam

Islam is the dominant religion in the Kurdish region. A believer of Islam is a Muslim. Muslims believe in Allah, (the Arabic name for God), and they believe that Allah gave revelations through the archangel Gabriel to the prophet Muhammad, who lived in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. These revelations are contained in the *Quran*, Islam's holy book.



Courtesy of sxc.hu  
Page of the Quran

The Five Pillars of Islam are the profession of faith, ritual prayer performed five times a day, giving alms to the needy, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Following the death of Muhammad, the Muslims were divided on who should succeed him. The majority, who believed that it should be an elected caliph, became known as Sunni Muslims. Those who believed the successor should remain in Muhammad's family became known as the Shi'a Muslims. This Sunni-

Shi'a conflict began after the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 CE and continues today.

## The Role of Religion in the Government

Kurds are perceived as mainly secular, and this factor may play a key role in preventing Iraq from becoming too fundamentalist.<sup>29</sup> Kurdish leaders have maintained a consistent position in favor of federalism to gain greater control of the semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq. The security forces are composed of roughly 100,000 *peshmerga* fighters<sup>30</sup>, and fundamentalists have not been successful in implementing *Sharia* (Islamic law) in this region. In 2005, the Kurds opposed all measures introduced by the Shi'a to implement a "Federal Islamic Republic" in Iraq. The Shi'a draft aimed at replacing Iraq's civil code with Islamic laws, which consequently would have diminished woman's rights.<sup>31</sup>

The militant Sunni Islamist Kurdish group known as *Ansar al-Islam* numbers fewer than 1,000 fighters, yet terrorizes secular Kurds. The United Nations Security Council has cited this group as having ties with Al-Qaeda. *Ansar al-Islam* was formed when the conventional Islamic Movement (IMK) tried to participate in the PUK-led regional government and cooperate with other secular Kurdish parties from 1997 on. Some factions that didn't approve of this step broke away, such as the Islamic Unity Front and Soran Forces, which formed *Jund al-Islam*.<sup>32</sup> *Jund al-Islam* merged with other factions of

29 [http://www.cfr.org/publication/9615/role\\_of\\_kurds\\_in\\_iraqi\\_politics.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/9615/role_of_kurds_in_iraqi_politics.html)

30 Edward Wong. Kurds Vow to Retain Militia as Guardians of Autonomy. New York Times. February 27, 2005

31 [http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial\\_opinion/oped/articles/2005/07/25/the\\_constitution\\_and\\_the\\_kurds/](http://www.boston.com/news/globe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2005/07/25/the_constitution_and_the_kurds/)

32 <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/mena/ansarbk020503.htm>

the IMK at the end of 2001 to form *Ansar al-Islam*. Their leaders Mullah Krekar and Abu Abdallah al-Shafi'i are both believed to have served under Bin Laden in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> They staged suicide attacks from the mountains along the Iranian border, and they are based in Biyarah.<sup>34</sup> Mullah Krekar was captured in September of 2002.

In Turkey, most Kurds participate in the political life of the country; their resistance to assimilation is related to their wish of preserving their language and culture. Religion has not played a major role since 1925 when Ataturk suppressed a Kurdish revolt against his regime's renunciation of Muslim religious practices<sup>35</sup> and the government introduced measures to secularize Turkey. The Kurds struggled to keep Islamic religious practices under government control, and did not want a separation of Islam and the government. A few decades later their focus shifted. In the 1970s the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in Turkey was founded as a Marxist-Leninist insurgent group with the goal to establish an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey, where the population is mostly Kurdish.<sup>36</sup>

After undergoing a name change and a political facelift the PKK, now the *Kongra-Gel* Party, instigated confrontations with the Iranian regime in 2004 along with the Free Life Party. Tehran and Ankara agreed to jointly fight the Kurdish insurgencies, and Tehran declared the *Kongra-Gel* a terrorist organization. In 2005, the Islamic regime attacked Kurdish demonstrators in Saqqez with helicopters, killing 39 people and injuring 200.<sup>37</sup>

### **Influence of Religion on Daily Life**

Kurds have always had a liberal approach to Islam. For instance, Kurdish women do not cover their faces or wear garments that would cover them fully, like many Arab and Iranian women do. Nevertheless, many aspects of their daily life are influenced by Muslim customs such as bathing requirements.<sup>38</sup> Ritual bathing or ablutions in preparation for daily prayer, for example, follow rigorous Islamic traditions and restrictions.

Although the large majority of Kurds are Sunni, most follow the Shafi'i School, unlike most other Sunnis. However, Kurds living in Turkey are often inclined to join Sufi orders, which consequently have an impact on their daily life. The Naksibendi, Kadiri, and Nurcu have large numbers of followers among the Kurds of Turkey and Iran. The Kadiri sect, for example, engages in dervish ceremonies in which divine names are repeated to rhythmic sounds. This, combined with special breathing



© Rahel Hawez  
Mosque

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/030324/24ansar.htm>

<sup>34</sup> [http://iraqinews.com/org\\_ansar\\_al-islam.shtml](http://iraqinews.com/org_ansar_al-islam.shtml)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan-turkey.htm>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/pkk.htm>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/kurdistan-iran.htm>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/krelig.html>

and repeated motions, produces trance-like states in the practitioners. All these sects, called “*tarikats*”, were banned by Ataturk in Turkey.<sup>39</sup>

Some Shi’a Kurds in the Tunceli, Elazig, and Mus provinces in southeastern Turkey are followers of the Alevi sect (a Sufi order also followed by other Turks). The Alevi’s interpretation of the Quran is more symbolic than literal. Their society is divided into two groups: the elite *Ocak*, who claim to be descendents of Ali and Hussein, and the religious fighters called *Ghazi*. The *Ocak* are in charge of performing rituals, teaching the young, and mediating conflicts.<sup>40</sup> The Alevis fast for twelve days during the month of Muharram. They celebrate the ascension of Mohammad to the “Seven Heavens” with a ritual meal called *lokma*, which is accompanied by an alcoholic drink. Special hymns and dancing accompany this secretive celebration.

In Iraq, most of the Shi’a Kurds are called Faili Kurds. This group of Kurds living on the porous eastern border between Iraq and Iran were subject to persecution because of their religion, ethnicity, and origin. The Saddam Hussein regime deported thousands of Failis to Iran, where they were forced to live in refugee camps.<sup>41</sup>

The Yazidis, most of whom are Kurds, practice an ancient, distinctive religion of their own that combines pre-Islamic and Islamic traditions.<sup>42</sup> They have often been persecuted by Orthodox Muslims. This religion forbids its followers to wear blue clothing and requires specific dietary restrictions, such as banning fish and gazelle.

Yazidi temples are called *Khalwa*. These places of worship are generally simple and lightly furnished.<sup>43</sup>

Another distinctive Kurdish religious group are the Ahl-i Haq (often called Yaresan in Iran or Kakai in Iraq). They observe three days of strict fasting in winter. Breaking the fast is a collective event in each community, which is followed by a special ceremony (*Shab-e Padshahi*)<sup>44</sup>. A distinctive physical feature of Ahl-i Haq males are their mustaches, which according to their tradition they must not cut or trim.<sup>45</sup>

Ahl-i Haq followers visit the shrine of Bâbâ Yâdigâr, which is considered one of the holiest sites of this sect, two days before the festival of Nurooz (the Persian New Year). Worshipers sacrifice a rooster and engage in specific chants that go back to Zoroastrian religious practices.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www3.estart.com/turkey/news/naksibendi.html>  
<sup>40</sup> <http://meria.biu.ac.il/journal/1999/issue4/jv3n4a5.html>

<sup>41</sup> Refugee Magazine Issue 134: The Road Home: The Faili Kurds.

<sup>42</sup> <http://hnn.us/articles/1172.html>

<sup>43</sup> [http://altreligion.about.com/library/faqs/bl\\_yezidism.htm](http://altreligion.about.com/library/faqs/bl_yezidism.htm)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.ahle-haqq.com/fasting.html>

<sup>45</sup> <http://yarsan.web.surftown.se/English/Yarsanism.htm>

## **Influence of Religion on the Interaction between Males and Females**



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Woman with a headscarf

Although wearing a veil doesn't seem mandatory as it is in more conservative Muslim societies, women are still under the authority of the male figure of the family, whether it is the father or the husband. In Turkey, however, the secular laws protect the status of woman at least on paper. The new Iraqi Constitution is still ambiguous in reference to this issue. Although Article 14 clearly states "without discrimination because of sex,"<sup>46</sup> it also says that no laws should contradict Islamic Law.

