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IRAQ



Common Country Analysis Iraq

2023



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Common Country Analysis Iraq

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SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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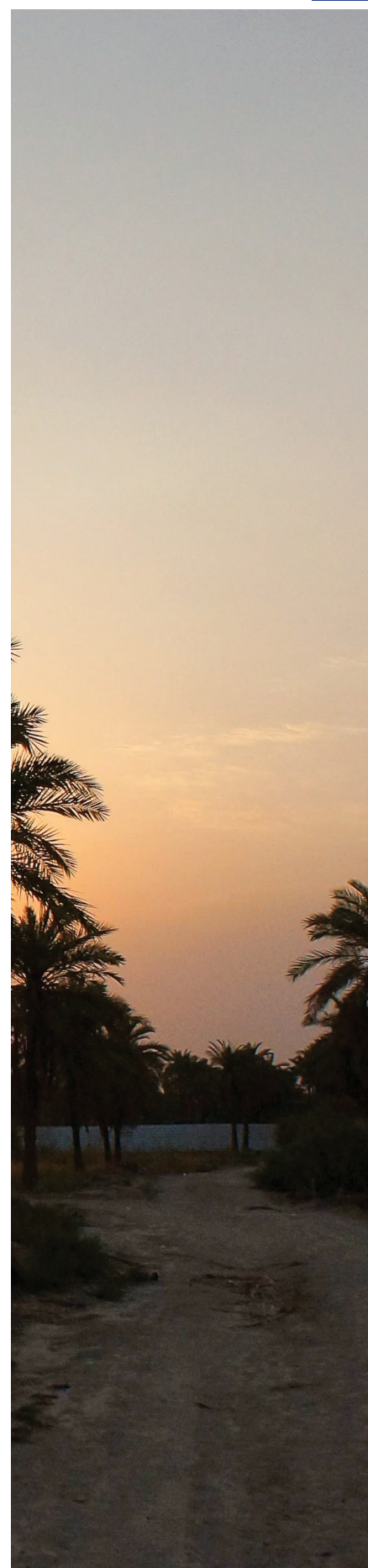


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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CCA	Common Country Analysis
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
CoI	Commission of Integrity
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EO	Explosive Ordnance
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICSO	Iraqi Central Statistical Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IHEC	Iraqi High Electoral Commission
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IQD	Iraqi Dinar (1,400 IQD = USD1)
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (locally known as 'Da'esh)
ITC	International Trade Centre
km ²	Square Kilometre or 250 acres (locally known as a '1,000 donum')
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
kWh	kilowatt hour
MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NCSD	National Committee on Sustainable Development
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
No.	Number
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PCB	PolyChlorinated Biphenyls (a
PMF	Popular Mobilization Forces (locally known as PMCs)
RC	Resident Coordinator
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (as per UNSC Res. 1500)
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (formerly UNDAF)
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USD	US Dollar (USD1 = 1,400 IQD)
WASH	Water and Sanitation Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme

IRAQ AT GLANCE



Population 43.324 Million

50.5% Male 49.5% Female

71% Urban 29% Rural

40% of the population is under the age of 15

Economic indicators

6% Real GDP (percentage change) for 2024

6,909 GDP per capita (US\$) for 2024

107.8 Total government debt (US\$ billion) for 2024

Nutrition

9.9% Stunting in children under 5 (2022)

6.4% Overweight in children under 5 (2022)

Health Indicators

17.8 Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births

46.1 Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births

70.38 years overall Life expectancy with

72.42 for Female and 68.2 for male

Development and Governance Indicators

105th out of 166 countries in SDG Index Rank (2023)

128th out of 193 countries in Human Development Index (2022)

172nd out of 190 countries in Doing Business Index (2020)

154th out of 163 countries in Global Peace Index (2023)

166th out of 170 countries in Women, Peace, and Security Index (2023)

Education

10% of children aged 6-11 are out of school

91% Primary school enrolment

12.2 years Expected years of schooling

Food Security

2.5 million people in acute need of food and livelihood assistance

1.14 million people internally displaced by conflict

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

94.2% of households have access to improved drinking water with only

59.7% access water from safely managed sources

97.4% have basic hygiene access

95.7% have improved sanitation

95.7% have improved sanitation but only 52.7% access it from safely managed sources

Employment

16.5% Unemployment rate with youth Unemployment (14-24) 35.8%

10.6% Female labor force participation (ranking among the lowest in the world)

68% Male labor force participation

36.7% Youth not in education, employment, or training

75% of them are women and adolescent girls

Violence Against Women and Girls

1.32 million people are estimated to be at risk of different forms of GBV with

75% of them are women and adolescent girls

Climate Change

5th most vulnerable country to climate breakdown

105th out of 192 countries in the Notre Dame Climate Change Vulnerability Index

61th out of 163 countries on UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index

Social Protection

40.5% of the population receives some form of social protection

1.4% of individuals with severe disabilities receive disability cash benefits



Executive Summary

Iraq stands at a crossroads; the impact of political unrest and recent violent conflicts have profoundly affected its people, particularly those most vulnerable. Although parliamentary elections were held in 2021 and a new government set out an ambitious reform agenda, the country continues to face many longstanding political, social, economic, and other challenges, including a volatile regional security environment.

Iraq is projected to experience significant demographic growth, with a predicted surge in population from 43 million in 2023 to around 74.5 million by 2050. This rapid growth, especially notable in the 2023-2025 period, positions Iraq among the fastest-growing populations regionally. However, this growth presents considerable challenges, particularly in the areas of social protection and water security, where Iraq is projected to meet only 15 percent of its water needs by 2035. This scarcity risks exacerbating desertification, soil erosion and, consequently, food security, particularly impacting the agricultural sector.

Iraq stands at a critical juncture in its environmental trajectory, grappling with multifaceted challenges exacerbated by the pervasive impact of climate change. The nation's environmental fabric is under strain, with manifestations ranging from recurrent droughts and floods to extreme heat events. Alarming, the UN Environment Programme positions Iraq as the world's fifth most vulnerable country to these climatic changes. Additionally, Iraq is ranked 61st out of 163 countries on UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index, which provides a comprehensive view of children's exposure and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

The Iraqi economy, which is overly dependent on oil, urgently needs diversification to mitigate the risks of fluctuating global oil prices. Expansion and strengthening of the private sector in areas such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services is crucial for creating jobs, particularly for women and the youth.

The labor force participation rate for women is among the lowest worldwide (10.6%, compared to 68% for men). Additionally, the youth unemployment rate is alarmingly high at 35.8 percent, significantly surpassing the adult unemployment rate of 11.2 percent.

The education sector, especially for youth, reveals critical concerns. Despite high primary school enrolment, there is a significant drop in intermediate and higher education levels, exacerbated by gender disparities and practices such as child marriage. Furthermore, unemployment rates, particularly among the youth, remain high, posing a significant challenge to economic growth and stability.

Iraq's housing crisis, characterized by systemic issues such as complex management systems, convoluted land allocation laws, and outdated urban planning, has expanded informal housing and slums. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach, integrating legal, financial, and infrastructural reforms.

The path to sustainable peace and development in Iraq critically depends on rebuilding trust in the rule of law and justice systems, ensuring that everyone, including IDPs and refugees, has access to justice. Parallel legal systems based on tribal codes further undermine the official judiciary, affecting the ability to resolve disputes and enforce the rule of law, with women being particularly disadvantaged by these systems. Addressing these issues is essential for fostering a just, equitable society and laying the foundation for lasting peace and development in Iraq.

Iraq's resilience in the face of continuous shocks is commendable, but the country remains vulnerable to external and internal dynamics, including geopolitical tensions, health emergencies, and economic crises. The current risks are diverse, with the highest from sources like conflict, displacement, and governance challenges.

Vulnerable groups, including women, children, youth, and minorities, face unique challenges that increase the risk of vulnerability. Issues like normalized domestic violence, poor legal awareness, lack of accountability for human rights violations, and high rates of child detention underscore the need for focused interventions.

To address these challenges, Iraq needs robust partnerships between national and international stakeholders, focusing on environmental sustainability, economic diversification, respect for human rights, and social inclusion. Expanding into diverse economic sectors, strengthening small and medium enterprises, transitioning to renewable energy, and addressing gender disparities are key strategies. Moreover, resolving issues between Baghdad and Erbil, and supporting IDPs are vital steps towards a resilient and sustainable Iraq.

2 Introduction

Iraq's journey toward sustainable development is impeded by multifaceted challenges, including prolonged conflicts, political instability, and sectarian tensions. These factors have significantly impacted the nation's infrastructure, institutions, and human capital.

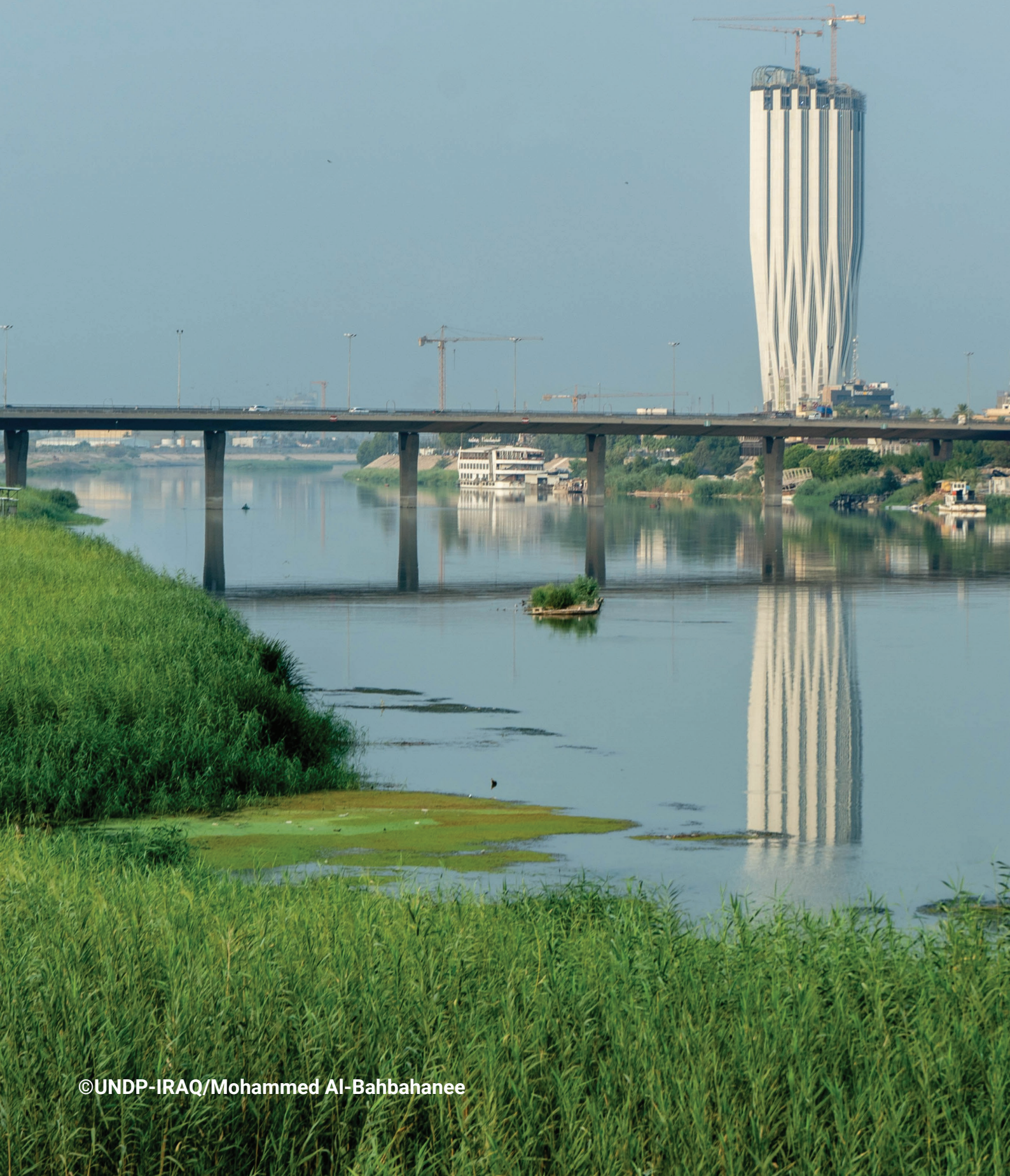
In response to Iraq's request and pursuant to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1500, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) was established in 2003. UNAMI's mandate was further extended in 2007 through UNSC Resolution 1770. Operating under the leadership of the UNAMI Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UN Resident Coordinator, and Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC), the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Iraq integrates 23 UN agencies, funds, and programs. This team commits to assisting Iraq in achieving Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), bringing specialized expertise and evidence-based solutions. Emphasizing the leaving-no-one-behind principle, the UN's efforts in Iraq are tailored to support the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

The UN engagement in Iraq is adaptable to the changing context, particularly since the 2003 military operation, which put an end to Saddam Hussein's regime. On 30 May 2023, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2682 extending UNAMI mandate until 31 May 2024 and requesting that the Secretary-General provide the Security Council, no later than 31 March 2024, with an independent strategic review of UNAMI. The resolution requested an assessment of current threats to Iraq's peace and security and the continued relevance of UNAMI's tasks and priorities as well as recommendations to optimize UNAMI's mandate, mission structure and staffing to support the Government of Iraq (GoI) in addressing the challenges of peace and security. The resolution requested that the review be conducted in consultation with a broad spectrum of stakeholders such as the Iraqi government, UN agencies, member states, regional organizations, independent experts, civil society, and the Government of Kuwait.

In preparation for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2025–2029, the UN in Iraq undertook the 2023 Common Country Analysis (CCA) in collaboration with diverse actors. This forthcoming framework will direct the UN's collective endeavors in development, stabilization, resilience, and peacebuilding in Iraq. The CCA provides a detailed, forward-looking assessment of Iraq's sustainable development landscape, tracking progress towards Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and identifying acceleration opportunities. It also evaluates the situation of vulnerable groups at risk of being overlooked, utilizing the most recent data. The outcomes of the CCA will be instrumental in defining priorities for the new Cooperation Framework in partnership with the Iraqi government and other stakeholders.

The analysis incorporated in the CCA spans six integrated dimensions: poverty reduction, environmental and climate issues, social and human development, economic factors, governance, and partnerships. The CCA also focuses on identifying the most vulnerable and marginalized, examining the causes and effects of their exclusion, and the root causes of fragility and vulnerability. This analysis informs the development of comprehensive, multifaceted responses. However, the challenge of limited recent data necessitated reliance on alternative sources from various entities for a thorough assessment in alignment with the SDGs.

It is recommended that the CCA undergo annual revisions to incorporate new data and adapt to evolving country dynamics. This will ensure that the UN's support in the forthcoming Cooperation Framework is both effective and pertinent.



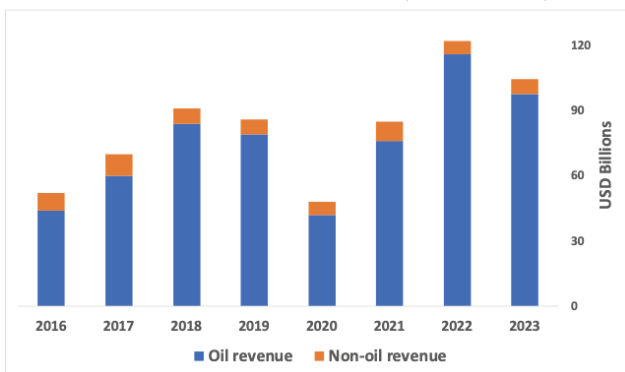
3 Country Context

3.1 Population dynamics

Iraq has grappled with protracted conflicts spanning nearly four decades. These developments have eroded public confidence in state institutions, a sentiment underscored by the recent mass youth protests culminating in early election and a new government. These dynamics attest to an underlying fragility in Iraq's social contract and the pressing need for systemic reforms.

Despite being endowed with significant natural resources,¹ most notably oil, Iraq's economy remains predominantly rentier in nature. Oil revenues alone account for approximately 90 percent of total government revenues,² underlining the nation's excessive dependence on a single commodity. This economic structure, combined with a burgeoning young population, poses both challenges and opportunities for the nation's future.

Figure 1: Government actual revenues (2016 – 2023)



Source: MoF, Iraq.