It was due to this the leader of the Nurcu group left Turkey to live in the United States<sup>47</sup> after being accused of attempts to replace the existing secular laws with Islamic Sharia.

## **Religious Events**

The power of religion on daily life is palpable during religious events, especially Ramadan.

### **Ramadan**

Ramadan is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic lunar calendar, so the time of the celebration falls about ten days later each year on the Western calendar, which is solar.

According to the Quran, believers attain piety through fasting. Adult Muslims abstain from eating, drinking and smoking between sunrise and sunset. In addition, people must avoid any wrong doing. Many spend their time in extra prayers. Ramadan is also a time for giving, and charitable contributions, whether to the homeless or to an established organization like a mosque or the Red Crescent Society (similar to the Red Cross), are considered extremely important.

During Ramadan, religious respect is essential and is required from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It is considered extremely discourteous for non-Muslims to smoke, eat, or drink in front of those who are fasting during daylight hours. You should realize that fasting affects people in many ways. People might be easily irritated and might overreact to things that would normally be shrugged off.

Although getting food in the day time during Ramadan is difficult, owing to the closure of the restaurants, there are some restaurants authorized to be open during daylight hours. Travelers and non-Muslims can go there to eat, but they should be discreet.

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<sup>46</sup> <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060101faessay85104/isobel-coleman/women-islam-andthe-new-iraq.html>

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.reuters.com>



### ***Jazhin and Quraban Jazhin***

On the 30<sup>th</sup> (last) day of Ramadan, the celebration known to Kurds as *Jazhin* (The End of the Fast or *Eid al Fitr*) begins, and goes on for three days. *Quaraban Jazhin* (The Feast of Sacrifice, which commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael or *Eid al-Adha*) occurs later in the year and is a four-day holiday. (Please note that the Muslim belief presented here differs from that of Christians and Jews, who believe that it was Isaac, not Ishmael, who was to be sacrificed.)



DoD image  
Women preparing food

During both holidays, people celebrate by preparing special foods and visiting cemeteries to honor their ancestors. During both events people forget any differences and carry on as if nothing had happened. You will see many adults visiting and exchanging gifts. You may even be honored by an invitation to someone's home. Jazhin and Quaraban Jazhin are not like other days of the year. You will probably see many excited children and young adults wearing brand new clothes and playing

noisily in their neighborhoods.

Quraban Jazhin, the celebration at the end of the fasting period, also includes the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca. Usually, a goat or sheep is slaughtered and the meat is shared with family and friends. The celebration lasts three days, and it is important to Kurds to invite foreigners to share in the happiness.

### **The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday**

On this day, Muslims—if they can afford it—buy a sheep or cow and slaughter it, sharing the meat with their neighbors. The poorest have priority in getting a share of the meat.

### **Places of Worship**

The Kurds take particular pride in their places of worship. Therefore, the Regional Government has set up a Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs (known as the *Waqf*). The ministry plans to build 71 new mosques (*mizgawt*), halls, and dormitories within the borders of Arbil and Dohuk.<sup>48</sup> The Kurdistan Development Corporation is assigned by the ministry to provide maintenance to over 2,500 mosques. It also recruits and trains religious teachers and preachers for 16 religious schools and one institute for imams.

### **Visiting a mosque**

The holy days are Friday in Iraq, Iran, and Syria and Saturdays and Sundays in Turkey. On these days, schools and government offices are closed. Fridays are religious days for Muslims. The men perform their noon prayers in the men's section of the mosque. The prayers are followed by the



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Mosque in a Kurdish village

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.kurdistancorporation.com/government\\_ministry\\_endowment.htm](http://www.kurdistancorporation.com/government_ministry_endowment.htm)



congregational prayers and then a speech from the Imam, the leader of the mosque. The rest of the day is spent visiting at the parents' home.

**Exchange #1: When do you pray?**

Soldier:	When do you pray?	kangee dey naveyzhee kee?
Civilian:	I pray at noon.	neevro dey naveyzhee kam

Women can choose to pray at the mosque or to at home on Fridays. Women have a separate section in the mosque. They listen to the congregation prayers from there as well, but they do not mingle with the men. Some women bring their children with them.

You may visit a mosque. If you are Muslim, you may participate in the holy service. Muslims regard mosques as sacred places and they should be respected as such. Ask for permission to enter.

**Exchange #2: May I enter the mosque?**

Soldier:	May I enter?	az dishem beyma zhor?
Civilian:	Yes.	bali

When entering a mosque, remember that Muslims have to take time to pray at prescribed hours of the day and night. Further, the congregational prayer at midday on Fridays is a religious requirement. Respect these needs, and allow prayer if at all possible.

Everyone, even visitors, must remove any form of footwear when entering a mosque under normal circumstances. Dogs should never be taken inside of a mosque; this would be extremely disrespectful as these animals are considered unclean. Women need to cover their heads, and they need to limit their visit to the women's section.

**Exchange #3: Do you have a cover for my head?**

Soldier:	Do you have a cover for my head?	ta dasrok heyba bo sarey min?
Civilian:	Local: Yes.	bali

Once inside the mosque, speak quietly and do not interrupt people who are praying. The space immediately in front of a person who is praying is also considered sacred, and you should walk around rather than in front of people who are praying. Walking in front of the person invalidates the prayer and will upset him or her. Also, do not direct any question to a Muslim while he is praying. He will ignore you. Interrupting someone who is praying is considered a sin in Islam.

This information may come in handy as well: When Shiites pray, they begin by standing up straight and keeping their arms and hands against their sides. Sunnis, on the other hand, will stand with their arms crossed in front of them.

## Cemeteries

The cemeteries in the Kurdish region are revered places. In fact, nothing is disturbed in the cemeteries, not even the trees are cut down. Here you will find marked graves that are maintained by the families of the deceased. There are also tombs, which you may enter. When you visit a cemetery, take care not to step on the graves.



© Rahel Hawez  
Kurdish cemetery

# Traditions

## Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Kurdish men who are good friends will greet each other with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Whether you are a male or a female, it is appreciated if you shake hands when you greet men, as Kurdish men shake hands whenever they meet. The handshake signifies friendship and respect. It is always the right hand that is offered, never the left. If you are by yourself and want to greet a group of people, you are expected to initiate the greeting.



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Friends

Kurdish men can be addressed as *kaaka*—meaning brother—to show respect. This is tantamount to saying “sir.” Close friends call each other by their first names. In Kurdish culture it is especially important to show respect to older women. They are addressed as *poore*, which means “aunt.” Younger women are addressed as *Khoshke*, meaning “sister.”

### Exchange #4: Hello, Mr. Azad.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Hello, Mr. Azad.	merHabaa kaak azaad
<b>Civilian:</b>	Local: Hello.	merHaba
<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you doing well?	too chaawanee baashee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

A friendly greeting is always appreciated. The following exchanges illustrate greetings used at different times of the day.

### Exchange #5: Good morning!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good morning!	speyda Khosh
<b>Civilian:</b>	Good morning.	speyda Khosh

### Exchange #6: Good evening!

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good evening!	eyvaara Khosh
<b>Civilian:</b>	Good evening.	eyvaara Khosh

Use the following phrase when taking leave for the night.

### Exchange #7: Good night.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good night.	shav Khosh
<b>Civilian:</b>	Good night.	shav Khosh

Inquiring about the other person's well-being is also appropriate and highly appreciated.

**Exchange #8: How are you?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Good afternoon!	paashneevro Khosh
<b>Civilian:</b>	Good afternoon.	paashneevro Khosh
<b>Soldier:</b>	How are you?	cho waanee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Fine, thank you.	baashem soopaas

### Male-Female Relationships

You will see that men and women mingle in public places, but, if you are a male, you should converse only with the males. Do not attempt to shake a woman's hand. You should try to avoid talking to women unless you are a female yourself.

As a rule, if you need to ask a question or speak to a group of people, it is advisable that you deal with the men. Interacting with Kurdish men requires certain protocol. For example, do not ask a Kurdish man about his female relatives: wife, mother, or daughter. This is considered particularly impolite. It is okay, however, to ask "How is your family?"



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Women accompanied by a male relative

What's more, men and women do not show affection in public. If you observe a male and female kissing each other on the cheek in public, they are probably close family members who are greeting each other. In large cities, men and women will walk side-by-side, but they will not hold hands. In rural areas, the woman walks behind the man. It is acceptable to greet children by rubbing their heads.

If you are a male, do not summon women at all, unless it is a matter of life or death. If possible, all interactions between Kurdish women and male soldiers should go through a male intermediary who is related to the woman.

### Hospitality

For Kurds, social ties and relationships are especially important. Kurds willingly show hospitality to strangers and foreigners, even during the harshest of times. Visitors are warmly welcomed into their home and are offered the best that the family has to give. If you cannot accept an invitation, decline politely.

When you visit a Kurdish friend, you do not need to call first; you will always be welcome. Do not bring alcohol or flowers for the family; in fact you are not expected to bring anything, but it would be a nice gesture to bring fruit or a dessert. Alternatively, you could bring your host a specialty from the area where you live. For example, people from the country will often bring produce to their friends in the city.

When you greet the family in their home, you may shake hands with the man and greet the woman verbally. It would be best to visit only when the husband is at home.

When you are visiting, you should avoid talking about religion or politics. You can talk about history or things in general. Do not focus your conversation on the women in the house. You should also not try to help the women carry objects or assist them with any kind work.

**Exchange #9:** I appreciate your hospitality.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I really appreciate your hospitality.	az braastee soopaasyaa mih-vaandaareeya tadm
<b>Civilian:</b>	You're welcome.	sar chaavaa

If you are invited to the home of a Kurdish family, you should expect to be treated as an honored guest, and offered both food and drink. Do not expect alcohol. When offered tea, it is considered impolite to refuse the first cup or glass, or to ask for sugar or milk. Just drink it as it is. You will be offered more; at that time, it is okay to ask for something else.

**Exchange #10:** I'd like a cup of coffee, please.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I'd like a cup of coffee, please.	min koopak qah-we devet beyzaHmat
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

When the meal is served, it is usually laid on a *sifra* (tablecloth) directly on the floor.

**Exchange #11:** You may sit here.

<b>Soldier:</b>	You may sit here.	fermoo ilveree reena Khaaree
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Thank you.</b>	soopaas

In addition to large amounts of food, your host will bring plates, spoons, and jugs of water. He will say *farmo*, meaning "Please, help yourself!" and will probably repeat this several times.

As a guest it is considered good manners to appear to eat as much as you can. Traditionally, your host will keep insisting you eat more, even complaining that you haven't eaten enough. Once you have eaten enough to convince your host that the food is to your liking, it is okay to say you do not want more food.



DoD image  
Woman cooking over a fire

**Exchange #12:** The meal was very good.

<b>Soldier:</b>	The meal was very good.	Khwarnekaa galek baazhbee
<b>Civilian:</b>	Thank you.	soopaas

If you need to use the facilities, do not be shy about asking where they are located.

### Exchange #13: May I use your bathroom?

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I use your bathroom?	az dishem dastaava ta bikaarbeenam
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes, it is over there.	baasha

### Sharing Food and Giving Gifts

Another example of the hospitality the Kurds inevitably demonstrate is their insistence on sharing food. Do not be surprised if Kurdish colleagues bring food or candy to the work place and offer it to you. It is better to accept a small amount graciously and with thanks than not to accept at all.

You should always say *soopaas* (thank you) afterwards. People may also show their friendship by bringing you gifts.

### Indecent Language

Remember that many Kurds have lived in English-speaking countries or have relatives there, and may understand quite a lot of English. Many Kurds, especially the younger generation, have also seen enough American movies to understand English obscenities. Obscene language is offensive to Muslims and all Kurds, so go out of your way to avoid obscenities, especially in stressful situations. Doing so will improve your chances of success.



DoD image  
Two men

### Interactions with Dogs

Americans tend to love dogs and want to pet them when they see them roaming on the streets. Kurds consider dogs dirty and unsafe, although they do understand the need for search dogs and accept them as part of searches conducted by the military or the police.

### The Evil Eye

Every culture has its own superstitions. In Kurdish culture there is a popular belief that one should not admire or compliment children unless you qualify that admiration with the expression “May God protect him/her.” The reasoning is that by calling attention to the fine features of a child, you are alerting evil forces that will then come to harm the child.<sup>49</sup>

### Vendettas and Honor Killings

The concept of vendetta is still prevalent in the Kurdish region.<sup>50</sup> The traditional vendetta-style, an-eye-for-an-eye approach is further complicated by tensions between Arabs and Kurds. In many instances Arabs from the desert regions were moved into Kurdish territories and given homes that had been taken away from the oppressed Kurds. With the Kurdish autonomous government now in power in Northern Iraq, many of the

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.turkeytravelplanner.com/TravelDetails/NazarBonjuk/index.html>

<sup>50</sup> [http://aanf.org/midwest/mar2003/ethnic\\_time.htm](http://aanf.org/midwest/mar2003/ethnic_time.htm)

Arab “occupiers” find themselves in a precarious situation. Most Kurds were also forced to leave their homes and lands in the region of Mosul and Kirkuk, which is rich in oil. Now many Kurds want to get those lands back. Disputes such as these and the resulting revenge killings are problems that are likely to continue to plague the region.<sup>51</sup>

So-called “honor killings” have not ceased either. In these situations a father or brother finds it necessary to kill a female family member in the name of guarding the family’s honor.<sup>52</sup> Women may be killed after they get raped, or for something as trivial as wearing a pair of blue jeans.<sup>53</sup> Women’s organizations have been protesting such killings, but to no avail.<sup>54</sup> The *Kurdish Women Action against Honor Killings*<sup>55</sup> organization, established in 2000, has publicized many cases of these slayings, and is seeking international support in stopping the practice. Their slogan is: “No Honor in Killing!” The organization is fighting hard to stop the rape and murder of innocent women and is calling for the killers and rapists to be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

### Female Genital Mutilation

A recent study undertaken by a German non-governmental organization in northern Iraq has revealed that the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is much more widespread among Kurds than previously thought. Approximately 60-70 % of females in some areas have undergone this painful process when they were children.<sup>56</sup> FGM involves removing all or parts of the female genitals, and this is typically done when a girl is between three and eight years old. Since the procedure is undertaken by laypeople with improper tools and under unsanitary conditions, the risk of infection and resulting complications is extremely high. Kurdish leaders have begun calling for an end to this practice, yet many Kurds believe uncut women to be unfaithful and unclean, and thus unfit to be married. It is important to note that this is a cultural tradition, not a religious convention called for by Islam.

### Celebrations

Along with religious festivals, Kurds celebrate non-religious festivals and social events such as weddings and *Nawroz*.

#### *Nawroz*

*Nawroz*, or “New Dawn,”<sup>57</sup> is the Kurdish national day. It coincides with the first day of spring, which is also the first day of the Kurdish calendar year. In Iranian Kurdistan, government offices are closed for one week, and schools are closed for two weeks. In Iraqi



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Celebrating Nawroz

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.kurdmedia.com/articles.asp?id=7254>

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.kurdmedia.com/articles.asp?id=11410>

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.kwahk.org/articles.asp?type=News>

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.kwahk.org/articles.asp?type=News>

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.kwahk.org/articles.asp?type=News>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0810/p06s01-woiq.html>

<sup>57</sup> <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/9CF470CC-B29E-41DA-8267-A3E114122A31.htm>



Kurdistan government institutions are closed for just one day. *Nawroz* is not recognized as a public holiday in Turkey and Syria. No matter where they live, Kurdish people observe *Nawroz* festivities with great enthusiasm.

**Exchange #14:** Will you celebrate the festival next week?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will you celebrate the festival next week?	aaya todey ahangey key hafteya beyt?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

On this occasion Kurdish people celebrate by lighting fires, which symbolize light and new life. People wear colorful clothes as an expression of happiness and joy and they gather to have elaborate picnics, with singing and dancing. The best food available is served.<sup>58</sup> On the eve of *Nawroz*, Kurdish families make special preparations. They decorate their homes and wear new clothing.