The demographic landscape of Iraq presents a stark picture. The country is projected to experience a population surge of about 29 million (from 43³ million in 2023 to an estimated 74.5 million by 2050).⁴ Notably, within just two years, from 2023 to 2025, the population is predicted to grow at 2.24 percent, signifying an addition of approximately 2.04 million individuals. This rapid population growth positions Iraq as having one of the fastest-growing populations in its region.⁵

However, it's not just the sheer numbers that are notable; the age distribution further accentuates the potential challenges and prospects. By 2030, adolescents and youth are projected to constitute a substantial 31 percent of the population, numbering approximately 16.4 million individuals.⁶ Such a demographic bulge signifies a vibrant, young workforce in the near future, but it also underscores the mounting pressures on the nation's resources, infrastructure, and employment sectors.

¹ ILO Iraq, Code of Conduct for Fair Recruitment in Iraq

² IMF

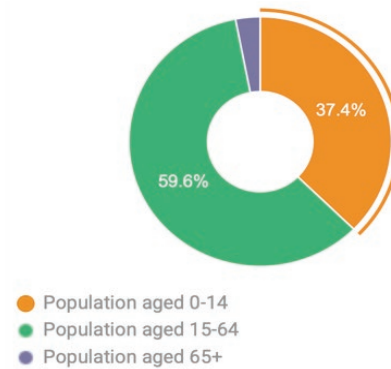
³ UNFPA estimated Iraq's population to be 45 million. However, following correspondence from the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, there was a request to revise this figure to 43 million.

⁴ For the projections of the population in 2050, the source utilized was the DESA Population Estimation Report 2022. [Link 1](#) and [Link 2](#)

⁵ UNICEF Iraq

⁶ UNICEF Iraq

Figure 2: Iraq population, by age group in 2023

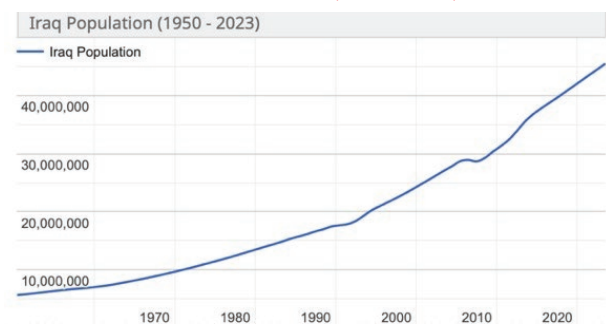


Source: UNFPA / World Population Dashboard.

The dual challenge of a rentier economy and a rapidly expanding young population requires rigorous strategic planning. As the population graph continues its upward arc, the strain on essential services, infrastructure, and resources will undoubtedly amplify. Nevertheless, the gradually decelerating growth rate may provide Iraq with a vital window to instigate reforms, innovate, and address the multifaceted challenges accompanying this growth.

In conclusion, the future trajectory of Iraq hinges on its ability to harness its youthful demographic while diversifying its oil-reliant economy. Proactive strategies and robust policies, rooted in foresight, will be paramount for sustainable development and to secure the well-being of the Iraqi people.

Figure 3: Iraq population growth (1970-2023)⁷



Source: UNFPA.

3.2 Political landscape and development strategies

In the aftermath of the October 2021 parliamentary elections, a year-long political impasse ensued. This period of uncertainty concluded in October 2022 with the election of Abdullatif Rashid as President and Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as Prime Minister (PM). The new government retained the ethno-sectarian power-sharing model in place since 2003 and comprised of political parties representing the Shi'a, Kurdish, and Sunni components.

⁷ UNFPA

The Sadrist Bloc, with its MPs resigning in June 2022 and its leader, Muqtada al-Sadr announcing his exit from politics in August 2020. Under PM Suhani's stewardship, a federal budget for three fiscal years from 2023 to 2025 was adopted by the Council of Representatives in June, enabling the Government to implement its programme and transform longstanding commitments into tangible improvements.

The Iraqi Government Priorities 2023



Fighting Corruption



Tackling unemployment and creating job opportunities for young people



Supporting vulnerable and low-income groups



Reforming the economy and supporting the private sector



Improving and developing services that affect the lives of citizens.

Notably Key Achievements of the Current Government:

Banking and Finance Reforms: The recent introduction of an electronic platform for foreign currency sales underscores the government's determination to elevate transparency and efficiency.

Private Sector Growth: The establishment of the Iraq Fund for Development and the decision to issue sovereign guarantees for agricultural and industrial projects signal a rejuvenated commitment to investment.

Enhanced Social Protection: The enactment of the Retirement and Social Security Law in May solidifies the rights of all workers, including those in informal sectors. This progressive step, enriched by collaboration with the United Nations, aligns Iraq with International Labour Standards.

Infrastructure Development: The Development Road Project, launched in May, envisages bridging the Gulf and Europe, creating a plethora of economic opportunities across the region.

Energy Sector Advancement: A noteworthy agreement with TotalEnergies in July 2023 promises a USD27 billion investment in oil, gas, and renewable energy, fortifying Iraq's quest for energy independence.

Counteracting Drug Proliferation: The National Strategy for the Prevention of Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances (2023-2025) represents a robust commitment to safeguarding the youth.

Climate Action and Water Management: The forthcoming climate change adaptation plan and the inaugural National Conference on Safe Water Management in Au-

gust 2023 testify to Iraq's dedication to environmental sustainability.

Iraq has showcased political resilience, bolstered by transformative socio-economic reforms. With political stability and comprehensive fiscal reforms, the nation would be poised for growth.

3.3 Baghdad- Erbil relations and the implications for Iraqi unity

Baghdad-Erbil relations continue to pose significant challenges. Despite shared history and interests, fundamental issues remain unresolved.

The management and distribution of oil resources have been a primary source of contention. The Kurdistan Region's independent oil sector has faced legal challenges from Baghdad, as evidenced by the Federal Supreme Court rulings in February 2022 and January 2023. Revenue sharing, pivotal for the economic stability of the Kurdistan Region, is directly tied to hydrocarbon management. Moreover, the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which aims to address the disputed internal boundaries (DIBs) issue, has not been implemented. In addition ensuring the implementation of the Sinjar Agreement is crucial for the stabilization of the region and the return of displaced communities.

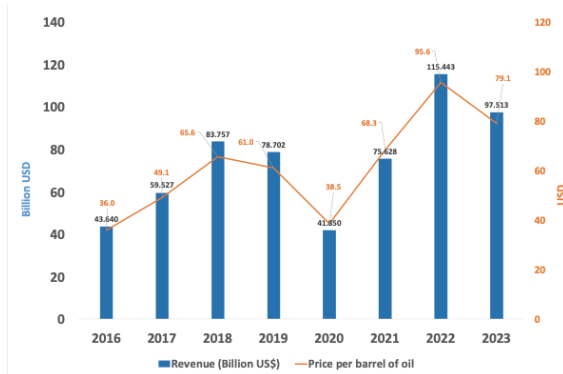
The approved budget for 2023-2025 has allocated a 12.67 percent share to the Kurdistan Region, unchanged from the 2021 allocation. However, the recent stipulation under article 13 of the Federal Budget Law mandates an increase in oil provisions by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) from 250,000 bpd (2021) to 400,000 bpd. These provisions, intended to ensure economic cooperation, come with the assurance from the Iraqi government to meet the region's financial entitlements.

It's imperative for both Baghdad and Erbil to navigate these challenges with a collaborative spirit. While the fiscal arrangements in the recent budgets signify progress, ensuring their fair and effective implementation, combined with addressing the underlying issues, will be crucial for Iraqi unity stability, and prosperity.

3.4 Economic situation and fiscal landscape

The economic situation in Iraq has been challenging. The country's economy heavily relies on the oil sector, making it vulnerable to shocks in oil markets and global demand. The year 2022 witnessed a remarkable surge, with revenues reaching a decade-high of USD10 billion and the average price per barrel reaching an unprecedented USD99.

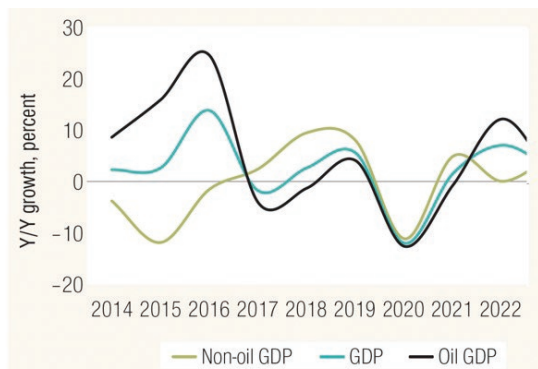
Figure 4: Actual oil revenue trend



Source: MOF-MOO, Iraq.

The data underscores the volatility of Iraq’s oil sector, closely tied to global market dynamics. The revenue fluctuations over the years highlight the nation’s vulnerability to external economic shifts and emphasize the importance of diversifying its economy to ensure stability. In terms of economic growth, Iraq experienced a sharp recession in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there has been a recovery since then, with real GDP growth accelerating to 7.0 percent in 2022. This growth was primarily driven by the tapering of OPEC+ production cuts in the first nine months of 2022. Oil GDP, which accounts for a significant portion of Iraq’s GDP, grew by 12.1 percent in 2022. On the other hand, non-oil GDP growth was limited, partly due to stagnation in non-oil industries and contraction in agriculture activities caused by drought and water shortages.

Figure 5: Oil and non-oil GDP growth



Source: World Bank.⁸

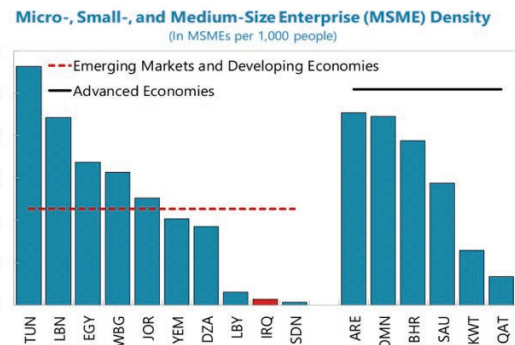
Despite the recent growth, there are re-emerging constraints in the oil sector. New crude oil production limits announced in late 2022 and extended in April 2023 have constrained oil GDP growth, which fell to 2.6 percent in the first quarter of 2023. The World Bank forecasts a contraction of 1.1 percent in Iraq’s GDP for 2023, primarily driven by a projected 4.4 percent contraction in oil GDP. Inflation has also been a concern in Iraq. After moderating in 2022, consumer price inflation ticked up in early 2023, driven by the depreciation of the Iraqi dinar in the parallel market. The revaluation of the dinar is anticipated to reduce dinar-denominated oil revenues, while expenditures are set to rise significantly with the budget. A stronger dinar might also lead to higher imports and

⁸ Iraq Economic Monitor, Spring/Summer 2023

undermine export competitiveness. Fiscal reforms are necessary to ensure the sustainability of expenditures, including optimizing current expenditures such as the wage bill, pensions, and subsidies. Additionally, improving oil revenue management through fiscal rules and enhanced non-oil revenue mobilization is crucial. Public financial management reforms, such as the roll-out of the treasury single account and regular reporting, are also important for economic planning and transparency. Investment in energy and infrastructure is needed to address Iraq’s significant development challenges. However, public investment should be accompanied by efforts to attract private financing, considering capacity constraints and climate change issues.

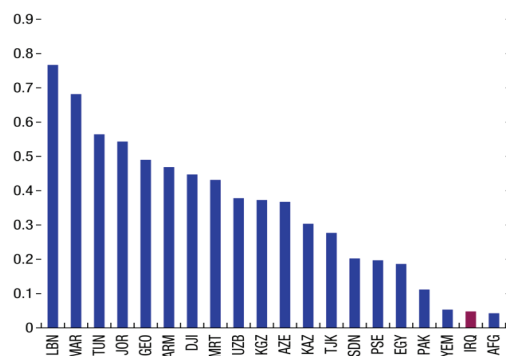
The private sector, especially Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), remains side-lined in an economy dominated by large state-owned entities and public sector employment. Moreover, the MSMEs sector is largely underdeveloped, with density - measured by the number of MSMEs per 1,000 people- substantially lower than both the MENA region and emerging and developing countries⁹.

Figure 6: MSMEs density



Source: IMF Country Report No. 19/249.

Figure 7: SME Financial Inclusion Index (on a 0 to 1 scale)



Source: IMF.

The lack of a robust legal framework to shield the private sector, coupled with the minimal use of banks for savings and transactions, continues to hinder investments in SMEs. In 2019, Iraq had the second lowest score for MSME financial inclusion in the MENA and Central Asia

⁹ Iraq White Paper

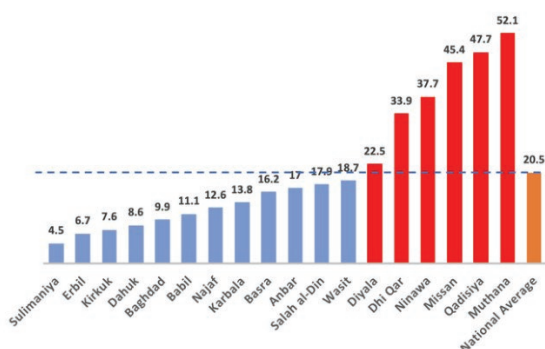
region after Afghanistan, according to the IMF.¹⁰ Only 2.7 percent of all firms in Iraq had financed investment projects through bank loans, compared with an average of 23.7 percent in the MENA region. Accordingly, fewer than 5 percent of SMEs in the formal sector have ever received a bank loan.¹¹

The Iraqi public sector is the largest formal sector employer, accounting for nearly 4.1 million jobs in 2023.¹² In the 2023 budget, public sector wages and pensions witnessed a significant augmentation of 15 percent, amounting to USD 57.4 billion. This allocation represents 37 percent of the total expenditures, equating to an approximate monthly disbursement of USD 4.8 billion. For context, in 2021, the allocation stood at USD 49.8 billion. The sector is also the largest employer of women in the country: 62.5 percent of employed women were working in the public sector compared with 34.2 percent of employed men.¹³ The government payroll expenditure is very high, having swelled to an estimated 24 percent of GDP in 2020 – one of the highest in the world – contributing to a budget deficit of about 20 percent of GDP in 2020.¹⁴

The civic and voluntary sector in the country experiences constrained growth in Households and NPISHs Final consumption expenditure. The percentage of households expenditure in Iraq fluctuated between 40 percent and 52 percent of GDP from 2017 to 2021. It reached its lowest level in 2021, at 41 percent of GDP, and its highest level in 2020, at 52 percent of GDP.¹⁵ Addressing this decrease of demand requires a strengthened network of voluntary organizations, stronger civic sector contributions to GDP and solidarity groups to bolster service provisions, bridging the gap and meeting the population’s services and needs effectively.

Poverty continues to stifle growth, posing a grave challenge for a significant portion of the Iraqi populace, notably women. Alarming, Iraq has the highest poverty rate among all upper-middle-income nations.¹⁶

Figure 8: Poverty rate in Iraq, by governorate



Source: MOP, Iraq.

¹⁰ Financial Inclusion of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Middle East and Central Asia
¹¹ IMF, Iraq Country Report No. 19/249, July 2019.
¹² Approved Federal budget law 2023-2025
¹³ ILO/ LFS 2021
¹⁴ IMF
¹⁵ Households and NPISHs final consumption as per GDP.
¹⁶ Iraq National Strategy to prevent and reduce inequalities in the World of Work. ILO Iraq Nov 2023

Prior to the pandemic, the poverty headcount ratio for Iraq as a whole was estimated at 22.5 percent¹⁷ (reaching 41.2 percent in areas previously occupied by Da’esh).¹⁸ The economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, however, is estimated to have increased poverty to 29.8 percent by the end of 2020.¹⁹ In July 2020, a poverty modelling study predicted that the poverty rate in Iraq would increase to 31.7 percent in 2022, adding 2.7 million new poor to the 6.9 million already living in poverty before the crisis.²⁰

The economic outlook for Iraq remains subject to significant risks, primarily due to deep structural challenges. The country’s heavy dependence on oil leaves it vulnerable to oil market shocks and global demand fluctuations. Limited appetite for reforms, a deteriorating business environment, and widespread corruption are expected to constrain long-term economic growth. Higher public expenditures and imports are projected to weigh on fiscal and current account balances, with the dinar’s revaluation expected to reduce oil revenues and undermine export competitiveness.

The country experiences constrained growth in Households and NPISHs Final consumption expenditure per capita (recorded at 2.2 percent in 2021), significantly lower than the global average (6%) and figures for high-income countries like the US (8.1%) and the UK (5.7%). Addressing this disparity demands a strengthened network of organizations and solidarity groups to bolster service provisions, bridge the gap, and meet the population’s essential needs effectively.

3.5 Human rights

In recent years, Iraq has faced multifaceted challenges in upholding and advancing human rights. The 2022 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO-2022) underscores the barriers hindering the transition from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance,²¹ emphasizing the necessity for infrastructural investments, re-establishment of basic services, employment creation, and the fortification of social cohesion and security.