**Exchange #15:** Will you join us for the feast?

<b>Civilian:</b>	Will you join us for the feast?	too dey bshegdareeya jazhney key ilgalma?
<b>Soldier:</b>	Yes. Thank you.	bali soopaas

## Weddings

Marriage in Kurdish society requires the approval of both sets of parents. However, there are differences in the way the marriage is conducted, depending on whether you are in the country or the city. In rural areas the father of the bride asks for money (a dowry) from the groom's family in return for giving them his daughter. In the cities such a request is not usually made.

Once both sides have reached agreement, a date is set for the engagement. Later, parents from both sides sit together and arrange the wedding date. Relatives and friends are invited to attend. Wedding festivities in the villages sometimes last up to three days, but in the cities celebrations usually last only one day. Marriages are extremely expensive and the groom's father is required to cover all costs.

Should you ever attend a Kurdish wedding, do not participate in the dancing unless you are invited. Some people may not appreciate you, a stranger, dancing with their wives and daughters.

**Exchange #16:** *I wish you both much happiness.*

<b>Soldier:</b>	I wish you both much happiness.	heeveeya Khoshye bo wa hardookaa Khaazem
<b>Civilian:</b>	Thank you.	soopaas

<sup>58</sup> [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/kurdish\\_refugees.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/kurdish_refugees.htm)



Firing guns into the air at weddings has become very rare in the Kurdish region, but it may still occur in some rural areas. Remember that it is a way of expressing joy; it is part of the celebration and not hostile fire. The groom's family will usually be the ones doing the shooting.<sup>59</sup>

**Exchange #17:** Congratulations on your marriage.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Congratulations on your marriage.	zhen eenaana ta peeroz bet
<b>Civilian:</b>	Thank you.	soopaas

## Funerals

Islamic law requires burial the same day as death. Funeral services for men are held at the mosque; services for women are at home, but men carry the open coffin on their shoulders in a funereal procession to the graveyard. The family then stays home from work and receives friends and family members who come to show love and respect. On the third day, the family and friends visit the grave of the loved one at the cemetery.

On the death of a loved one, Kurdish women typically cry out, hit their chest with their hands, and pull at their hair. The magnitude of the loss also is demonstrated by the length of time mourning dress is worn: up to three years for a youth, three months for an older person.

**Exchange #18:** I would like to offer my condolences.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like to offer my condolences to you and your family.	sera Khoshye il taw Kheyzaana tadm
<b>Civilian:</b>	Thank you.	soopaas

Should you see a funeral procession, stop and let it pass unhindered. Stopping a funeral procession—even at a checkpoint—would be a great affront. Bystanders will salute to show respect for the dead and the mourners as the procession passes by placing right hands over hearts. During the actual burial ceremony, one should also step aside and show respect.

## Dress Codes for Kurds

The Kurdish national attire for men consists of balloon-legged pants and loose fitting shirts and jackets. A large band is worn around the waist that serves both as design and as back support for farm workers. The colors used are traditionally brown or gray, or occasionally white.

These traditional garments are usually worn by older men and more commonly by men living in the rural areas. In Kurdish cities both traditional and western-style clothing are worn. Most business people wear suits and young people wear blue jeans. Students and government employees most often wear western attire.

<sup>59</sup> <http://issues.families.com/kurdish-families-1008-1013-iemf>

Women wear long dresses, but those working on the farms wear clothing similar to that of men. When working at home, they wear house-dresses and many wear head scarves. Women wear veils at religious places and at funerals.<sup>60</sup>

Most children wear clothes that are similar to those worn by American children, but some may still follow the traditional style and wear balloon-legged pants.

### **Dress Codes for non-Kurds**

If you are a male soldier, do not wear shorts in public and always keep your shirt on, no matter how hot and humid it is. When wearing T-shirts, do not wear those with graphics that may be considered offensive. Take off your shoes or boots before entering a mosque, except in an emergency situation or during a military operation.

Female soldiers should not wear shorts or short skirts anywhere. Do not wear short-sleeved shirts or blouses in public, however, a short sleeved uniform may be worn in accordance with command regulations. Remember that Kurds in general respect modesty. Remove your shoes/boots and cover your head before entering a mosque.

### **Exchange #19: How should I dress?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	How should I dress?	chi jilkaa ilbar Kho bikam?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Just be casual.</b>	har i'tiyaadee ba

### **Do's and Don'ts**

#### **Do's**

- To call a person to you, use your entire right hand only, and wave inward.
- If you are visiting Kurds and sit on the floor, show respect by sitting with your feet flat on the ground, or tucked under you.

#### **Don'ts**

- Do not show the bottoms of your shoes or the soles of your feet to people, this is considered an insult. Do not sit with your legs extended in front of you.
- Do not use the “Western” way of beckoning someone with one finger. This gesture is used for calling animals, and beckoning a human in this manner is considered very rude.
- Do not wink at Kurdish women if you are a male.
- Do not summon or shake hands with a Kurdish woman if you are a male.

<sup>60</sup> <http://char.txa.cornell.edu/treasures/turkey.html>

- Do not keep your hands in your pockets when you are standing and talking to someone.
- Do not use the “A-OK” sign as it may be misinterpreted as an obscene gesture by some Kurds.
- Do not use the “thumbs up” sign, which is also considered obscene.
- Do not cross your legs while you are sitting, as this is considered rude in Kurdish society.

## URBAN LIFE

### Health Issues

It is difficult to surmise the health situation of the Kurds as it is different in each country they live in. Overall, the best health care within the Kurdish region is offered to the Iraqi Kurds. In Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Armenia, the Kurdish population is presented with healthcare difficulties in some form or another.



DoD image  
Elderly woman at a clinic

About 50% of all Kurds live in Turkey, where they represent the largest non-Turkish ethnic minority. In light of Turkey's efforts to become a member of the European Union (EU), it could be expected that the Kurds be given the same rights and privileges as other citizens in Turkey, including health care. However, most reports claim otherwise.<sup>61</sup> The Turkish government continues to persecute not only members of Kurdish political parties, but also people supporting Kurdish national identity or even working in Kurdish areas (including medical personnel). This is one of the factors that have put a hold on Turkey's acceptance into the European Union.<sup>62</sup>

The Iranian government provides free health care to those who work for the government, including military personnel. Kurds do not have that privilege and must pay for their own health insurance, an expense that is often out of their reach. Moreover there are few health care facilities in the Kurdish regions of Iran, and Kurds have very limited access to them. Serious illness often forces them to travel to Tehran or other large cities for medical treatment.<sup>63</sup>

### Exchange #20 : Can I see a doctor here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I see a doctor here?	az dishem diktorey bibeenam?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

Northern Iraq has the most visible of the Kurdish health system. Here, coalition forces have laid the groundwork to develop a centralized health-care system by enforcing the no-fly zone and giving support to the Kurdish minority. Partnerships have been established to help the poorest regions, and although the war has slowed down these efforts, results clearly show that there is promise for well-developed health care. There are small health care facilities and some district hospitals in this region of Iraq. Some villages also have paramedics, but with limited facilities.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.aas.net/EU/>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-91887>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/~ghobad/kurds3.html>

Infant and maternal mortality rates are difficult to calculate since over half of all births take place at home and there is no systematic requirement for registration of live births. As far as children's health is concerned, as many as 20% of the children are malnourished; however, government programs have been established to reduce these figures. Diarrhea is still a major problem that causes the deaths of many children. Diseases that cause diarrhea can be traced to sanitation problems in most cases.

Land mines have been a constant problem in the region for quite some time. Local and international organizations have been hard at work, deactivating almost a million landmines since 2003. Mine Risk Education classes have been introduced in many areas while mine clearing operations continue to make Iraq a safer place for all.<sup>64</sup>

Massive post-traumatic stress syndrome—caused by the terrors of biological and chemical weapons unleashed on the Kurds by the Saddam Hussein regime—still affects many of the survivors and their families.<sup>65</sup>

When traveling to a Kurdish region, it is important to have your immunization records current. Although immunization is widespread, there are concerns about the available quantity and quality of pharmaceutical supplies, particularly those provided by local distributors. Tuberculosis is not yet under control, and typhoid and cholera remain a problem due to food and water contamination. Malaria is also prevalent. As a precaution, you should drink bottled water only and avoid eating dairy products.



DoD image  
Girl fetching water from a river

#### **Exchange #21: Seeking Medical Attention**

<b>Soldier:</b>	I am sick.	az naKhoosham
<b>Civilian:</b>	I will help you.	az dey haareekaareeya tadkam

There are certain customs that are followed when visiting a health care center. If the doctor is a male, female patients must be treated in the presence of a male family member. When the doctor is female, there is no need for related males to be present.

#### **Employment**

It is still very difficult for the majority of the Kurds to get good jobs in the region, except in Northern Iraq, which has become a haven for them, especially since the establishment of the Kurdish Autonomous Region.

Historically, women have had very little role to play outside the home, but organizations of Kurdish women such as the Kurdistan Women Union (KWU) have been trying hard to

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/iraq>

<sup>65</sup> [http://www.etsu.edu/kellogg/the\\_other\\_Iraq.pdf](http://www.etsu.edu/kellogg/the_other_Iraq.pdf)

change that. The KWU was founded in 1952 and many women have actively fought for its goals, which include not only equal rights for women, but a free Kurdistan.

## Education

In the Kurdish region of Iraq, there are two major universities: the University of Sulaymaniyah and the University of Salahaddin. There are also universities in Dohuk and Koye. The universities are government funded and there is no tuition. However, there are some private colleges where tuition is required. Most of the students of private colleges attend in the evening. All Kurdish children have the opportunity to attend school. Students can enroll in vocational training or college preparation courses. By law, all children must attend school through the sixth grade. After mandatory education, parents are responsible for sending their children to middle school. Middle school lasts three years in Iraq and Syria, and two years in Iran and Turkey. Students who are on the college track continue with high school. Those who choose not to attend high school typically join the military. During the Saddam Hussein era, military service was mandatory, but today, it is voluntary.<sup>66</sup>

## Traffic

Because city populations continue to grow and new roads are not being built, there are frequent traffic jams in the cities. It is advisable to find out beforehand which roads experience the heaviest traffic. You should also ask for directions from locals in order to avoid being stuck in one of the frequent traffic jams.

### Exchange #22: Which direction to the airport?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Which direction to the airport?	keesh laa bofroka Khaaney cheet?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>That way.</b>	avlaaya

### Exchange #23: Is there a train station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a train station nearby?	aayaa bingahey shemendafarey neyzeekke verree heya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>No.</b>	naKheyr

Even though the streets are wide in most Kurdish-populated cities, they are invariably choked with traffic. Most city-dwellers have American, Japanese or German cars. Should you be stuck in traffic, politely ask other drivers to let you pass.

Traffic rules and regulations are widely ignored in Iraqi Kurdistan. This behavior was inherited from the Ba'ath regime, whose law enforcement officials regularly violated the rules. Ordinary people followed their example. However, driving habits are improving, but greater efforts are still needed to make the streets reasonably safe. The following exchanges will help you locate a gas station or a mechanic should the need arise.

<sup>66</sup> <http://www.4icu.org/reviews/2312.htm>

**Exchange #24:** Is there a gas station nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a gas station nearby?	paanzeenKhaanek neyzeek heya ilveree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes.</b>	bali

**Exchange #25:** Is there a auto mechanic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?	chi feeta teret baash il nezeekkey verree hena?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes.</b>	bali

### Transportation

To avoid driving in heavy traffic, traveling by bus is an excellent alternative. The traveler just boards the bus and takes a seat. Someone will come by to collect the fare. Locals will be happy to help you find the bus station and to provide you with information about the bus schedule.

**Exchange #26:** Where can I catch the bus?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where can I catch the bus?	il keeva az dishem ilpaasee siyarbam
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Over there.</b>	il weyraa ha

**Exchange #27:** Will the bus be here soon?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Will the bus be here soon?	paas zee degahat verree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes.</b>	bali

Taxi drivers in Kurdish cities operate as independent businesses. If you need a cab, you should ask a local contact, if possible, to find you a reliable driver.

**Exchange #28:** Can I get a cab around here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can I get a cab around here?	aayaa az dishem takseeeye bigram ilveree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes.</b>	bali

They will show you where to hire these drivers.

**Exchange #30: Can you take me there?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me there?	toodshey min bibee weree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes, I can. Follow me.</b>	bali dishem ildeev min wara

It is not expensive to hire a taxi, and you can negotiate acceptable fares. Be sure to have local currency on hand as cab drivers will not usually accept foreign currency.

**Exchange #29: Do you accept US currency?**

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you accept US currency?	paaret amreekee war degree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	No, we only accept dinars.	naKheyr am bas deenaara wardegrin

**Daily Life of Urban Dwellers**

Sulaymaniyah, one of the three northern provinces in Iraq with the highest Kurdish population in the region, is like a Phoenix rising from its ashes. Years of no-fly-zone protection, followed by the ousting of Saddam Hussein, have enabled Sulaymaniyah to flourish as a kind of oasis. It is an open city with busy markets, which sell electronic equipment and other consumer goods from every corner of the globe. All-night stores even sell whisky and French colognes.<sup>67</sup>

After Iraq's regime change in 2003, tourism began to boom in the tranquil Kurdish areas of Northern Iraq. Kebab stalls and tea shops are popular in most cities. At tea shops people play backgammon, dominoes, and chess, all popular pastimes in Kurdistan. People can also watch television there and talk about social and political issues. Tea shops often attract large crowds of people and most visitors come after work and in the evenings.

The local tea shop is an excellent place to interact with Kurdish people and build relationships. In many communities the tea house serves as both social and information center for local residents.

**Exchange #31: Asking for a Phone Number**

<b>Soldier:</b>	What is your phone number?	zhmaaraa telefona ta chanda?
<b>Civilian:</b>	My phone number is 2435477	zhmaaraa talafona min doo sey yek chaar pent chaar haft haft

In the Kurdish area of Iraq, mobile telephones have become a popular item. Even children use them. The Asia Mobile Company has introduced a new mobile system in the Kurdistan region the GSM-GPRS. Subscribers benefit from a range of new services much like those offered to European users.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup>[http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research\\_topics/research\\_topics\\_show.htm?doc\\_id=184335&attrib\\_id=7511](http://www.defenddemocracy.org/research_topics/research_topics_show.htm?doc_id=184335&attrib_id=7511)

<sup>68</sup> <http://home.cogeco.ca/~konuche/24-7-03-asia-mobile-in-kurdistan.html>



**Exchange #32: Requesting Permission to Use a Phone**

<b>Soldier:</b>	May I use your telephone?	az dishem telefonaa ta bkaar beenam?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

There are at least a dozen newspapers, magazines, and radio and television media that serve the region.

Urban areas always attract people that are down on their luck. You will probably be approached by a beggar asking for money from you.

**Exchange #33: Give me money.**

<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Give me money.</b>	paaraa bidamin?
<b>Soldier:</b>	<b>No, I don't have any.</b>	na min paara naman

**Favorite Pastimes**

Kurds enjoy picnics with spreads of food and drink accompanied by music, singing and dancing. Movies are also a favorite pastime.<sup>69</sup>

**Food and Drink**

Traditionally, meals consist of chicken, lamb, goat, mutton, or beef prepared in a pilaf or stew. The Kurds do not eat pork, so do not ask for it or serve it to Kurdish guests. Rice and *bulghur*—a staple food made of wheat—are always popular side dishes.

*Dolma*, a common Mediterranean dish, is popular in the Kurdish region. It consists of a mixture of rice, meat, and vegetables wrapped in grape leaves or cabbage. Squash, cucumbers, tomatoes, and parsley

are frequently used as well. Cumin and garlic are ubiquitous in meals, and occasionally hot pepper is also used in cooking. Roast chicken and chicken *tikka*, pieces of meat skewered and cooked over an open flame, are favorite restaurant dishes.<sup>70</sup>



© Rahel Hawez  
Kabobs

Kurds consume large amounts of tea. They drink their tea hot and sweet, sometimes sweetened even more by a sugar cube held under the tongue. Ritual tea drinking involves using small, thin glasses of tea, held by the edges. Do not drink the local water; bottled water is safer.