Political divisions among governmental actors have strained humanitarian efforts, with the politicization of displacement and the continued reliance on IDP camps. These factors, combined with challenges in social cohesion and stabilization, risk heightening the vulnerability of IDPs and returnees. Amidst this backdrop, political instability and skirmishes between armed factions have resulted in significant casualties and further displacement, with the current IDPs population standing at 1.14 million.²²

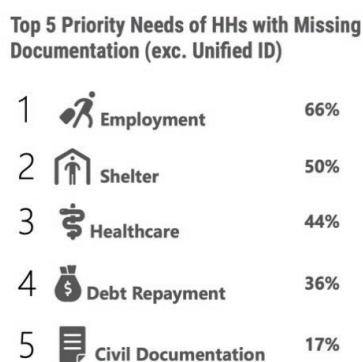
As Iraq progresses from a humanitarian to a developmental phase, it is imperative to address inequalities and

¹⁷ In 2014
¹⁸ World Bank
¹⁹ World Bank
²⁰ UNICEF
²¹ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2021).
²² UNHCR Report 8/2023

discrimination to foster sustainable development and bolster social cohesion. Significant disparities, especially in access to basic services like education, health, and water, are evident. These inequalities often stem from discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, or religion.²³ Addressing these root causes is paramount for inclusive development.

The Protection Platform, aligned with the UNSDCF’s strategic priorities, emphasizes the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”, focusing on the most marginalized or at-risk groups in achieving the SDGs. However, access to civil documentation, a prerequisite for availing public services, remains a challenge, especially for IDPs, returnees, and those perceived to have affiliations with extremist groups.²⁴

Figure 9: Top five Priority Needs of HHs with missing documentation



Source: REACH/ Missing Civil Documentation in Iraq: Who, Why & How Important is it?

The right to freedom of expression and assembly has been under threat, both in federal Iraq and in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) suppressing journalists, activists, and critics.²⁵ The prevailing climate of impunity for armed actors targeting these groups further undermines this right. The lack of accountability for past unlawful actions and human rights violations and abuses, in both federal Iraq and KRI, including during and after the October 2019 protests, and ongoing protests demanding access to economic and social rights, remains a significant concern.

Iraq faces significant challenges in meeting international labor standards, primarily due to the ineffective enforcement of labor rights. A key issue is the inadequate number of labor inspectors, which considerably undermines inspection efficacy. Additionally, the growth of trade unions – vital for the protection of labor rights – is hindered by antiquated laws dating back to the Saddam Hussein era, leading to limited union coverage and diversity.

The 2022 Labour Rights Index²⁶ assigns Iraq a score of 73.5 out of 100, surpassing the Middle East and North Africa’s regional average of 61.26. Despite this, it’s crucial to acknowledge that Iraq’s score is negatively influ-

enced by reported systemic restrictions on the rights to form, join, and engage in collective bargaining through both legislation and practice.

Figure 10: Labor Rights Index, Iraq 2022



Source: Labour Rights Index.

The adverse effects of climate change, such as droughts, heatwaves, and sandstorms, have impacted millions in Iraq. The country’s healthcare infrastructure, already strained by the Covid-19 pandemic, struggles to cater to those affected by environmental degradation. Water scarcity, exacerbated by the driest year since 1930, has had profound human rights implications, particularly affecting the rights to health, work, water, and sanitation. The imposition of the death penalty, often following trials that do not meet international standards, remains a concern.²⁷ In conclusion, while Iraq has made strides in certain areas, significant challenges persist in ensuring the comprehensive protection of human rights as per Iraq’s national and international commitments. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort, at legislative and policy levels, from all stakeholders, including the international community.

3.6 Environmental and climate change

Iraq stands at a critical juncture in its environmental trajectory, grappling with multifaceted challenges exacerbated by the pervasive impacts of climate change. The nation’s environmental fabric is under strain, with manifestations ranging from recurrent droughts and floods to extreme heat events. Alarming, the UN Environment Programme positions Iraq as the world’s fifth most susceptible country to these climatic shifts due to its hydrological limitations, downstream access to water, and geographic position. The country is in the plains between two major rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, and has limited arable land (21.4 percent).²⁸ Currently, it ranks 115 out of 192²⁹ countries on the ND-Gain Index, indicating an urgency for climate adaptation actions and a need for investment to reduce the population’s adaptation deficit.

Forecasts paint a concerning picture for Iraq’s water security. By 2035, it is anticipated that the nation will be equipped to satisfy a mere 15 percent of its water demands.³⁰ Such scarcity has cascading effects, with

²³ Violence and Discrimination against Women of Religious Minority Backgrounds in Iraq
²⁴ Missing Civil Documentation in Iraq: Who, Why & How Important is it?
²⁵ Amnesty International/Iraq
²⁶ LABOUR RIGHTS INDEX 2022

²⁷ Amnesty International/Iraq
²⁸ FAO 2021
²⁹ Data unavailable to determine the ranking of seven countries out of 192 countries.
³⁰ UN estimate

desertification and soil erosion in the forefront, posing significant threats to the country's food security. The agricultural sector, a cornerstone of Iraq's economy and sustenance, is particularly vulnerable to these environmental adversities.³¹

Transboundary sand and dust storms (SDS) in Iraq significantly impact the country's agriculture and food security, driven by poor land and water management, desertification, and land degradation. These storms lead to soil fertility loss, reduced crop yields, and decreased livestock productivity, thereby undermining agricultural sustainability and the ability to meet current and future food needs. Studies, including remote sensing analysis, reveal that a significant portion of SDS sources is linked to areas newly decertified due to vegetation removal and soil salinization. Econometric analysis shows that SDS exposure significantly lowers crop yields and agricultural productivity, resulting in economic losses equivalent to approximately 0.045 percent of Iraq's GDP, or around USD 0.1 billion, for each additional SDS day. Additionally, increased SDS frequency correlates with higher household poverty and consumption expenditures, especially among those reliant on agriculture. The findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to mitigate SDS effects through improved land and water management and enhanced agricultural resilience.

Beyond the challenges posed by climate change, pollution emerges as a pressing concern. A staggering 70 percent of Iraq's water sources bear the brunt of contamination due to industrial waste. Such pollution not only jeopardizes human health but also further compounds the challenges of water scarcity and agricultural sustainability.

Addressing these environmental challenges necessitates a holistic approach. Comprehensive strategies, underpinned by robust environmental management and governance ensuring the application of a human rights-based approach, are imperative. Equally crucial is the adoption of equitable, rights-based climate change adaptation and mitigation measures.³²

Investment in clean energy and sustainable infrastructure emerges as a pivotal component of this strategy. Transitioning to a green economy, one that fosters sustainable growth while ensuring social and political stability, is not just a desirable goal but an essential one for Iraq's future. In conclusion, while Iraq faces daunting environmental challenges, with concerted efforts, strategic investments, and international collaboration, it can chart a path towards a sustainable and resilient future.

3.7 Cultural heritage

Iraq, often referred to as the cradle of civilization, boasts a rich tapestry of cultural and historical heritage. However, recent conflicts, particularly the occupation by **Da'esh, have left an indelible mark on this heritage, espe-**

³¹ At least 75 per cent of the area of Iraq has been substantially affected by desertification, and it is estimated that over 74 per cent of the irrigated land is affected by salinity (FAO-Iraq).

³² Iraq Protection Platform (Forthcoming-2023) Desk Review on Climate Change and Protection in Iraq.

cially in the once diverse and multicultural city of Mosul. The systematic destruction perpetrated by Da'esh led to the razing of numerous cultural and religious sites. Over a span of four years, the old city of Mosul witnessed the destruction of more than 80 percent of its historical fabric.³³ This not only robbed the local communities of their places of worship and cultural exchange but also eroded the communal trust, dialogue, and social cohesion that these landmarks fostered.

The post-conflict period has seen concerted efforts towards the restoration and rehabilitation of Iraq's cultural heritage. Starting in 2019, initiatives were launched in the Old City of Mosul to restore historical landmarks and houses. To date, over 7,218 historical fragments have been recovered, and the rehabilitation of 44 heritage houses is nearing completion.³⁴

The Iraq Reconstruction and Investment (2018-2030)³⁵ framework underscores the necessity for an inclusive approach founded on transparency and equity principles. Emphasizing fairness, economic equality, and inclusive civic participation, the framework envisions a comprehensive transparency strategy. This strategy aims to streamline the roles of accountability institutions while inviting participation from civil society organizations (CSOs), volunteer-involved organizations, local communities, and non-governmental entities.

These efforts are not merely physical reconstructions; they symbolize the revival of cultural life in Mosul. Activities such as music festivals, art exhibitions, and filmmaking are being promoted to restore mutual trust, social cohesion, and to ensure the preservation of Iraqi cultural heritage and cultural rights for future generations.

Furthermore, the importance of supporting Iraqi stakeholders in the implementation of cultural conventions ratified by Iraq cannot be overstated. These include the 1972 World Heritage Convention,³⁶ the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,³⁷ and the 1970 Convention against the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

The restoration of Iraq's historic and cultural heritage is viewed as a pillar for economic recovery. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have emphasized the role of cultural heritage in socioeconomic development, particularly in providing job opportunities and enhancing social cohesion.³⁸

In conclusion, the restoration of Iraq's cultural heritage is not just about rebuilding structures; it's about reviving the soul of the nation. It's about restoring trust, fostering social cohesion, and ensuring that the rich tapestry of Iraq's history is preserved for future generations.

³³ Historical and economic crimes committed by ISIS in Mosul

³⁴ UNESCO/Iraq

³⁵ Iraq Reconstruction and Investment (2018-2030) [https://andp.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Iraq per cent20Reconstruction per cent20and per cent20Investment.pdf](https://andp.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/2020-09/Iraq%20per%20cent20Reconstruction%20and%20per%20cent20Investment.pdf)

³⁶ UNESCO/ World Heritage Convention

³⁷ UNESCO/Safeguarding our living Heritage

³⁸ Reviving Mosul and Basra Old Cities: Restoration of Iraq's Historic and Cultural Heritage as a Pillar for Economic Recovery



Progress Toward Achieving The 2030 Agenda and Com- mitment Under International Norms and Standards

4.1 National commitment to SDGs



Iraq has established a National Committee on Sustainable Development (NCSd) chaired by the Minister of Planning, tasked with monitoring SDG progress and submitting reports to a high-level follow-up group.³⁹

This work is supported by specialized thematic committees (technical teams) covering various sustainable development dimensions. To enhance SDG localization, Iraq adopts a multi-level governance approach, with each governorate having its own governorate-level committee on sustainable development (GSDC) chaired by governors and composed of local experts, universities, civil society organizations, and private sector representatives. GSDCs monitor SDG progress at the governorate level and report to the NCSd. The monitoring of SDGs in Iraq is a collaborative effort involving the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), relevant line ministries, and support from UN agencies and international organizations. Of the 231 global SDG indicators relevant to Iraq, only 36 percent were readily available in 2021. Data disaggregation by dimensions and categories remains limited, hampering the accurate measurement of progress, especially for sub-populations and vulnerable groups.

Iraq lacks a periodic, integrated, and results-oriented national reporting mechanism for the implementation of the Iraq Vision 2030 and National Development Plan (NDP) cycles, including mid-term and final evaluations to assess policy outcomes. Iraq submitted Voluntary National Reviews in 2019 and 2021, with the latter reflecting progress since the first VNR. However, political instability and public demonstrations shifted the country's focus after the first VNR. The 2021 VNR emphasized local ownership of the 2030 Agenda, noted improved data accessibility and availability (from 29.1 percent in 2018 to 35.9 percent in 2020),⁴⁰ and recognized the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on SDG progress. It proposed solutions, including enhanced funding processes, program-based budgeting, gender mainstreaming, and youth involvement. Challenges remain in fully integrating SDGs into national planning processes and identifying financing models. The Iraqi Government has sought continued assistance from the United Nations in these areas.

³⁹Iraq's Voluntary National Review 2019.

⁴⁰2021 VNR report of Iraq, pp. 24

4.2 Country progress towards SDGs

Assessment of Iraq’s progress shows only 9 of the 17 Goals can be monitored effectively using indicators with quantifiable targets and sufficient data.

Figure 11: The six integrated dimensions of SDGs



Source: Mohieldin, M. (2021, May). A global economic system in turmoil: What is at stake for the MENA region?

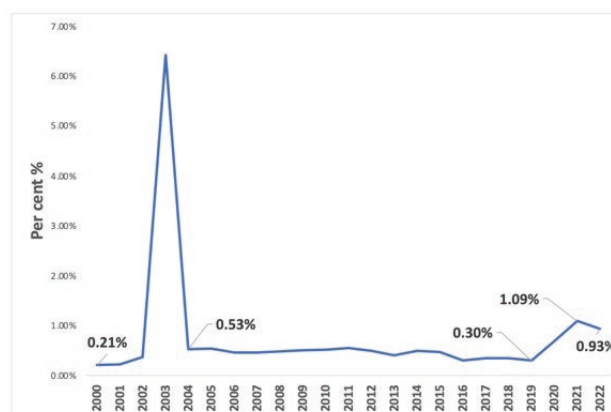
4.2.1 No poverty and reduced inequalities



The proportion of the country’s workers and their families living on less than 1.90 US dollars per person per day increased from 0.2 percent in 2000 to 0.9 percent in 2022.

The chart depicted in Figure (12) clearly shows a marked increase in the proportion of the employed population living below the international poverty line in 2003, a surge likely linked to the onset of the U.S.-led military operation. Subsequent to this peak, there is a noticeable decline; however, a gradual upward trend is observed thereafter, culminating in a pronounced escalation in 2020 and 2021—this can be attributed to the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic. It’s noteworthy that the poverty rate among the employed in 2022 remains above the 0.21 percent threshold set in the year 2000.

Figure 12: Employed population below the international poverty line in Iraq, by sex and age (200-2022)



Source: ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2022.

Nearly half of Iraqi children - 47 percent (8.7 million) are multidimensionally poor, meaning that there are more than 8 million children in Iraq who are living in multidimensional poverty⁴¹.

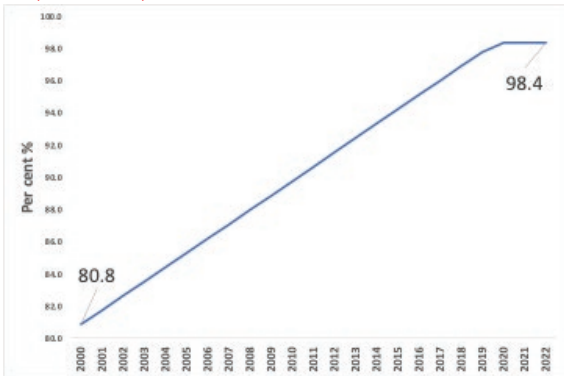
In the year 2020, data indicates that 26.9 percent of the vulnerable population received cash benefits through social assistance programs. Additionally, a broader 40.5 percent of the population was covered by at least one form of social protection benefit.⁴² Meanwhile, a modest 1.4 percent of individuals with severe disabilities were recipients of disability cash benefits.

For the proportion of the population in Iraq using basic drinking water services from the year 2000 to 2022: In urban areas, there has been a consistent increase in the proportion of the population with access to basic drinking water services, starting from 93.18 percent in 2000 and reaching 99.81 percent by 2022. Rural areas have seen a significant improvement, though the increase has been more gradual, from 54.04 percent in 2000 to 94.83 percent in 2022. When considering the entire population (all areas), the proportion using basic drinking water services has risen from 80.85 percent in 2000 to 98.38 percent in 2022. This data in Figure 13 reflects a positive trend in the availability of basic drinking water services across different locations in Iraq, with urban areas nearing universal access and rural areas showing substantial progress over the two decades.

For the proportion of the population in Iraq using basic sanitation services: there has been a consistent increase in the urban population using basic sanitation services, starting from 77.74 percent in the year 2000 and reaching 98.84 percent by 2022. The rural areas also show improvement, though the percentages are consistently lower than urban areas. The proportion increased from 54.77 percent in 2000 to 97.65 percent in 2022. When considering the entire population, the proportion using basic sanitation services started at 70.50 percent in 2000 and reached 98.50 percent in 2022.