**Restaurants**

When you enter a Kurdish restaurant, seat yourself.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/kreset.html>

<sup>70</sup> [http://www.boston.com/yourlife/health/other/articles/2006/02/01/for\\_kurds\\_chickens](http://www.boston.com/yourlife/health/other/articles/2006/02/01/for_kurds_chickens)

**Exchange #34:** Are you still serving?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you still serving?	Khazmetaa wa bardewaama?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

You may sit at a table by yourself, but do not be surprised if a stranger joins you when the restaurant is crowded. There are no menus; you simply need to ask what is being served for that day.

**Exchange #35:** I'd like some soup.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I'd like some soup.	min peechak soop devet
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

The food is usually safe in restaurants in the cities, but you should avoid eating at restaurants on the highways. They are not inspected, so the food there may not be fresh. There are no restaurants in villages, but you may be invited to eat in a home. Typical food offered at Kurdish homes and restaurants include rice, various vegetables, goat, lamb, and beef.

**Exchange #36:** Would you like dessert?

<b>Civilian:</b>	Would you like dessert?	tooHash sheernyekee?
<b>Soldier:</b>	Yes, thank you.	bali, soopaas

**Exchange #37:** I would like a bottle of water.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I would like a bottle of water.	min bitlak aavey devet
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

When asking for the bill, remember that gratuity is not included, but tips are appreciated.

**Exchange #38:** Can you give me my bill?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you give me my bill?	toodshey Hisaabey boomin beenee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	bali

If you are at the restaurant with a Kurdish friend, it would be a nice gesture to offer to pay for the meal.

**Exchange #39:** I will pay for all the meals.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I will pay for all the meals.	az dey paarey hamee Khwaarney dam
<b>Civilian:</b>	Okay.	baasha

**Markets**

Urban markets and bazaars in the Kurdish region are booming following the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime. New roads, uninterrupted food supplies and water have allowed many of the market places to flourish. Shops sell refrigerators from Turkey,

different kinds of soap from Syria, and potato chips from Europe.<sup>71</sup> In most cities bazaars are open every day. In Turkey, there are permanent bazaars, but in Iraq, bazaars are set up in a different section of town every week.

**Exchange #40:** How much longer will you be here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How much longer will you be here?	chand demey dee ilveree demeenee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Three more hours.</b>	sey sa'atet dee

You can find anything and everything in a bazaar, from needles to cars.

**Exchange #41:** Do you have this in a different color?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have this in a different color?	ta ava heya zherangakey dee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes.</b>	bali

To pay for the items you purchase, you must use the country's currency.

**Exchange #42:** How much is it?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How much?	chanda?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Five dinars.</b>	pench deenaara

Credit cards are not accepted even at large hotels. However, there are a few cities in Turkey where it is possible to use credit cards.

**Exchange #43:** Can you give me change for this?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you give me change for this?	toodshey baakiyaa vey bidey min?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>No.</b>	naKheyr

### Street Vendors

Kurds are very concerned about cleanliness, but you should still be cautious about buying food from street vendors that you or your colleagues do not know. The food may not be fresh or clean and may or could cause food poisoning. Additionally, their prices are usually high, and the quality of the products may be questionable.

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.worth.com/Editorial/Wealth-Management/Investment-Risk-Management/World-MarketPlace-Kurdistsans-Revival-3.asp>

**Exchange #44:** Buy something from me.

<b>Civilian:</b>	Buy something from me.	hindak tishtaa-zhmin bikra?
<b>Soldier:</b>	<b>No. Not today.</b>	na. na-avro

It is better to buy from a regular store, although it is safe to purchase some items such as cigarettes from a street vendor.

**Exchange #45:** Shopping for Certain Items

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you have any more of these?	taheshtaa zhvey hena?
<b>Civilian:</b>	<b>Yes, over here.</b>	bali ilveree na

Not only is it acceptable to bargain with a vendor for a better price, it is expected. However, do not bargain if you have no intent to buy. It is also acceptable to touch the wares.

**Exchange #46:** While Shopping

<b>Soldier:</b>	I like this.	min ava devet
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

**Exchange #47:** I can give you this much money.

<b>Soldier:</b>	I can give you this much money for this.	az dishem vaan paara bidama ta bovey
<b>Civilian:</b>	No.	naKheyr

## RURAL LIFE

### Tribal Distribution

Kurds are Sunni Muslims and, although they are a non-Arab ethnic group, their tribal system is similar to that of the Arab nations around them. The most powerful unit in Kurdish society is the extended family or tribe. Throughout the history of the region, tribal leaders wielded immense power. Federations of tribal sheikhs, who had the popular support of their families, frequently demonstrated that they had more power than government forces.



DoD image  
Kurdish men

The structure of tribal groups has been affected by centuries of foreign occupation and political instability. Long-extant tribes were separated by ever-changing borders. The enforcement of national boundaries after World War 1 impeded the seasonal migrations of flocks, forcing many Kurds to abandon traditional ways of village life and farming to take up non-traditional employment.<sup>72</sup>

Tribes, whether nomadic or newly-urban, are led by the most respected elders.<sup>73</sup> Saddam Hussein's regime persecuted Kurdish tribes and clans; leaders were arrested, jailed or even killed if suspected of posing any threat to the regime. The government forcibly relocated influential Iraqi tribes with large populations to Kurdish regions to weaken the Kurdish tribes and banned the use of tribal names as family names. Kurds were told they owed their allegiance to the State and its President, rather than to tribal leaders. Many Kurds chose to flee these conditions and settled in refugee camps for lack of better solutions. The flight is still happening as Kurds escape homes in Arab-majority Iraqi cities in fear of ethnic-centered attacks and other violence. Some refugee camps also exist in other countries, most notably in northern Iran, where Kurds fled to escape Saddam and the subsequent turmoil of the coalition invasion.

As Kurdish history goes back millennia, tribal and clan names can be traced back for centuries as well. Some of the biggest Kurdish tribes include the Jalaali, Milaan, Haydaraanlu, Arasbaaran, Auko, Diza, Surti, Beaajalaan, Telya, Aruk, Zirika, and Judikaanli.<sup>74</sup>

### Tribal Militias

The Kurdish region was a battleground in 1997, when tribal militias supporting the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) fought against those supporting the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In addition, there were attacks by the Turkish Kurd terrorist

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<sup>72</sup> <http://www.knn.u-net.com/kurd.htm>

<sup>73</sup> [http://public.afosi.af.mil/deployment\\_stress/iraq/people-social.html](http://public.afosi.af.mil/deployment_stress/iraq/people-social.html)

<sup>74</sup> [http://www.iranica.com/articles/ot\\_grp5/ot\\_kurdish\\_tribes\\_20040616.html](http://www.iranica.com/articles/ot_grp5/ot_kurdish_tribes_20040616.html)

organization, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). As a result, there were many deaths among the villagers who supported the KDP.<sup>75</sup>

**Exchange #48:** Did these people threaten you?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did these people threaten you?	av Khalka tah-deedaa tadken?
<b>Civilian:</b>	No.	naKheyr

By June 2004, most of the tribal militias had agreed to disarm. Their members joined the state-controlled security services or returned to civilian life. The PUK and the KDP together consisted of approximately 75,000 fighters, which are known as *peshmerga* (“those who face death”). These were the same fighters that resisted the regime of Saddam Hussein. Now, it is estimated that about half of the *peshmerga* have joined the national army or police forces, while the others joined the Kurdish-controlled regional forces<sup>76</sup>, which are under the command of the Kurdish regional government that controls northern Iraq.



DoD image  
Peshmerga fighter

**Rural Economy**

Throughout the Kurdish region, life has centered on herding and farming throughout history. Agricultural products include wheat, barley, rice, vegetables, dates, and cotton. Traditionally, the most important animals in the rural economy are sheep, cows and to lesser extent, goats, poultry, and pack animals.<sup>77</sup> Their products are used mainly in domestic markets. Raising sheep is an expanding local business and mutton and wool are also gaining acceptance as an export commodity. Raising cattle is becoming more popular as well as it further strengthens the local economy.

**Exchange #49:** Do you own this land?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you own this land?	av 'arda ye teya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

The main industries of the Kurdish rural areas are handicrafts and textiles, mostly for the local markets, although some articles are exported. Traditional Kurdish carpets represent a highly developed art.<sup>78</sup>

Saddam Hussein forced many Kurdish and Turkoman residents out of Kirkuk and settled Arabs in their places. Kirkuk continues to be important to the national aspirations of the Kurds<sup>79</sup>, but is also a center of the Iraqi oil industry. Some of Iraq's most important oil pipelines run through Kurdish territories and these pipelines are often the targets of

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/kdp.htm>

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/english/2005-06-06-voa38.cfm>

<sup>77</sup> <http://factbook.wn.com/Iraq>

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/~siamakr/Kurdish/KURDICA/1999/NOV/carpet2.html>

<sup>79</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/kirkuk.htm>

insurgent attacks. Local shepherds may prove to be an excellent source of information when trying to investigate these attacks.

Smuggling is a social and legal problem in the region, but paradoxically it is an important source of revenue. Opium, from which heroin is produced, is smuggled from Afghanistan through Iran and the Kurdish regions and finally into Turkey for transport to Europe. In the past, smugglers avoided traveling through Iraq because of the enforcement of strict anti-drugs laws. Because of the war and the collapse of security throughout Iraq, new drug routes from Afghanistan through the Kurdish region of Iraq into Jordan have opened up.<sup>80</sup> The PKK has been known to use smuggling to finance its operations.<sup>81</sup>

### Village Life

In general, villagers are typically more conservative than urban dwellers. One should show respect and sensitivity to people's way of life and to their privacy. Kurds tend to be strongly clannish where their social organization is concerned. Families and tribes are organized around a male ancestor. Villages are often identified along extended family lines, which means that people living in the same village are more often than not related to one another. An insult to one member of the village may therefore be taken as an offense to the entire village.<sup>82</sup>

People in villages are often kinder, more hospitable, and more sociable than city dwellers, and will often provide information concerning insurgent activity.

#### Exchange #50: Did you grow up here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Did you grow up here?	too ilveree mazan bee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

#### Exchange #51: Do you know this area?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Do you know this area very well?	toogelek shah-razaay vey jehey?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

Since much of daily life in rural areas is rooted in nomadic traditions that follow seasonal cycles and center on farming and trade, many Kurds celebrate harvest and other annual milestones with special feasts.<sup>83</sup> Many of these ancient rituals have changed and evolved over the years. While strict adherence to religious beliefs is still much stronger in rural regions than in urban environments<sup>84</sup>, many ethnic, religious, tribal, and social contexts are undergoing rapid growth and radical change. The effects of globalization impact traditional ways of living in both rural and urban settings.

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<sup>80</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3752184.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3752184.stm)

<sup>81</sup> <http://embajadausa.org.ve/www1737.html>

<sup>82</sup> [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/kurdish\\_refugees.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/kurdish_refugees.htm)

<sup>83</sup> <http://countrystudies.us/iraq/32.htm>

<sup>84</sup> [http://public.afosi.amc.af.mil/deployment\\_stress/iraq/people-social.html](http://public.afosi.amc.af.mil/deployment_stress/iraq/people-social.html)

## Transportation Issues

In Iraq, the once well-developed transportation infrastructure suffered serious damage during the Gulf War of 1991. Thereafter, primary roads were hastily repaired, but insurgent attacks in 2003 caused further damage to the system. Future attacks may prompt road closings.

### Exchange #52: Is it broken?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is it broken?	aaya shikesteeya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

In 2004 there were about 39,000 km (24,375 mi) of hard-surface roads, many restricted to military and commercial use. In rural Kurdish areas, many transport corridors are rough and unpaved. Roads in mountainous regions are especially perilous and transportation is tenuous, with rivers also prone to seasonal flooding. Some areas may also be mined. Ask a local to point out these hazards.

### Exchange #53: Is this area mined?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this area mined?	meen ilvey jahey hena?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

## Checkpoints

When conducting vehicle check in the Kurdish region, remember to remain polite and to address the males in a group whenever possible.



DoD image  
Vehicle search near Mosul

### Exchange #54: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	neyziktireen Khaalaa ibshkineeny il keeveya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	It's two kilometers.	doo keelometra deera

### Exchange #55: Please step out of the car.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Please step out of the car.	beyzaHmat ilturoombeyle wara Khaarey
<b>Civilian:</b>	OK.	baasha

Do not try to group unrelated males and females together. Searches of Kurdish females should be conducted by female coalition soldiers.

### Exchange #56: Asking for Identification Papers

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is this all the ID you have?	har av haweeya ta hana?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali



**Exchange #57:** Show us the registration.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Show us the (automobile) registration.	sanaweeya turoombeyle neesha mabda
<b>Civilian:</b>	Okay.	baasha

Kurdish men often carry guns for self-protection.

**Exchange #58:** Are you carrying any weapons?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Are you carrying any weapons?	ta chichak heya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

### Health Issues

There are no doctors in the local clinics of the rural areas. Nurses are available in the clinics to treat minor injuries and illnesses. For more urgent needs, patients need to travel to the nearest city hospital.

**Exchange #59:** Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	aaya binkey tandristyeh ilveree heya?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes, over there.	bali ilvereeya

Some stores may sell herbal remedies for such ailments as stomach problems or mild burns. There are not many traditional healers in rural Kurdish society, but some curative healing power is attributed to the *imams*, the leading religious figures. The imams will sometimes fashion amulets with Islamic inscriptions in order to protect children from evil spirits. They also make so-called *basbands*, a larger version of this amulet in a leather pouch, which is to protect travelers and fighters from dangerous situations.<sup>85</sup>

It is customary to employ the assistance of a midwife during child birth. She will be the one who delivers the child, cutting the umbilical cord, then tying the remaining stump with a string. Until this stump falls off, it is kept clean with a crushed seed mixture that must be freshly applied several times a day.<sup>86</sup>

### Available Schooling

Kurdish families typically decide themselves about educating their children. In most cases, rural families want their girls to stay at home to help with the household.<sup>87</sup> Most Kurds are bi-lingual in a Kurdish language and the official language of the country where they live. They must use that language to educate their children, except for in Iraq, as Kurdish became one of the official languages in 2003. Here, the foundation of a Kurdish educational system has been established. Recently the University of Baghdad has even started offering classes in Kurdish Studies.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/kurdish\\_refugees.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/kurdish_refugees.htm) Kurdish Home Remedies

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/keedu.html>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

### Who is in charge?

When you first enter a village, it is a wise idea to ask to visit the person in charge, usually the *agha* (chief), even if your business is not with him. This sign of respect for the chief will ensure better cooperation from all the people in the village.



© Andrea Giudiceandrea  
Kurdish man

### Exchange #60: Does the *agha* live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does the <i>agha</i> live here?	aayaa aaghaa ilveree dezheet?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

If the village chief is unavailable, then ask to see the *mokhtar*. His house is always open to visitors. You will need to inform him about the business you have in the village.

### Exchange #61: Can you take me to the *mokhtar*?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you take me to the <i>mokhtar</i> ?	toodshey min bibee dav mooKhtaaree?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

Villages in the Kurdish region will seldom have proper street names or house numbers, you may have to ask around to find a certain location.

### Exchange #62: Can you please help me?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Can you please help me?	beyzaHmat toodshey haareekaareeya min bikee?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

If you are invited to the house of someone living in the village, you do not need to see the *mokhtar* and you can go directly to the house of your host. Alternately, the village leader may request to talk to your commander.

Should you be required to conduct a search of a village and are asking other villagers about a certain person's whereabouts, remember that most villagers are part of the same tribe or even family. Their loyalties will lie within their social structures. Asking the village chief for assistance from the village chief might prove beneficial.

### Exchange #63: Respected *agha*, we need your assistance.

<b>Soldier:</b>	Respected <i>agha</i> , we need your assistance.	janaa bee aaghaa ma haareekaareeya tadvit?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Sure.	baasha

# FAMILY LIFE

## Family Structure

Family is central to Kurdish life and culture. There is a mutually protective attitude among members of both nuclear and extended families, which gives families cohesion and strength.<sup>89</sup>



DoD image  
Kurdish family

A typical family consists of a husband, a wife, and their children; however, family influence extends far beyond the immediate, nuclear family. The extended family includes not only parents and unmarried children, but also married male children, their wives, and their offspring. Unmarried sisters and brothers of the father may also live with them. Even if the extended family includes more members than the nuclear family, they still live under the same roof.<sup>90</sup> In both urban and rural

settings, it is common for children to stay with their families until they get married. The phenomenon of single mothers is virtually unknown in Kurdish society.