⁴¹ UNICEF IRAQ
⁴² ILO

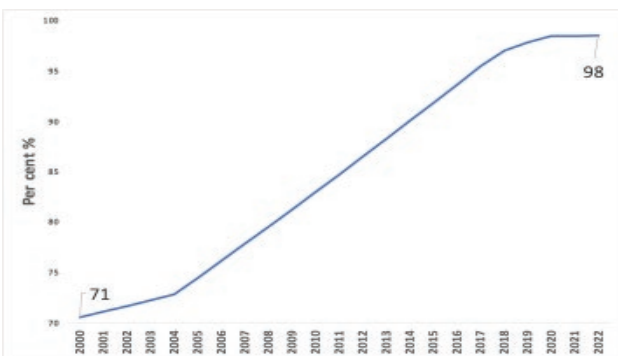
Figure 13: Proportion of Iraqi population using basic drinking water services (2000-2022)



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, as of 2023.

The data in Figure 14 indicates significant progress in access to basic sanitation services in Iraq over the 22-year period. The improvement is more pronounced in urban areas, although rural areas have also seen substantial gains.

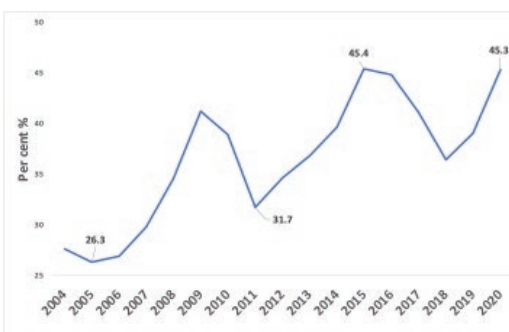
Figure 14: Proportion of Iraqi population using basic sanitation services (2000-2022)



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene, as of 2023.

The share of GDP from labour, comprising wages and social protection transfers, increased from 27.6 percent in 2004 to 45.3 percent in 2020. This suggests that a larger part of the economic value generated within the country is going to workers in the form of wages and social benefits. In the context of SDGs, specifically Goal 10 which aims to reduce inequality within and among countries, this increase can be an indicator of progress towards reduced inequalities (Target 10.4).

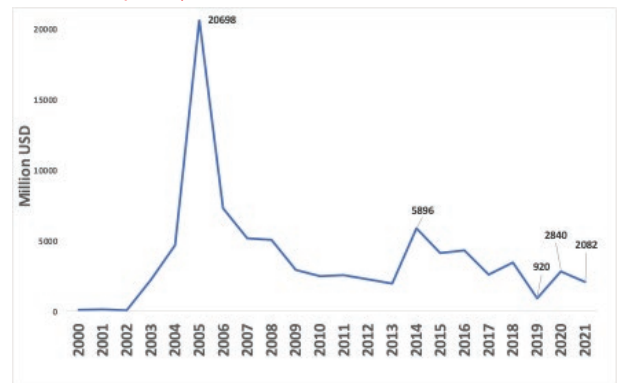
Figure 15: Labour share of GDP in Iraq (2004-2020)



Source: ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2022.

In Iraq, the inflow of development assistance saw a substantial rise in 2004, 2005, and 2014. This increase in aid reflects the international community’s heightened support in response to the multiple crises Iraq has encountered, particularly post-2003 and the post-Da’esh crisis. The significant volume of aid directed to Iraq represents a concerted effort by global actors to bolster the nation’s development trajectory and to mitigate the deepening inequalities intensified by the prolonged conflict and political upheaval.

Figure 16: Total assistance for development to Iraq 2000-2021 (million USD in current prices)



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2022.

4.2.2 Environment and climate



For SDG 13, Iraq has adopted various adaptation and mitigation strategies in response to pressing environmental and climate-related challenges.

The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) serves as a cornerstone, outlining climate vulnerabilities and proposing adaptive measures, especially in water management, agriculture sustainability, infrastructure and ecosystem resilience.⁴³ To combat water scarcity, there’s a push for efficient water usage, updated infrastructure, and potential dam and reservoir constructions. In urban areas, the emphasis is on sustainable planning, including heat-resilient structures and green space enhancement. Agricultural resilience is being sought through drought-resistant crops and efficient irrigation systems. A concerted effort is also being made to heighten public awareness about the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation and promote community-level actions. There is significant scope to include more attention to and investment in nature-based approaches, like integrated landscape and catchment management, to build more resilient agricultural systems and ecosystems and protect biodiversity.

Iraq is taking some steps towards mitigation⁴⁴ and is investigating a more diversified energy mix including the potential of solar and wind energy. Initiatives focusing on tree planting and green belt development, aiming to

⁴³ UNEP, 2020, Iraq launches National Adaptation Plan process for climate change resilience.
⁴⁴ Nationally Determined Contributions of Iraq 2021-2035

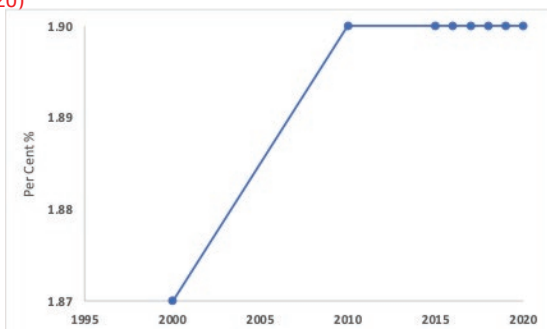
create carbon sinks, are also being implemented on a small scale. New efforts in waste management involve promoting proper disposal, recycling, and reducing industrial pollutants. Lastly, Iraq actively participates in regional and global climate and environmental dialogues to exchange knowledge and best practices. Despite these efforts, effective implementation still needs to be improved, through increased domestic investment in environmental initiatives and strengthened partnerships nationally and internationally.

Iraq currently does not have a national disaster risk reduction strategy and the national responsibilities for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management and response are not fully articulated in any existing strategies. There is an urgent need to address the management and protection of its natural resources and implement disaster risk management strategies. A national DRR strategy, that includes early warning considerations and a comprehensive environmental management strategy should be developed. These are key to economic revitalization, social well-being, and cohesion for the future of Iraq.

For SDG 15, Land utilization in Iraq is significantly shaped by its economic role, historical military conflicts, demographic shifts, and governmental management of agricultural production. Of Iraq's total land area of 43.3 million hectares, 34 million hectares, representing 78.5 percent, are currently unsuitable for agriculture. Forests, encompassing approximately 825,000 hectares or 1.9 percent of the national territory, are predominantly situated along the northern frontiers with Iran and Türkiye.

Agricultural land accounts for 9.4 million hectares, which is 21.5 percent of Iraq's total area. However, nearly half of this agricultural land offers limited utility, serving primarily as seasonal pastures for livestock, including goats and sheep. Tree crops, occupying roughly 340,000 hectares, consist mainly of grapes, olives, figs, and dates, with the latter being the most widespread. The majority of tree crop cultivation is concentrated near Karbala.

Figure 17: Forest area as a proportion of total land area in Iraq (2000-2020)



Source: FAO. Global Forest Resources Assessment 2020 and FAOSTAT.

Field crops in Iraq include a variety of vegetables, cereals, pulses, and fruits. The extent of land under cultivation fluctuates in response to market demands and climatic conditions, averaging between 3.5 to 4 million

hectares. Grains, particularly barley and wheat, dominate the cropped area, comprising 75 to 85 percent of the total.

Despite challenges from climate change and water scarcity, the Ministry of Agriculture reported that wheat production in 2023 surpassed five million tons, ensuring self-sufficiency. Conversely, livestock producers faced hardships due to reduced barley production and rangeland degradation. Since 2021, following extensive crop failures in northern regions, feed prices have risen. To cope, affected farmers downsized their herds and sold livestock for better cash flow and sustaining the remaining animals.⁴⁵

Desertification afflicts 39 percent of Iraq's land area.⁴⁶ Escalating temperatures, more frequent droughts, and intensified dust storms are increasingly common. Iraq's susceptibility to climate change is among the highest in the Middle East, with rising temperatures, diminishing rainfall, severe sand and dust storms, and critical water shortages posing the greatest risks to the agricultural sector, which remains the most vulnerable.

The analysis of progress for SDG 13, which focuses on Climate Action, and SDG 14, concerning Life Below Water, is currently hindered by a lack of comprehensive data, which presents challenges in evaluating the advancements towards these critical environmental objectives effectively.

4.2.3 Social and human development



Despite its status as an upper middle-income country, Iraq's multiple crises and conflicts over the past two decades, including severe climatic anomalies, have increased food insecurity in Iraq.

One of the most important drivers of food insecurity is the more than one million Iraqis who remain displaced since 2017. According to a Humanitarian Needs Overview published in March 2022, around 740,000 IDPs and returnees face challenges in meeting their daily food needs, resulting in poor food consumption, household hunger, spending a high percentage of income on food, and relying on negative coping strategies. Of these, 224,000 are in acute need and require immediate assistance. Compared to 2021, a 48 percent drop in acute need is primarily attributed to camp closures in federal Iraq, leading to a drop in the number of in-camp IDPs who rely on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic food needs.

⁴⁵ Addressing these issues, in 2023 the government allocated USD 3.6 million for purchasing critical buffalo feed and essential supplies for buffalo breeders.

⁴⁶ ICRC

Iraq is also host to 257,974 refugees from Syria⁴⁷. Almost all the Syrian refugees are living in the Kurdistan Region, mainly in Erbil (50.5 percent), Duhok (33.3 percent) and Sulaymaniyah (12.9 percent) governates. According to Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) Country Chapter for Iraq 2023/2024, "As of November 2022, 84 percent scored as Food Insecure and Vulnerable to Food Insecurity compared with 77 percent in March 2022".

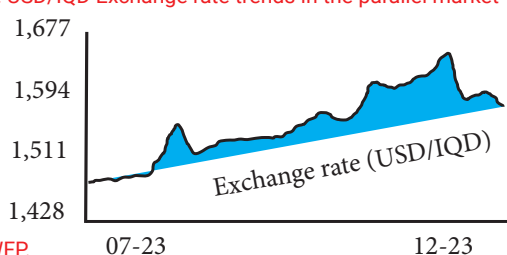
Furthermore, the WFP's Food Security Outcome Monitoring (FSOM) conducted in March and November 2022 revealed a 12 percent increase in the in-camp refugees falling under the Food Insecure and Vulnerable to Food Insecurity category. This deterioration was identified through a re-targeting exercise WFP implemented among in-camp refugees. Cash-based food assistance are still required for vulnerable refugees as it allows families to prioritize their own needs while upholding their dignity and making them less likely to resort to harmful coping strategies.

The FAO DIEM report for Round 12, covering data collection from October to November 2023, highlights significant improvements in income, resilience to shocks, and crop production in comparison to Round 9 from the same period in 2022. Food insecurity remains a concern, with 34 percent of households experiencing moderate to severe levels, although severe food insecurity rates have halved from 4 percent to 2 percent.

The use of emergency coping strategies by households has also decreased from 20 percent to 14 percent. Notably, agricultural households have adopted a broader range of strategies to mitigate risks. Improvements in dietary diversity and food consumption have been significant, with less than 1 percent of households reporting low dietary diversity, down from 5 percent, and only 8 percent reporting poor or borderline food consumption, a substantial decrease from 20 percent. These findings indicate progress in food security and nutritional well-being, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to sustain these positive trends.

The fluctuation in the Iraqi currency exchange rate against the USD and price increases of essential food and non-food items have eroded the purchasing power of the poorest quintile.

Figure 18: USD/IQD Exchange rate trends in the parallel market



Source: WFP.

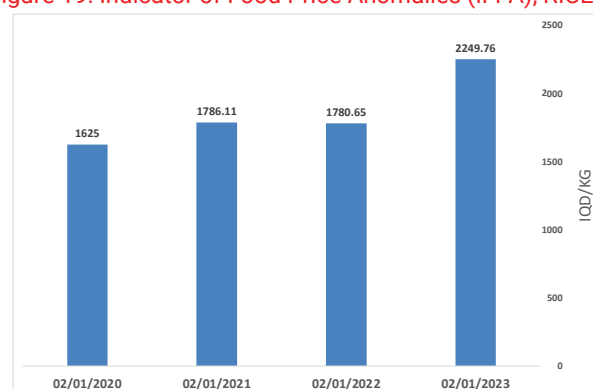
⁴⁷ UNHCR Iraq, 2023

Compared to January 2020, the price of WFP Food Basket used for Cash-Based Transfers increased by 42 percent in January 2023⁴⁸. Increase in prices is impacting the food security at household level. Therefore, the needs of the vulnerable populations remain, as negative coping strategies are still being used.

Reduction in rainfall, increased water and soil salinity, drought-like situations, and the increasing temperature have worsened the livelihoods of the vulnerable population. An increase in food prices and the inability to afford food costs has forced vulnerable households to move to urban locations in search of job/non-farm-based livelihoods. Households faced challenges with coping strategies related to working multiple or alternative jobs and relocation, lack of skills to find a suitable job, and financial constraints to acquire employable skills. This results in poor quantity and quality food consumption by the household and compromised food security.

Despite the government benefiting from high oil prices and implementing measures such as increasing strategic food reserves, expanding social safety nets, and reducing tariffs on food, building materials, and consumables, these actions may not be adequate to fully protect returnees, and impoverished Iraqi households. The Indicator of Food Price Anomalies (IFPA) for rice increased from 0.2 in 2021 to 1.2 in 2022.

Figure 19: Indicator of Food Price Anomalies (IFPA), RICE.



Source: Food Price Monitoring and Analysis (FPMA) online database.⁴⁹

Iraq is making progress towards meeting three maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) targets. There has been a reduction in anemia among women of reproductive age, with a 28.6 per cent prevalence. Data on progress towards the low-birth-weight target is insufficient. However, progress is evident in exclusive breastfeeding, with 25.8 percent of infants aged 0-5 months exclusively breastfed. Iraq is on track to meet targets for stunting (9.9 per cent prevalence, lower than the Asia average of 22.3 per cent) and wasting (3.0 per cent prevalence, lower than the Asia average of 8.9 per cent). The

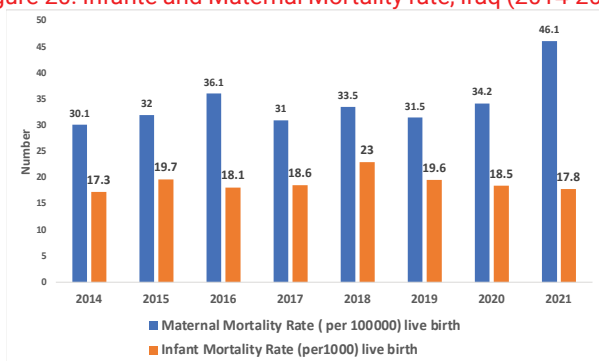
⁴⁸ Iraq Country 3PR 2023 - 2024

⁴⁹ <https://fpma.apps.fao.org/gIEWS/food-prices/tool/public/#/dataset/domestic>.

country is also on course to prevent an increase in overweight children under 5 years (6.4 per cent prevalence)⁵⁰. However, Iraq has limited progress towards diet-related non-communicable disease (NCD) targets. Obesity rates are high, with 40.1 per cent of adult women and 26.5 per cent of adult men affected, exceeding the regional average. Additionally, diabetes affects around 20.2 per cent of adult women and 20.3 per cent of adult men.

Iraq has made commendable strides in reducing child mortality. The under-five mortality rate declined from 23 per 1,000 live births in 2018 to 17.8 in 2021. However, maternal mortality, after decreasing to 34.2 per 100,000 live births in 2020, saw an uptick to 46.1 in 2021. Additionally, while infant and neonatal mortality rates witnessed a slight decrease in 2021, they have yet to meet the SDG target of 12 per 1,000 live births.

Figure 20: Infante and Maternal Mortality rate, Iraq (2014-2021)



Source: ICSO, the annual statistical report 2022/2023.

From 2005 to 2020, Iraq exhibited a noteworthy ascent in its adult literacy rate, surging from 68 per cent to 89 per cent. This 21 per cent augmentation over a decade and a half is emblematic of the nation's unwavering commitment to education.

The enhancement in Iraq's literacy rate from 2005 to 2020 can be attributed to the rise in enrollment at primary education and the establishment of adult literacy centers. However, when juxtaposed with nations possessing lesser financial capabilities, such as Jordan and Lebanon, Iraq's literacy rate still lags. Despite Iraq's substantial financial resources, these countries exhibit higher literacy indicators.

From 2005 to 2012, Iraq saw primary education enrolment rise from 86 per cent to 96 per cent, marking significant progress. However, the subsequent period experienced setbacks due to the Da'esh crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a drop in enrolment to 90 per cent by 2019/2020. Notably, one in ten children aged 6-11 remains out of school.

Secondary education enrolment improved from 35 per cent in 2005 to 58 per cent in 2016 but fell sharply to 46 per cent in 2019/2020 due to the pandemic. This decline underscores the system's vulnerability to external shocks and the need for enhanced investment in technology and

infrastructure. The enrolment gap between primary and secondary levels points to structural imbalances and a rise in dropouts and repeaters.

A crucial concern affecting Iraqi youth is the quality of education. According to the recent Iraqi Women Integrated Social and Health Survey 2021 (IWISH), primary school enrolment for girls and boys is 91 per cent. However, it drops to 53.6 per cent for boys and 56.6 per cent for girls in intermediate schools and further down to 30.5 per cent and 36 per cent in higher education.

A significant gender gap exists in individual education attainment. Girls are less likely to finish intermediate school than boys. Partially, this is due to the growing child marriage practice in Iraq. In the last ten years, child marriage increased by 18 per cent among women married before the age of 18, and by 6 per cent before the age of 15. Marriage is commonly a replacement for education, especially in displaced communities.⁵¹ Decision-making about marriage and forming a family is rarely made by young women. IWISH2 indicated that 67 per cent of marriages were decided by families. In rural areas, this indicator is higher than in urban areas (70.8 per cent and 68.8 per cent, respectively).

In 2022, Iraq's legal frameworks for promoting, enforcing, and monitoring gender equality exhibited varying degrees of effectiveness across different domains, as measured on a 0-100 scale. The overall promotion, enforcement, and monitoring of gender equality in public life scored 45.5 points. In the specific area of violence against women, the score was slightly higher at 55.6 points. Employment and economic benefits related to gender equality scored the highest at 70.0 points. However, the domain of marriage and family benefits lagged behind, with a score of 36.4 points.

Additionally, the representation of women in the single or lower houses of parliament showed a significant increase, rising from 6.4 per cent in 2000 to 28.9 per cent in 2023.

The Constitution provides guarantees for the implementation of all international instruments to which Iraq is a party. Iraq ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 with reservations to Article 2 (f and g), which call on states to modify or abolish existing laws and penal codes that discriminate against women; Article 16, on the elimination of discrimination in marriage and family relations; and Article 29(1), with regard to the principle of international arbitration on the interpretation or application of the Convention. Iraq has yet to sign or ratify its Optional Protocol, which establishes complaint and inquiry mechanisms for CEDAW.

⁵¹ UNICEF, Situation Analysis of Women and Children, 2018.

⁵⁰ Global nutrition report.

Significantly, Iraq was the first Arab country to launch a National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in February 2014, which was, in fact, a significant step toward enabling women's participation and protection in the processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Iraq.

The second National Action Plan (2020-24) was launched in 2020 by the Council of Ministers in partnership with UN Women. Iraq has still to implement the other resolutions on women, peace and security, which address sexual violence in conflict.⁵²

Iraq participated in the third Universal Periodic Review cycle in 2019 (34th session). Recommendations supported by the Government of Iraq related to gender equality and women's empowerment included amending key domestic legislation; re-establishing the ministries of human rights and the status of women; criminalizing all forms of domestic violence against women; improving the gender balance in the recruitment of public officials; and establishing a national institution for women's empowerment.

Iraq stands as a trailblazer in the endeavour to engage organizations, communities, and local groups within its Health Policy. Remarkably, the Iraq National Health Policy 2014-2023 stands out as the sole framework recognizing the pivotal role of volunteers in healthcare delivery. Notably, it emphasizes the imperative to "Invest in community participation and volunteering support for emergency preparedness, emphasizing the development of human capacity and sustainable integrated systems. This acknowledgment underscores the significant contribution of the voluntary sector in augmenting healthcare services, especially for women, child, and older populations. However, sustaining and furthering these efforts poses an ongoing challenge.

In conclusion, Iraq has demonstrated notable progress in achieving the SDGs related to Zero Hunger (SDG 2) and Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3). These advancements reflect the nation's commitment to enhancing food security and improving health outcomes for its population. In the realm of Quality Education (SDG 4), Iraq has achieved commendable progress, indicating a positive trajectory in educational development. However, the progress in gender equality (SDG 5) remains moderate. While there have been improvements, the pace and scale of change in this area require further acceleration to meet the SDG targets. This disparity underscores the need for focused efforts to address gender disparities and promote equality across all sectors of Iraqi society.

⁵² By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a state recognizes the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women—the body that monitors states' parties' compliance with the convention—to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction.

4.2.4 Economic Aspects.



For SDG6, Iraq has made significant improvement in access to clean and safe water services. The proportion of the population with access to safely managed drinking water services — defined as an improved source located on premises, available when needed, and free from contamination — increased from 50.0 percent in 2000 to 60.0 percent in 2022. This progress is indicative of the country's efforts to enhance the quality and availability of drinking water.

Additionally, the availability of basic handwashing facilities on premises has seen a notable rise, from 89.0 percent in 2005 to 97.0 percent in 2022. This improvement is crucial for maintaining hygiene standards and preventing the spread of diseases.

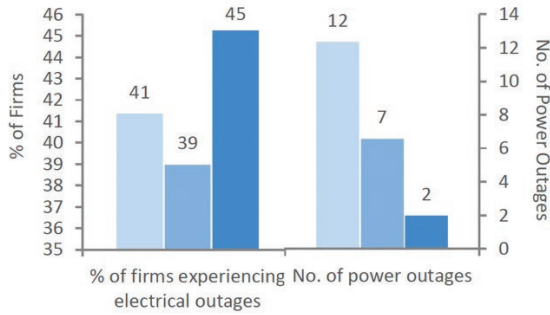
Regarding sanitation, the proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services — basic facilities that safely dispose of human waste — has more than doubled, from 26.0 percent in 2000 to 53.0 percent in 2022. Furthermore, the percentage of safely treated domestic wastewater flows has increased from 37.1 percent in 2020 to 42.0 percent in 2022, reflecting advancements in wastewater management.

In terms of financial support, total gross disbursements of official development assistance specifically allocated for water supply and sanitation have escalated significantly, from 2.0 million in constant 2021 dollars in 2000 to 83.8 million in constant 2021 dollars in 2021. This increase in funding underscores the international community's commitment to supporting Iraq in improving its water and sanitation infrastructure.

For SDG 7, a significant stride has been made in enhancing access to electricity. By 2021, the country achieved universal electricity access, a notable increase from 96.8 percent in 2000. However, despite this progress, challenges persist in ensuring stable and sustainable electricity supply. Many Iraqis, faced with an unreliable grid, turn to household generators or local private providers for their electricity needs. These alternatives, while filling the gap in supply, come with notable drawbacks. They are not only environmentally harmful and a source of noise pollution, but also place a considerable financial burden on households.

Efficiency in the operation of the private sector relies on a reliable supply of electricity. Figure 21 illustrates the challenges firms face in terms of electrical outages, both in terms of the percentage of firms affected and the frequency of power interruptions. Insufficient electricity supply can lead to increased costs, production disruptions, and decreased profitability.

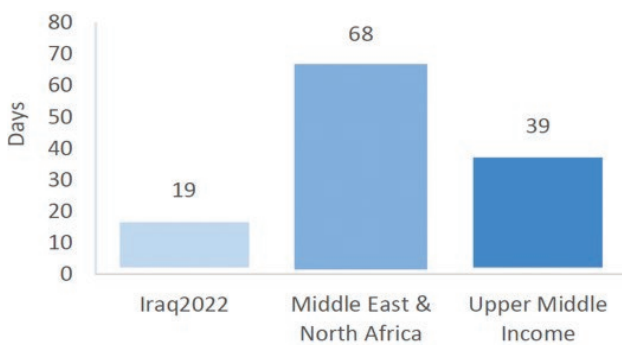
Figure 21: Reliability of electricity supply and related losses, Iraq



Source: World Bank 2022.

Figure 22 assesses the efficiency of infrastructure services by measuring the time required to secure an electricity connection. Delays in obtaining these services result in additional expenses for firms and may impede entry and investment.

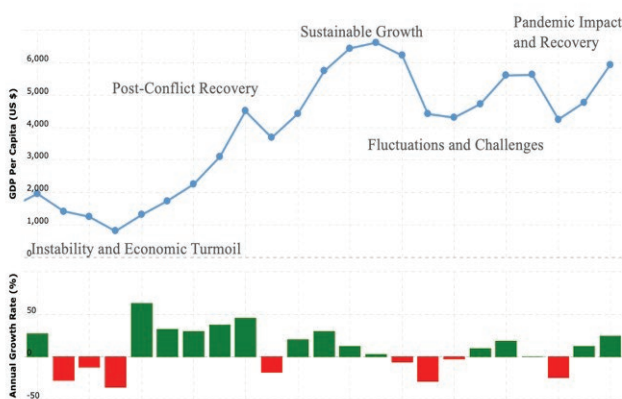
Figure 22: Days to obtain an electrical connection in Iraq



Source: World Bank 2022.

For SDG 8, Iraq’s GDP per capita has exhibited notable fluctuations over the past two decades (see Figure 23). It is essential to examine these trends within the context of SDG 8 to understand the country’s progress towards achieving decent work and economic growth.

Figure 23: GDP per Capita, Iraq



Source: World Bank.

Year 2000-2003: Instability and Economic Turmoil: Iraq’s GDP per capita in 2000 was USD1,964. However, in 2003, following geopolitical instability and conflict, the GDP per capita plummeted to USD810, reflecting a 35.43

percent annual decrease. This period of economic turbulence underscores the negative impact of conflict on economic growth and decent work opportunities.

Years 2004-2007: Post-Conflict Recovery: In 2004, Iraq’s GDP per capita experienced a remarkable growth rate of 62.35 percent, reaching USD1,315. This recovery was likely influenced by post-conflict reconstruction efforts and increasing oil prices. Subsequent years saw continued growth, with a GDP per capita of USD3,100 in 2007. These years witnessed initial steps towards economic stabilization and the potential for increased employment opportunities.

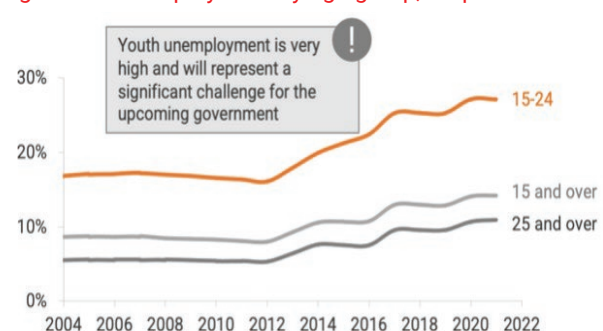
Years 2008-2012: Sustainable Growth: Between 2008 and 2012, Iraq’s GDP per capita showed steady improvement, with an annual growth rate ranging from 12.21 percent to 45.33 percent. This period marked a promising phase for Iraq’s economy, aligning with SDG 8’s objective of sustained, inclusive economic growth. These gains had the potential to enhance decent work prospects for the population.

Years 2013-2019: Fluctuations and Challenges: Iraq experienced mixed economic performance during this period, with varying growth rates. The GDP per capita reached USD6,613 in 2013, showcasing a 2.72 percent annual growth rate. However, subsequent years witnessed fluctuations, including a decrease to USD4,725 in 2017, accompanied by an annual growth rate of 9.76 percent. These fluctuations reflect the challenges Iraq faced in achieving consistent and inclusive economic growth, impacting the goal of decent work for all.

Years 2020-2022: Pandemic Impact and Recovery: The year 2020 saw a substantial decline in GDP per capita, reaching USD4,251, with an annual growth rate of -24.37 percent. This decline was largely attributed to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted economic activities worldwide. Iraq’s subsequent recovery in 2021, with a growth rate of 12.22 percent, and further growth in 2022, at 24.45 percent, indicate resilience in the face of adversity. These fluctuations highlight the vulnerability of Iraq’s economy to external shocks, underscoring the importance of building economic resilience for long-term decent work prospects.

The unemployment rate serves as a crucial indicator within the SDGs framework, specifically under SDG indicator 8.5.2. The ILO Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021 data reveals that the unemployment rate was 16.5 percent, signifying that approximately one in every five individuals within the labor force was unemployed.

Figure 24: Unemployment by age group, Iraq LFS 2021



Source: ILO, 2021.

Notably, gender disparities were evident, with the female unemployment rate reaching 28.2 percent, approximately twice as high as the male unemployment rate of 14.7 percent. Moreover, youth unemployment displayed a stark contrast with adult unemployment, with a rate of 35.8 percent, more than three times higher than the adult rate of 11.2 percent. It is worth noting that youth has been the main driver of many protests and demonstrations in the last decade.

The Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2021 data indicates a significant concentration of the working-age population in urban areas, accounting for 71.6 percent, while rural areas constituted 28.4 percent. Furthermore, the labor force participation rate was higher in urban areas, standing at 40.3 percent, compared to 37.3 percent in rural regions. This urban-rural disparity implies that urban centers may offer more significant opportunities for employment and economic activity, potentially impacting the achievement of SDG 8 targets. This discrepancy is attributed to a myriad of factors, including differences in economic opportunities, infrastructure, and access to education and vocational training.

Figure 25: Key labor force indicators by urban and rural area, Iraq LFS 2021

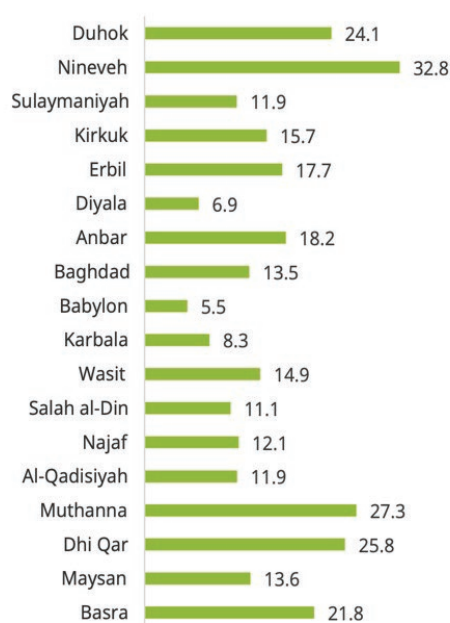
	Share of Working age population (15+ years)	Labour Force Participation rate(%)	LU1: Unemployment rate (%)
Total#	100#	39.5#	16.5#
Urban#	77.6#	40.3#	17.6#
Rural#	28.4#	37.3#	13.3#

Source: ILO,2021.

Unemployment rates exhibit regional disparities across Iraq’s governorates. The three governorates with the highest unemployment rates are: Nineveh in the northern region, recording a rate of 32.8 percent, followed by Al-Muthanna (27.3 percent) and Thi Qar (25.8 percent), situated in the southern part of the country.

As of 2021, approximately 5.73 million people were informally employed, making up 66.6 percent of total employment in Iraq.⁵³ The data on the ratio of informal employment in non-agricultural activities unveils a significant facet of Iraq’s labor market. Across all governorates, except Thi Qar, more than half of the non-agricultural workforce is engaged in informal employment. This indicates a substantial prevalence of informal labor arrangements, characterized by limited social protection, job security, and benefits. The governorates of Erbil and Nineveh exhibit particularly high levels of informal employment, signifying a challenge to the goal of decent work.

Figure 26: Unemployment rate by governorate, Iraq 2021



Source: ILO,2021.

Figure 27: Share of informal employment in total non-agriculture employment by sex and governorate, 2021



Source: ILO, Iraq LFS 2021.

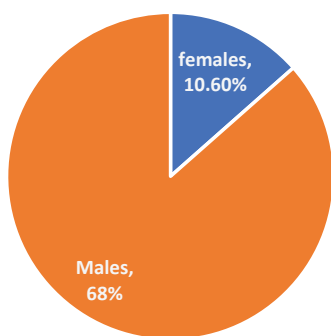
In addition to reduced employment prospects for the youth, women, persons with disabilities and IDPs also suffer from some of the highest unemployment rates. The ILO estimates that while female labour force participation in Iraq is low – estimated at 10.6 percent⁵⁴ – Iraqi women who participate in the labour market are more likely to be under-employed or employed only part-time. Young women in particular struggle to find employment: In 2021, the share of youth not in education, employment or training stood at 36.7 percent, and significantly higher among young women (at 52.3 percent) compared to young men (at 22.1 percent).⁵⁵

⁵⁴ These rates are among the lowest rates of female labour participation in the world. (ILO-Iraq)

⁵⁵ International Labour Organization 2019.

⁵³ upcoming ILO/OECD/UNDP study on the transition to formality in the MENA region

Figure 28: Women’s participation in the labor force in Iraq



Source: ILO,2021.

According to the World Bank, approximately 27 percent of IDPs are unemployed, and within that group, the most vulnerable are women and children, 49 percent of whom are less than 18 years old.