### Exchange #64: How many people live in this house?

<b>Soldier:</b>	How many people live in this house?	chand kas ilvey Khaaney dzheen?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Ten.	da

Sibling bonds are very strong among Kurds, and these ties continue even after a woman's marriage, guaranteeing that she will be well-treated in her husband's household. On the other hand, a tight bond also secures the brother's right to keep all property inherited from the parents. Cousins are usually very close friends, yet any serious disputes that may arise between them are mediated by the elder men in the family. Cousins also often invest in trading activities together. Extended family members are natural choices as business partners as they are more trusted than strangers by virtue of their kinship.

## Gender Roles

When a girl marries, she falls under the watchful eye of her husband's family, particularly the mother-in-law. Women in a man's family, whether urban or rural, are traditionally part of *his* household. The husband is responsible for supporting his family. Kurdish men make all decisions about family matters, but women wield considerable power in running the household.

Differences between life in rural and urban settings have become increasingly blurred with modernization and exposure to Western culture. Women from educated, upper-class

<sup>89</sup> [www.culturalorientation.net](http://www.culturalorientation.net)

<sup>90</sup> <http://issues.families.com/kurdish-families-1008-1013-iemf>

families are granted access to higher education, and they are allowed to pursue their own careers. The relationship between men and women is changing as well. The result of this change can be observed in public places. For example, in cities, men and women may walk side-by-side, unlike their rural counterparts, where the woman would walk behind the man. Furthermore, among rural Muslim Kurds and Yazidis, women are not able to receive inheritances. However, women in urban areas now have the necessary education and employment background to put them in a position to rightfully demand their legal inheritances.<sup>91</sup>

Family and household are extremely private for Kurdish men and they do not discuss family issues in casual conversation or in public discourse. Customs relating to women have derived from that attitude. Throughout the Kurdish region there is a fundamental belief that what matters most are a man's honor and his family. Consequently, protecting women is an absolute in the Islamic faith. This tenet is viewed by both males and females in the family as a gesture of love and respect.<sup>92</sup> Privacy and honor are deeply revered. If violated by another man, retribution and revenge will most likely follow. However, vendettas and honor killings are more entrenched in rural family tradition.

### Searching a house

When trying to secure an area, there might be a need to approach a house and establish contact with the people living there. If it is deemed safe to do so, you may knock on the door and talk to the inhabitants without causing too much concern. In this case the



DoD image  
Mother and children

following exchange will be helpful. It will be much appreciated if you do not barge in on the family, thus avoiding an insult the man's honor.

The next step would be to ask for permission to enter and search the premises. You need to give the head of the family time to inform his wife and children about your intent. Best results are obtained by always being polite and respectful.

### Exchange #65: Does your family live here?

<b>Soldier:</b>	Does your family live here?	Kheyzaana ta ilveree dzheen?
<b>Civilian:</b>	Yes.	bali

### Marriage

Most Kurdish marriages are still arranged, especially in rural areas, while the practice is waning in urban areas. While some rural Kurds are betrothed while they are still infants, couples in cities may choose to marry for romance and love. As with most cultures, rural

<sup>91</sup> <http://issues.families.com/kurdish-families-1008-1013-iemf,3>

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

families are slower to change.<sup>93</sup> Here, intra-village marriages, especially between first cousins, are preferred as they protect communal resources. Polygamy is allowed. Under Islamic law a man may have up to four wives if his economic or political status allows him to properly care for all of them.

It is generally assumed that Kurds marry only Kurds. Moreover, first and second cousins on the father's side are the preferred choices in marriage in order to keep property within the extended family and to strengthen tribal relations. Potential marriage candidates are identified by the mothers and carefully screened for qualities of character, behavior, and family connections. Occasionally, the boy or girl may have a voice in selecting his or her own mate. Sometimes young couples in rural areas attempt to escape the system of marriage arrangements by eloping or by "kidnapping" the bride. While rare, these tactics can lead to serious consequences, such as tribal feuds.

Among the Yazidis, marriage arrangements follow a stricter course. Not only is it forbidden to marry a person that is not a Yazidi, it is also forbidden to marry across certain social categories.

Weddings are important family occasions that are hosted by the groom's family. The family of the bride is paid a dowry, usually in cash and gold, but the bride-price may also include jewelry, household goods, and animals.<sup>94</sup> Alternately, poorer families may agree to trade daughters as wives instead of paying the bride-price.



© Rahel Hawez  
Kurdish wedding celebration

Most Kurdish women do not remarry when their husbands die, but stay with the late husband's family, as do the children. If the children are young, the widow will be obliged to marry her late husband's brother. Should she remarry outside of the family, the children stay with the husband's family without her. A similar custom applies to widowers: If a wife dies with no children or when the children are very young, her family is obliged to offer another wife to the man, usually a younger sister. Both customs ensure the well-being of the children and guarantee that any inheritance will stay within the family.

## **Divorce**

To end an Islamic marriage, the man has only to tell his wife three times that she is free and then papers are filed. After the divorce, there is no further contact between the former husband and wife. The children, unless they are very young, live with their father. After the divorce, it is always more difficult for a woman to remarry.

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<sup>93</sup> <http://www.culturalorientation.net/kurds/ksoc.html>

<sup>94</sup> <http://issues.families.com/kurdish-families-1008-1013-iemf>

## **Birth**

The size of Kurdish families varies. Birth control is frowned upon by Islamic law. Families in the cities usually range from five to six members. In rural areas, it is not unusual to find families of seven to ten members. This is due to the higher need for field labor and to compensate for a high infant mortality rate resulting from the absence of medical facilities and lack of education. Births are a joyous occasion and are celebrated with feasts. However, Kurds do not widely observe subsequent birthdays.

## **Status of Elderly, Children and Young Adults**

Older women in the household are highly respected and assume a great deal of responsibility. Those with more sons are given more status. Overall, elders are shown a great deal of respect in Kurdish culture, in part due to an Islamic tradition that directs children to give their aging parents the same care that they were given when growing up. Nonetheless, Kurds gather around the deathbed of a parent to ask for forgiveness for any transgressions they may have committed.

Children in general are expected to learn the rules which will help maintain the unity of the family structure. Toddlers receive doting care, yet they grow up to understand that their seniors must be obeyed at all times. They will rarely contest a parent's decision. Since sons represent prestige for the family, they are treated more favorably than girls, who are more closely supervised.

An important rite of passage in a young boy's life occurs when he is about six to ten years old. This is when he is circumcised. His family selects a *tirib* from their neighborhood to comfort the boy during the ritual. It is hoped that the two will forge a bond that will last the rest of their lives. Yazidis have a similar custom. They select a Muslim man as *karif* or *kiniv* for the boy, thus forming a blood-brotherhood between the two as well.

## **Naming Conventions**

In Iraq, Kurds have adopted a pattern of taking the father's name as one's middle name. Traditionally, Kurds adopt the paternal grandfather's or great-grandfather's first name as the family name. Others may simply take the tribal or geographical name as the last name. Women keep their name after marriage, but children are named according to their father's lineage.<sup>95</sup>

Kurds living in other countries face some difficulties as some Kurdish sounds do not have equivalent letters in the respective countries.<sup>96</sup> In these cases, they may adopt common names of the respective country in which they live. For example, Kurdish refugees to the United States have started adopting American-styled names at marriage and birth, and some are even going as far as to have their name legally changed.

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<sup>95</sup> [http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles\\_Kemp/kurdish\\_refugees.htm](http://www3.baylor.edu/~Charles_Kemp/kurdish_refugees.htm)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

The names of the older generation of Kurds entail Arabic or Islamic origins, whereas the names of the younger generation are Kurdish. Many of these Kurdish names refer to flowers, plants, rivers and other natural features found in the Kurdish homelands.

Male Kurdish names include Ahamed, Aki, Araas, Awat, Azad, Aziz, Hiwa, Muhamed, Rzgar, Saman, Sherko, and Muhamed. Female Kurdish names include Amana, Arsine, Ahwaz, Fatima, Narmin, Nasrin, Parwin, Rozhin, Shirin, and Sozan.