For refugees and asylum seekers, UNHCR collect during registration baseline data on employment and occupation for all registered adult individuals. For employment, each individual is asked if “he/she had worked at least once during the last 7 days for pay of profit”. As of end of January 2023, out of 162,899 registered individuals over 18, 27 percent answered positively whom majority are men (92 percent). 9 percent indicated that they are actively looking for work opportunities yet didn’t find any. 31 percent of the unemployed were not actively looking for work whom majority are women (83 percent). 33 percent have no employment data where out of which is 50 percent women. In conclusion, Iraq’s progress on SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth is characterized by fluctuations in GDP per capita due to geopolitical factors, conflict, and external shocks. Achieving sustained inclusive growth and decent work remains a formidable challenge. Policymakers should prioritize economic diversification, labor market improvements, and resilience against shocks, while promoting stability and peace.

To advance SDG 8, Iraq should formalize informal labor markets, enhancing social protection, promoting enterprise formalization, and strengthening labor regulations in accordance with applicable international labor standards and relevant conventions. Addressing gender disparities in informal employment, particularly in Salah al-Deen governorate, and empowering women economically is crucial.

Decent work is pivotal for inclusive growth. Iraq must reduce informal employment, ensuring legal protections,⁵⁶ social security, and fair working conditions. Policies should formalize labor markets, stimulate job creation, and promote equitable access to decent work, aligning with SDG 8. To succeed in SDG 8, Iraq needs a multifaceted approach addressing urban-rural disparities, fostering sustainable economic growth, and investing in edu-

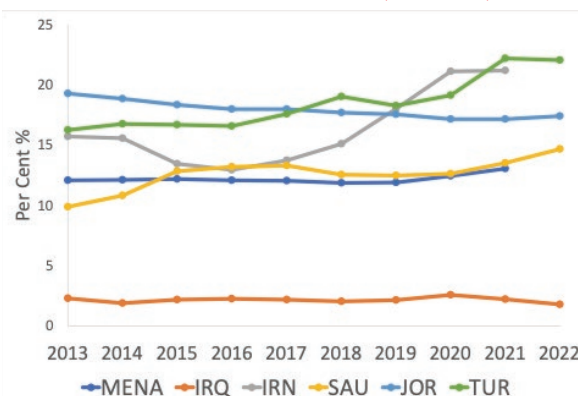
⁵⁶ While Iraq has ratified almost all fundamental labour conventions, some are yet to be ratified such as the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930. Both represent significant gaps to fill in order to ensure decent work.

cation, vocational training, and infrastructure to enhance the labor force’s skills and capabilities.

For SDG 9, The manufacturing industry in Iraq has encountered numerous challenges over time, significantly impacting the country’s economic landscape. These challenges primarily stem from political events and wars, resulting in the depletion of human and material resources and the temporary shutdown of critical industrial facilities. As a consequence, this disruption has hindered the continuous economic development process. Moreover, the manufacturing sector’s contributions to the gross domestic product have exhibited fluctuating patterns, indicating volatility in its growth rates. Conversely, an overarching reliance on oil resources as the primary driver of economic growth and prosperity has led to the neglect of the manufacturing sector.⁵⁷

The contribution of Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) to Iraq’s GDP has experienced a decline, diminishing from 2.3 percent in 2013 to 1.79 percent in 2022, a figure significantly below the MENA region average of 13 percent. In comparison to neighbouring countries like Iran (21.22 percent), Türkiye (22.06 percent), Saudi Arabia (14.68 percent), and Jordan (17.41 percent), Iraq’s performance in this domain is notably weaker. Furthermore, the MVA per capita (constant 2015 USD) in Iraq has seen a substantial decrease, plummeting from USD 242 in 2000 to USD 111.5 in 2022. This persistent downward trend raises concerns about the risk of premature deindustrialization, which could have adverse consequences for the country’s long-term economic sustainability.

Figure 29: Manufacturing, value added (% of GDP)

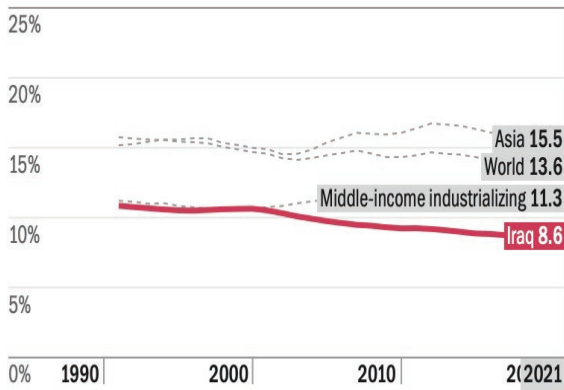


Source: World Development Indicators.

Industrialization is most effective when it prioritizes inclusivity and sustainability. The cornerstone of inclusive industrial development lies in the creation of formal employment opportunities. However, the proportion of employment within the industrial sector, relative to total employment, has experienced a decline from 10.6 percent in 2000 to 8.6 percent in 2022. This figure falls below the averages observed in middle-income industrializing countries at 11.3 percent and in Asian countries at 15.5 percent.

⁵⁷ The effectiveness of the manufacturing industry in Iraq, 2022

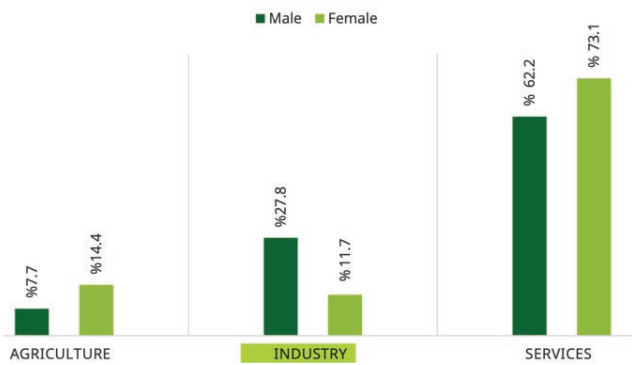
Figure 30: Manufacturing in total employment



Source: ILO.

Moreover, while 27.8 percent of employed men are engaged in the industrial sector, this figure significantly drops to just 11.7 percent for employed women.

Figure 31: Share of male and female employment by broad branch of economic activity at main job, 2021



Source: ILO, Iraq LFS 2021.

To reverse these concerning trends and advance progress towards SDG 9, Iraq should prioritize policies that promote industrialization, innovation, and infrastructure development. These include measures to attract investment in the industrial sector and high-growth, high-value-added, high-employment sectors, improve the business environment, invest in research and development, and strengthen the country's infrastructure networks. Moreover, initiatives to enhance human capital and skills development are crucial for fostering innovation and industrial growth.

In conclusion, Iraq's progress on SDG 9 is currently challenged by the decline in manufacturing value added and MVA per capita. Addressing these challenges is paramount to achieving the objectives of inclusive and sustainable industrialization, innovation, and infrastructure development outlined in SDG 9. Policymakers should focus on implementing targeted strategies to revitalize the industrial sector, promote innovation, and build resilient infrastructure to foster economic growth and development in Iraq.

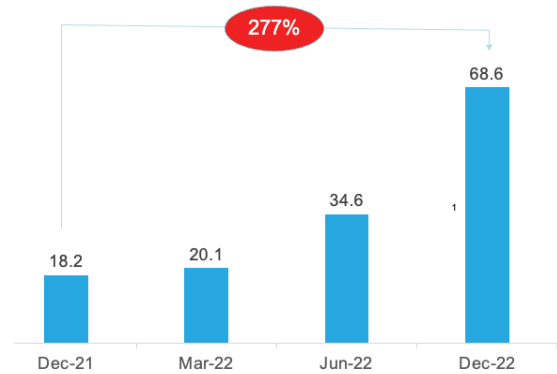
For SDG 11, Iraq has grappled with a significant housing shortage for the past decade. This shortage has been intensified by a myriad of factors, including rapid popula-

tion growth, large-scale migration from rural to urban areas, sectarian violence, lack of livelihood opportunities, and the recent impacts of climate change.

Urban Migration and Housing Demand: The shift from rural to urban areas has been driven by sectarian violence, limited opportunities in rural regions, and the effects of climate change; as of December 2022, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix has already recorded 68,670 individuals displaced from the central and southern governorates due to drought.

This migration, coupled with the prevalent high-density residential urban growth, has further strained the already limited urban housing resources. The result has been a notable increase in rents and real estate prices.

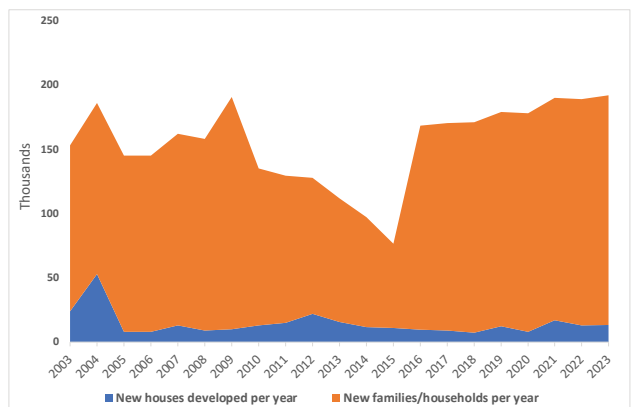
Figure 32: Number of individuals displaced by drought in central and southern regions (in thousands)



Source: IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix.

Impact of Armed Conflict: The conflict with Da'esh has had a profound impact on the housing sector. The World Bank estimates indicate a loss of 138,000 residential buildings due to this conflict. When combined with the estimated housing shortage, which exceeds 2.7 million units, the housing sector is in dire need of substantial investments. It is projected that approximately USD27⁵⁸ billion will be required to address this combined deficit.

Figure 33: Number of new houses developed, and new families/households founded per year (2003-2023)



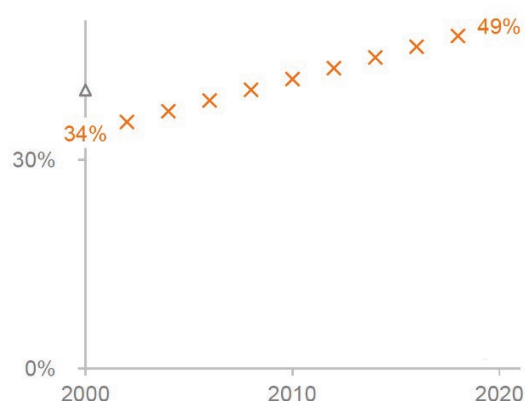
Source: Calculated based on housing data from the Iraqi Ministry of Planning.

Challenges in Housing Management and Policy: The housing crisis is not solely a result of demand exceeding supply. There are systemic issues at play, including

⁵⁸ Estimated based on data received from MoP

complex management systems, convoluted legal procedures for land allocation for housing, limited access to housing finance, and outdated urban planning for major cities. These challenges have led to the rise of informal housing, uncontrolled expansion of informal settlements, and areas with inadequate services. The proportion of the urban population living in slums increased from 33.9 percent in 2000 to 49.3 percent in 2020.⁵⁹

Figure 34: Population living in slums (% of urban population)



Source: UN-HABITAT.

Addressing the housing needs in post-conflict Iraq necessitates a comprehensive approach:

- **Area-based Strategy:** A localized approach that considers the unique needs of different regions.
- **Multi-sectoral Collaboration:** Integration of various sectors to provide a holistic solution.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaboration between the government, private sector, and commercial banks to pool resources and expertise.
- **Participatory Approach:** Engaging communities in the decision-making process to ensure solutions are tailored to their needs.
- **Inclusive Strategy:** Ensuring all segments of the population, including the most vulnerable, are considered.

For immediate action, development agencies and NGOs should prioritize addressing the needs of residents in partially damaged houses that can be quickly repaired. In the medium term (spanning two to five years), the government should formulate a detailed strategy for rebuilding destroyed houses in collaboration with the private sector and commercial banks. The housing crisis in Iraq is a multifaceted issue that requires a coordinated, comprehensive, and inclusive approach.

In the context of SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Iraq faces a twofold challenge. As a rentier state heavily reliant on fossil fuels, Iraq has grappled with significant environmental and public health issues stemming from this dependence. These issues range from constraints on access to drinking water to pollution caused by gas flaring during extraction processes.

However, Iraq has taken commendable steps towards achieving responsible consumption and production. It has committed to diversifying its energy sources and meeting its Nationally Determined Contribution commitment under the Paris Agreement, with a goal of re-

ducing emissions by 14 percent by 2035. As part of this commitment, Iraq aims to fulfill 10 percent of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2028, which not only promises to mitigate environmental and health impacts but also offers potential socioeconomic benefits, ushering Iraq toward a more sustainable and environmentally friendly economy. A significant milestone in Iraq's journey towards responsible consumption and production occurred on April 5, 2023, with the USD27 billion agreement between TotalEnergies and the Iraqi government. Termed the Gas Growth Integrated Project (GGIP), this initiative focuses on enhancing Iraq's electricity production, capturing flare gas for electricity generation, and treating seawater to maintain oil well pressure in the Basra region. Iraq's government will retain a 30 percent stake in GGIP through the Basrah Oil Company, while TotalEnergies has extended an invitation to QatarEnergy to join the consortium with a 25 percent stake, while maintaining a 45 percent operator interest.

In terms of hazardous waste generation, Iraq faces an alarming trend. The quantity of hazardous waste generated per capita increased from 0.1 kg in 2008 to 0.5 kg in 2020. This emphasizes the urgent need for enhanced waste management practices and the adoption of sustainable consumption patterns to mitigate the associated environmental and health risks.

Concurrently, Iraq has made progress in reducing the share of fossil-fuel pre-tax subsidies (consumption and production) in its total GDP. This reduction is noteworthy, decreasing from 8.9 percent in 2010 to 5.9 percent in 2021. Lowering fossil fuel subsidies aligns with the promotion of responsible consumption and production by encouraging energy efficiency, reducing carbon emissions, and aligning with global efforts to combat climate change.

To further advance on SDG 12, Iraq should persistently prioritize sustainable waste management practices to reduce hazardous waste generation. Additionally, continued efforts to reduce fossil-fuel subsidies will contribute to responsible consumption and production by promoting energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Iraq's journey towards responsible consumption and production is multifaceted, encompassing energy diversification, waste management, and subsidy reform, all of which require sustained commitment and action.

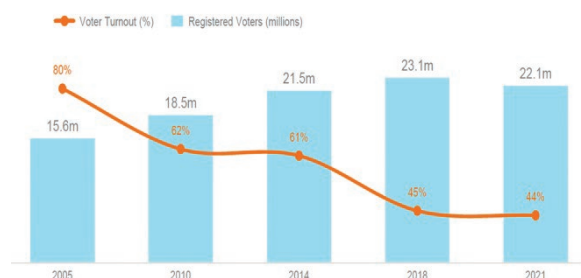
⁵⁹ UN-HABITAT

4.2.5 Governance.



In recent years, Iraq has witnessed a palpable decline in public trust towards its governmental institutions and political processes. A 2019 study by the National Democracy Institute revealed that a staggering 75 percent of Iraqis felt the nation was not progressing in the right direction.⁶⁰ In 2021, the sentiment remained largely unchanged. The Institute's subsequent report highlighted perceptions of endemic corruption and low levels of trust in the government ability to address major concerns.⁶¹ A common sentiment was the perception that electoral outcomes might be manipulated, leading to questions about the credibility and integrity of the elections.

Figure 35: Voter turnout in Iraq



Source: UNAMI.

These concerns were illustrated in the voter turnout in the October 2021 elections, a record low of 43 percent.⁶² This decline in participation was not merely a reflection of apathy but a manifestation of the deep mistrust in Iraq's electoral and political mechanisms.

The prolonged government formation process post October 2021 elections, which were held in response to 2019 public protests, only exacerbated the prevailing mistrust of the political system. This culminated in sporadic protests, primarily driven by the absence of a government with full decision-making authority not vested in caretaker government, including to adopt a fiscal budget. Concurrently, the Iraqi populace continues to grapple with persistent challenges such as corruption, inflation, unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure, all of which have been catalysts for localized protests.

In conclusion, restoring public trust is paramount for Iraq's political stability and progress. Addressing the root causes of this mistrust and ensuring transparency and accountability in governance will be pivotal in bridging the trust deficit.

In accordance with Chapter three of Iraq's 2005 Constitution,⁶³ particularly articulated in articles 87 and 88,

the framework for judicial power is explicitly delineated. Nonetheless, the judiciary contends with challenges in preserving its independence.

Constraints are evident in the restricted access to court information and the external pressures judges face, spanning from political to personal threats. A combination of significant court backlogs and insufficient documentation practices and archiving systems underscores an urgent call for reforms in justice administration. Notably, the absence of fully integrated internationally ratified instruments within the legislation poses a detriment to the legal infrastructure, curtailing access to pro-bono legal aid.⁶⁴

Further exacerbating the situation, the autonomy of the judiciary and the integrity commission is undermined by a range of factors, including non-state actors. This erosion of judicial efficacy not only creates avenues for persistent corruption but also underscores a pronounced need for an enhanced capacity within the judicial sector, especially when addressing trials related to terrorism and significant corruption cases.⁶⁵

The cornerstone of Iraq's pathway to sustainable peace and development lies in the restoration of public confidence in the rule of law and justice entities. Every individual in Iraq, including the IDPs and refugees, must be granted unobstructed access to justice. Barriers persist for vulnerable groups like IDPs and refugees, ranging from discrimination and insufficient legal awareness to threats of reprisals. With the judicial system's prevailing inefficiencies, comprehensive reforms and sufficient resource allocation are essential to actualizing justice for all in Iraq.

Iraq's journey through the annals of history has been marked by significant challenges, with the need for public administration reforms emerging as a salient issue. The legacy of past governance structures, coupled with contemporary challenges such as the plunge in oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the urgency of these reforms.

Most financial and administrative functions are performed by central ministries that, in theory, delegate power to governorate directorates, which in turn are supposed to delegate to offices in districts and sub-districts.

Humanitarian and development actors need multiple sets of permissions from differing authorities, causing delays in service provision. This is sometimes referred to as a "deconcentrated administration," meaning the central government is merely transferring power to local administrative units, instead of "devolving" it to sub-national entities. This allows the central government to control the administration and service delivery at the governorate and district levels.⁶⁶ The result, however, **is an overlap in the functions, competencies and juris-**

⁶⁰ National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2019 and 2021. NDI Poll: Improved Social Cohesion, but Iraqis Remain Dissatisfied with Government.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² IHEC

⁶³ Iraq constitutions 2005

⁶⁴ Iraq 2021 Human Rights Report

⁶⁵ Country Policy and Information Note Iraq: Actors of protection

⁶⁶ Al-Mawlawi, A., 2018. 'Functioning Federalism' in Iraq: A Critical Perspective. LSE Middle East Centre Blog [blog] 11 March.

dictions of different ministries and administrative units.

Contributing factors to the challenges include:

1. Absence of robust data collection and analysis systems.⁶⁷
2. Inconsistent policy planning.
3. Inadequate financial management.
4. Lack of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

These challenges culminate in over-employment, inflated public expenses, and bureaucratic slowdowns. Efforts by successive governments to address these issues have been stymied by a lack of political will. While PM Sudani's government program for economic and financial reform addressed many of these concerns, the implementation plans remain to be clarified.

The most urgent reforms needed are:

- **Decentralization:** Empower local administrative units to reduce overlaps and enhance efficiency.
- **Digital Transformation:** Implement e-governance solutions to streamline administrative processes and improve service delivery.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in training programs for public servants to enhance their skills and adapt to modern administrative practices.

Strengthening Financial Oversight: Collaborate with international entities to enhance financial management and accountability.

Iraq is a signatory to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption⁶⁸ and was one of the first countries to establish a specialized anti-corruption body, namely, the Commission of Integrity. Integrity judges are appointed to specialized anti-corruption investigative courts, while a centralized anti-corruption court adjudicates major corruption cases.⁶⁹ Additionally, specialized legislation (including protections for whistleblowers) was promulgated, and the Commission of Integrity Law was amended to include provisions related to the Illicit Gains Act. Despite this progress, Iraq's anti-corruption legislation must be upgraded and strengthened.

Good governance possesses several characteristics. It is accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable, and inclusive, ensuring that institutions adhere to the rule of law. Good governance also ensures minimal corruption and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. Iraq's political and governance system currently falls short of embodying these characteristics.

⁶⁷ According to IMF, the Central Statistics Organization (CSO) lacks adequate technical expertise and resources to address the requirements for a modern statistical system. Both the CSO and the CBI face challenges with interagency data sharing as well as issues surrounding data collection responsibilities.

⁶⁸ Iraq acceded to the Convention in 2008. In 2013, Iraq completed its review under the first cycle of the review mechanism, which focused on Chapters III (Criminalization and Law Enforcement) and IV (International Cooperation). The second cycle began in 2019, in which compliance with Chapters II (Preventive Measures) and V (Asset Recovery) were reviewed. Together with the Executive Secretariat of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the two reviewing countries (Niue and Cameroon), Iraq is currently coordinating dates to discuss the report and complete the review process.

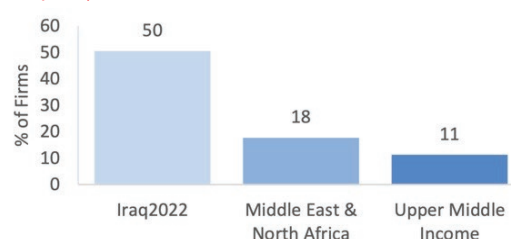
⁶⁹ This category consists of cases involving public officials, vast amounts of money and/or public interest. Nevertheless, the criteria and thresholds for major corruption cases still need to be determined in a legal document.

Corruption in Iraq could be described as structural and systemic and therefore remains among the core challenges towards effective and transparent governance. Several admirable initiatives are underway by the current government, but to succeed, the government needs: (1) time, and (2) genuine buy-in from all.

Iraq was ranked 157th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries based on indices that measure the prevalence of political, economic, and administrative corruption within various institutions. In the Bribery Index, Iraq is ranked 163rd out of 194. Iraq ranks 115th out of 143 in the Transparency Index, indicating moderate to low transparency levels in its public institutions and governance structures.

Hence, systemic change will prove vital for the country's future. It requires challenging work and collective efforts. Constitutional changes might be required too. Within this context, depoliticizing Iraq's civil service and introducing accountability into senior ranks must be prioritized.

Figure 36: Bribery incidence (firms experiencing at least one bribe payment request), 2023



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022.⁷⁰

Recently, considerable efforts have been made to enhance the anti-money laundering legal and regulatory framework, with some positive results. For instance, Iraq is no longer subject to the Financial Action Task Force's ongoing global anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) compliance process. The amendments are still insufficient to counter money laundering, and further improvements are needed.

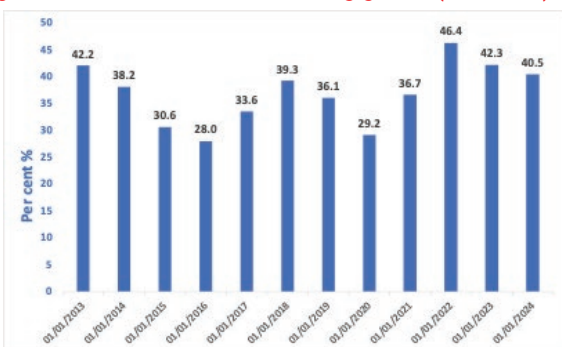
4.2.6 Partnerships.



The government revenue indicator as a percentage of GDP provides valuable insights into Iraq's capacity to mobilize resources, a fundamental element of self-reliance and financial sustainability.

⁷⁰ World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022

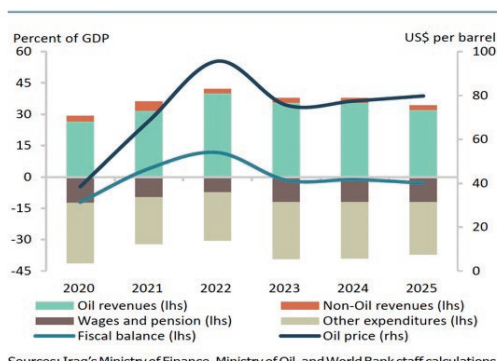
Figure 37: Total revenues, excluding grants (% of GDP)



Source: IMF.⁷¹

Iraq’s government revenue as a percentage of GDP has exhibited significant fluctuations over the analyzed period. Notably, in 2022, government total revenue accounted for 46.4 percent of the GDP, the highest since 2013, driven by a substantial increase in international oil prices. However, this upward trajectory followed a turbulent path. In 2013, the indicator stood at 42.2 percent, but it sharply plummeted to 29.2 percent in 2020, before gradually rebounding to 42.3 percent in 2023. The decline in government revenue during 2015-2016, primarily attributable to the Da’esh advent in Iraq, had a direct and profound impact on Iraq’s capacity to finance critical development initiatives, including those aligned with the SDGs.

Figure 38: Fiscal Account Outlook, 2023



Sources: Iraq’s Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Oil, and World Bank staff calculations.

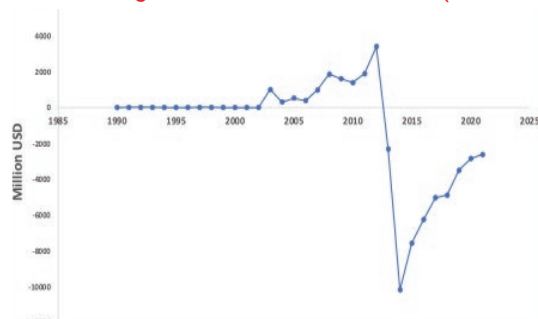
Source: World Bank.⁷²

These fluctuations in government revenue underscore Iraq’s susceptibility to external economic shocks, emphasizing the critical role of international partnerships in fortifying the nation’s resilience. Iraq’s heavy reliance on oil revenues remains a formidable challenge for its sustainable development aspirations. To attain financial stability and reduce vulnerability to external shocks, diversifying revenue sources and diminishing dependence on a single commodity are imperative objectives.

Iraq’s FDI inflows have experienced significant fluctuations. While FDI reached a peak of USD1 billion in 2003 during post-conflict reconstruction, subsequent years saw both positive and negative trends. The highest inflow occurred in 2012 at USD3.4 billion. Achieving SDG

17 and sustainable development in Iraq hinges on addressing oil dependency, security challenges, and improving the business environment to attract and retain foreign investments.

Figure 39: Foreign direct investment inflows (Million USD)



Source: UNCTAD.

Iraq’s progress on SDG 17: Partnerships for SDGs, as reflected in the government revenue as a percentage of GDP indicator and FDI inflows, highlights the country’s vulnerability to external economic shocks. To strengthen its ability to finance sustainable development initiatives and achieve the SDGs, Iraq must diversify revenue sources, implement effective DRM strategies, and actively engage in international partnerships. A resilient and diversified economy, coupled with enhanced partnerships, is essential for Iraq’s sustainable development journey in alignment with SDG 17.

4.3 Country resilience

Although Iraq has shown great resilience in the face of a long series of unrelenting shocks, many more crises are emerging or may emerge. Iraq remains vulnerable to external dynamics, particularly geopolitical tensions and competing political agendas, as well as global health emergencies and economic crises.⁷³ The situation is further constrained by internal fragmentation.

Figure 40: Components of the INFORM Global Risk Index

IRAC	Earthquake	Flood	Tsunami	Tropical Cyclone	Drought	Epidemic	Projected Conflict Risk	Current Highly Violent Conflict Intensity	Development and Deprivation	Inequality	Economic Dependency	Uprooted people	Other Vulnerable Groups	DRR	Governance	Communication	Physical Infrastructure	Access to health care
2021	5.4	9.5	0.0	0.0	5.3	6.9	9.9	9.0	4.9	4.2	1.4	9.0	2.2	8.4	7.8	4.0	3.5	5.6
2023	5.4	9.5	0.0	0.0	6.9	7	10	9.0	5.0	4.3	1.1	8.8	7.1	8.4	7.7	3.6	3.1	5.6

Source: INFORM Global Risk Index 2021-2023.

While future potential shocks remain a serious concern, the current risks facing the country are equally trouble-

⁷¹ The IMF provides these series as part of their Regional Economic Outlook (REO) reports.
⁷² WB, Macro Poverty Outlook, 2023

⁷³ For an overview, see Fanar Haddad (ed), Jan. 2020 'The Statecraft of Small States: Foreign Policy and Survival Strategies', Insights, Middle East Institute.

some. Figure 40, derived from the INFORM risk index, captures current natural and human-made risks, demonstrating that risks are at their highest from six sources: projected conflict, forced displacement, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and governance.

A precondition to effectively deal with current risks and future shocks is to urgently address social and institutional fragility at the local and national levels. Such a pathway will very much depend on an all-inclusive national reconciliation process and the mainstreaming of good governance, as stipulated by SDG 16. An uncompleted reconciliation process is uncondusive to resilience.⁷⁴ The need for such governance has been demonstrated by the protests calling for better essential services and a conducive environment that meets the aspirations of the Iraqi people.⁷⁵ Of great concern are the number of deaths and injuries during the demonstrations in Iraq, including of youth activists who voiced their dissatisfaction with the chronic governance deficit in the country. Although the Gol established investigation mechanisms, accountability for demonstration-related violence remains incomplete.

Building resilience at home will strengthen Iraq’s capacity to diversify its international relations and enable it to better navigate the regional and global geopolitical tensions. Iraq is a country exposed to multiple hazards with different origins such as floods, droughts, locust infestations and earthquakes, on which the frequency and severity of disasters have been on the increase. For this, a comprehensive disaster risk management approach is needed on which first, an identification of the risk levels and the main causes needs to be performed. In addition, the impacts of these events need to be assessed in a multidimensional way to assess the cascading consequences across multiple sectors.

Figure 41: SDG-based risk areas



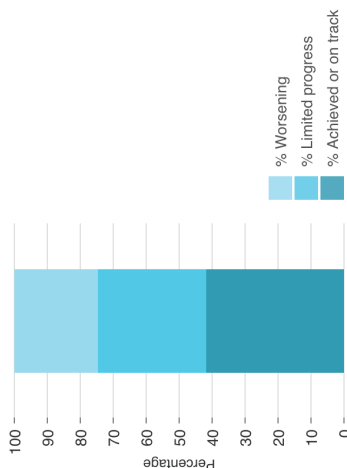
Source: UNDRR.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Conversations between the federal government in Baghdad and the KRG with neighbouring countries - Türkiye and Iran - are integral in supporting the Sinjar agreement’s implementation to end any further instability. The uncontrollable surge of powers in Sinjar may bring about the next political and humanitarian catastrophe for Iraq if not managed properly.

⁷⁵ 2019–2021 Iraqi protests

⁷⁶ Iraq RiX Spotlight for (CCA) Iraq

Status of SDG targets for Iraq (% trend indicators)



SDG Index Rank

105

/166

SDG Index Score

64.8

Spillover Score

96.9

SDG Dashboards and Trends

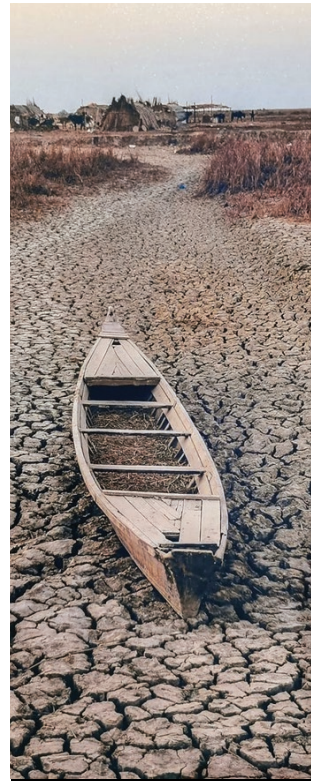
Click on a goal to view more information



Dashboards: ● SDG achieved ● Challenges remain ● Significant challenges remain ● Major challenges remain ● Information unavailable

Trends: ↗ On track or maintaining SDG achievement ↗ Moderately improving ↗ Stagnating ↘ Decreasing •• Trend information unavailable

5 Multi-Dimensional Challenges



UNDP Iraq

5.1 Socio-political challenges

5.1.1 National dialogue and disputed internal boundaries

The Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs) in Iraq, as outlined in Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, were intended to be settled through “normalization, census, and referendum”. However, their status remains a significant point of contention between Baghdad and Erbil. These boundaries encompass fifteen administrative districts across four governorates. While the KRG lays claim to these territories, they are nominally under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Notably, post the 2003 Iraq war, regions such as Sinjar came under the de facto control of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). These disputed territories are not only rich in oil and gas reserves but also house a diverse mix of ethnic and religious communities, adding layers to the existing disagreements. The complexities surrounding the DIBs are further intensified by the varied interests of Iraq’s political factions, the presence of multiple security entities, including non-state armed groups, and the geo-strategic interests.

Prime Minister Sudani’s government program has incorporated political agreements, which include the allocation of funds for the implementation of Article 140 and the re-establishment of the High Committee of Article 140. However, divisions among political entities and the differing interests of Baghdad and Erbil underscore the intricacies of reaching a resolution and emphasize the need for national and community-level reconciliation. In areas like Sheikhan district, refugees and asylum seekers with residency documents issued by the KRG face challenges accessing personal status courts. These KRG-issued residency documents are not acknowledged by Federal authorities. This hinders their ability to secure essential civil and identity documents.

Kirkuk remains a focal point of contention due to unresolved issues encompassing security, power-sharing, and agricultural lands. Historical demographic shifts initiated by the Ba’ath party have had lasting impacts on the Kurdish and Turkmen populations of the region. In Ninewa, particularly in Sinjar, tensions persist, affecting minority groups like the Yazidis who remain displaced. In October 2020, Baghdad and Erbil with UNAMI support reached an agreement aimed at fostering stability in Sinjar through a new administrative and security framework, facilitating the return of the IDPs. However, this agreement remains only partially implemented. Sinjar’s instability is attributed to the lack of consistent security measures, the presence of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) affiliates, other armed groups and disagreements over a unified administrative structure. Other disputed regions, such as the Nineveh Plains and the Al-Jazeera area, are agriculturally rich and hold potential for development.

The disputed status of certain locations also impacts the ability of displaced families to return or find alternative solution pathways. Although there have been recent developments in some areas of Ninewa, such as the KRG announcement permitting families to return to disputed parts of Hamdaniya (Hassansham Villages) and Tel-Afar (Zummar and Rabea villages), the complete implementation of these approvals is yet to be observed. Some families are still waiting for clearance approvals from the authorities.

5.1.2 Elections and democratic process

Iraq, a nation with a rich history and diverse cultural heritage, has faced significant challenges in its journey towards establishing a stable democratic process. The nation’s commitment to democracy is evident in its efforts to conduct elections in accordance with constitutional timelines, even amidst political tensions and regional complexities.

On 10 October 2021, Iraq held its parliamentary elections ahead of the constitutional deadline in response to widespread public calls in October 2019 for more inclusive representation, accountability and good governance.

The Council of Representatives (CoR) passed legislation in December 2019 mandating a restructuring of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and adopting a single non-transferable vote system and smaller constituencies. Subsequent legislation was passed to delineate electoral districts, complete membership of the Federal Supreme Court and allocate a budget for electoral preparations.

The Legal Framework for IDP Voting, the Law for the Council of Representatives Elections (Law No. 9 of 2020) defines the displaced voter as an ‘Iraqi who was forcibly displaced to another place inside Iraq after 9 April 2003 and is registered in the Ministry of Migration and Displacement. The Electoral Law further states in Article 17.1 that ‘IHEC is obliged to register all voters who meet the conditions listed in the law.

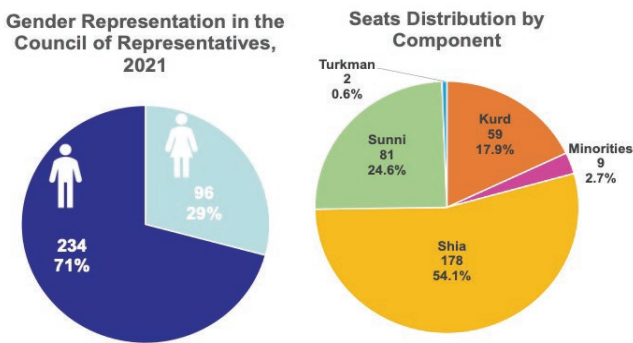
Article 39 of the Election law includes IDPs as part of the special voting process. Accordingly, IDPs together with members of the armed and security forces and prisoners will vote 48 hours ahead of general voting day. The law mentions that IDPs will vote “in their place of current residency for the constituency of his/her displacement”. Despite the legislation enabling IDPs to participate in voting, their precarious living conditions in camps expose them to political pressures that may influence their voting preferences towards specific parties. Iraqi political parties vie for the IDPs votes through promises of repatriation, yet the government has not adequately facilitated their participation beyond voting to include running for election.

The IHEC has reported that 49,000 displaced persons were eligible to vote in the recent election, distributed approximately among governorates as follows: 40,000 in Duhok, 5,000 in Erbil, and 4,000 in Sulaymaniyah. Displaced individuals residing in camps are entitled to vote within their camp’s corresponding electoral district of their original locality, utilizing biometric voter cards on the designated voting day.

Following a period of candidate registration and vetting process, IHEC certified the final list of 3,249 candidates, including 951 women (29 percent). Overall, 21 coalitions presented 959 candidates, 167 parties presented 1,501 candidates, while 789 candidates ran as independents. Out of 22.1 million voters in the final voter list, a total of 9.6 million voted on election day and on the advanced special voting day that took place 48 hours earlier. This translates to a voter turnout of 43.54 percent.

The final results announced by the IHEC on 30 November 2021 showed that women had won 96 seats, 12 more than the minimum quota of 83 seats (25 percent of seats) specified in the Constitution. The Federal Supreme Court eventually ratified the results on 27 December 2021, after ascertaining that all complaints and appeals have been addressed by the IHEC and the Election Judicial Panel.

Figure 42: Distribution of Iraqi Parliament (329 seats) by gender and component



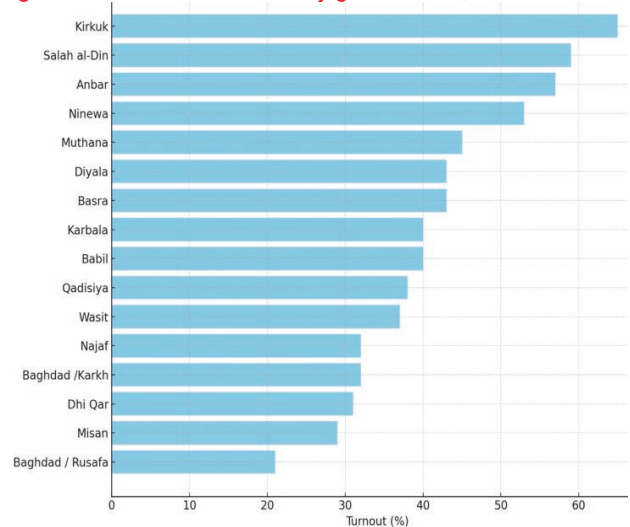
Source: IHEC.

For the 2021 CoR elections, the IHEC implemented a significant number of technical and procedural improvements, such as an independent audit of software and hardware; wide-scale public polling simulations; methods to more accurately and securely count, tabulate and transmit results; real-time publication of preliminary results; banning of cameras and phones in the voting booths; manual counting of at least one polling station in each polling centre to compare manual and electronic results; and manual counting of all polling stations in a given polling centre if results differed by more than 5 percent. The relatively modest voter turnout underscored the need to further invest in promoting a democratic culture and trust in the democratic processes and institutions of Iraq.

Moving forward, IHEC and UNAMI engaged in a lessons-learning process after the elections, with the aim of harnessing lessons, identifying recommendations and implementing capacity development activities as part of deepening reforms to improve electoral processes and institutions. That learning exercise took place in March 2022 with a total of 134 recommendations identified for implementation. The Electoral Support project, implemented by UNAMI with UNDP support, is now focused on capacity development activities in line with these recommendations. The areas of focus include, legal, public outreach, improved electoral operations (including training, logistics, IT, field coordination and procurement), election security, political participation and the IDP right to vote.

On 18 December 2023, Iraq held its provincial council elections (PCE) for the first time in 10 years and, in the case of Kirkuk, for the first time since 2005. This electoral process took place in a broadly peaceful and technically sound manner. It marked another milestone in the government efforts to break from past cycles of dysfunction.

Figure 43: PCE voter turnout by governorate, 2023



Source: IHEC.

The PCE concluded with 285 seats at stake. Of these, women secured 75 seats, 26.3 percent. The results of these elections are pivotal as governorate councils play a crucial role in local governance and administration. Their mandate covers local administrative matters, and their composition can influence the direction of regional development and policies. The elections were conducted under a modified electoral law, which was last used in 2018.

Iraq’s journey towards a robust democratic process is ongoing. The nation’s commitment to conducting regular elections, even amidst challenges, is commendable. As Iraq moves forward, the international community and policymakers must support and encourage its efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions.

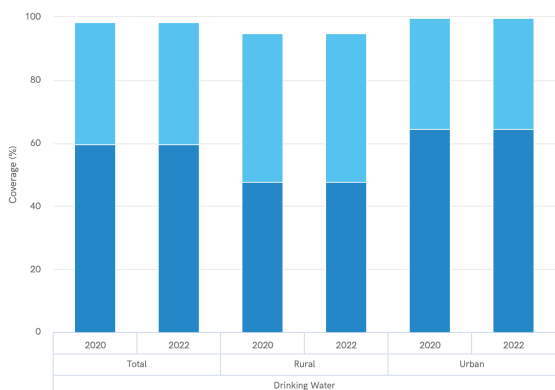
5.1.3 Lack of basic services

WASH needs

From 2018 to 2022, Iraq showed notable progress in the areas of hygiene, sanitation, and drinking water. However, over 1.6 million people across Iraq are still in critical need of sustained, equitable access to safe and appropriate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Of these, 52 percent are women, 47 percent are children, and 4 percent are elderly. Protracted displacement from homes and places of origin can increase levels of population vulnerability.⁷⁷

The WASH sector has seen significant damage amounting to IQD 1.6 trillion.⁷⁸ Despite rehabilitation efforts by several governmental and international development agencies, the bulk of the infrastructure still suffers from partial or total damage. The extensive damage of assets deeply affects their functionality in districts and governorates, thereby affecting households' daily usage and service of water.

Figure 44: Rural and urban water safely managed (2018-2022), (% of total population)



Source: UNICEF/WHO JMP.

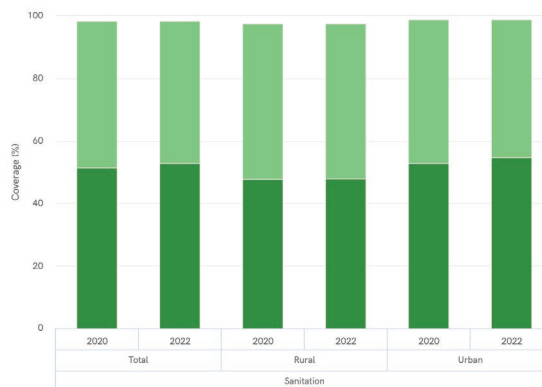
According to WHO/UNICEF joint monitoring programme for water supply, sanitation and hygiene report, in 2018, 92.02 percent of the total Iraqi population had access to on-premises drinking water. This figure increased to 94.21 percent by 2022. However, only 59.74 percent have access to safely managed water.

Sanitation, a cornerstone of public health, plays a pivotal role in determining a nation's overall well-being. Iraq's journey towards achieving optimal sanitation standards has been a gradual progress. In 2018, 47.81 percent of the population had access to safely managed sanitation, and this figure only modestly increased to 52.77 percent by 2022.

⁷⁷ Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2019.

⁷⁸ World Bank, 2018. Iraq Reconstruction & Investment: Damage and Needs Assessment of Affected Governorates. World Bank.

Figure 45: Rural and urban safely managed sanitation, (2018-2022), (% of the total population)

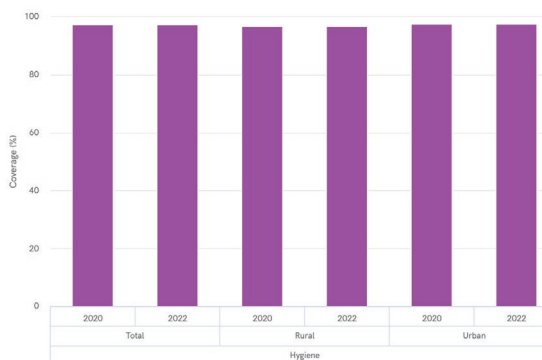


Source: UNICEF/WHO JMP.

Rural regions, already grappling with limited infrastructure, have seen only modest improvement. The coverage was 43.76 percent in 2018 and inched up to just 48 percent by 2022. This sluggish progress in rural sanitation poses significant health risks to these communities and calls for immediate intervention.

Urban areas, despite their dense populations and potential for rapid disease spread, started with a 49.51 percent coverage in 2018. Four years later, the figure stands at 54.68 percent. The slow pace of improvement in urban sanitation is alarming, given the health implications for a large segment of the population. The weakness and instability of electrical power needed for operations, lack of citizen awareness on conservation, and trespasses to the network along with insufficient technical and administrative staff are the main challenges facing the water sector.

Figure 46: Rural and urban access to basic hygiene services in Iraq (2018-2022), (% of total population)



Source: UNICEF/WHO JMP.

While Iraq has made efforts to enhance sanitation from 2018 to 2022, the slow pace of progress is concerning. The data suggests that a significant portion of the population remains exposed to sanitation-related health risks. Iraq has demonstrated a commendable commitment to enhancing basic hygiene services. In 2018, 96

percent of the total population had access to basic hygiene services. By 2022, this figure witnessed a positive uptick, reaching 97.39 percent. However, the incremental progress suggests there's room for further acceleration to ensure universal access.

Existing water and sewage infrastructure in Iraq, including treatment plants and pipe networks, is largely in disrepair. Trespasses on the sanitation and rainwater networks, lack of awareness and misuse of sanitation networks, and scarcity and instability of electricity supply needed for pumping stations are the main challenges facing the sanitation sector.

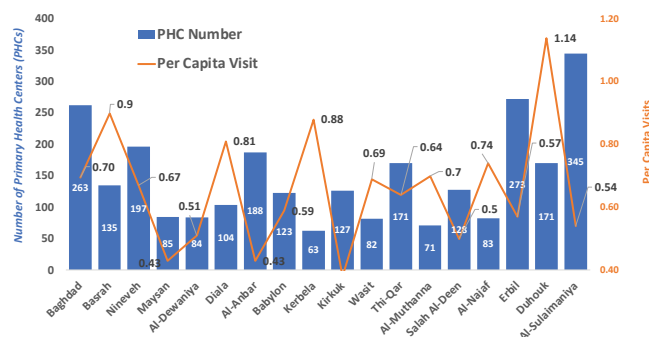
The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers system, for example, suffers from multiple local breaches of both over-abstraction and water pollution, which are compounded. Salinity increases as the rivers move downstream, peaking in the Shatt al-Arab, due to the compound effect of agricultural drainage channels with high salinity and reduced volumes of freshwater flows. Salinity levels downstream of Baghdad exceed the threshold for drinking water quality⁷⁹, compromising water supply security for domestic and agricultural uses further downstream. Policies and practices of Iraqi authorities since the 1980s have been the principal cause of the river water quality degradation, but there are also other factors. Damming projects in Iran, Syria, and Türkiye have impacted water flow into the Tigris and Euphrates.⁸⁰ At the same time, local authorities, individuals and businesses have been dumping significantly more industrial, agricultural and human waste into the rivers.⁸¹ The over-stretched community WASH systems cannot often cope with the additional burden of displaced populations, particularly if there has been damage to the infrastructure.

Health

The health system in Iraq has been exposed to exceptional challenges and damages in the past four decades. Infrastructure has been damaged, and many of the skilled health professionals have fled the country leaving behind a population with inadequate access to the basic healthcare services they need. The country is facing complex challenges and still recovering from long periods of conflict and political turmoil. Over the past decade, Iraq has witnessed some improvements in its health outcomes, despite the conflicts. The Ministry of Health is committed to a primary health care (PHC) system based on family practice. Therefore, increasing the number of family physicians is currently a priority and

needs to be accelerated to support PHC service delivery.⁸²

Figure 47: Number of PHC centers in Iraq, per capita visit (2020)



Source: ICSO, the annual statistical report 2022/2023.

Primary Health Care stands as a cornerstone in the health infrastructure of Iraq, the interplay between PHC centers, their utilization, and the resident population manifests distinctively across governorates. The governorates of Erbil and Sulaymaniyah have the biggest PHC numbers (273 and 345 respectively). However, juxtaposing these figures with their respective populations suggests potential challenges in meeting healthcare demands.

Duhok, with a population of 1,396,480, records the highest per capita visit rate at 1.14. This underscores significant reliance on PHC services, possibly due to limited alternative healthcare options. While Baghdad, housing a population of 8,780,422, maintains a per capita visit rate of 0.70. This indicates an efficient utilization of its 263 PHC centers, given its sizable population. However, some challenges have been reported, such as unnecessary visits, high workload, long waiting times, and a shortage of medicines, which have been attributed to organizational and operational issues.⁸³

The USAID's Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHC-PI) reported that the most utilized services at primary health centers (PHCs) were maternal and child health, immunization, and school health, while nutrition and health education were not adequately delivered. Moreover, the majority of the PHC users were there for therapeutic reasons because they could afford the prescribed medications, yet only a small portion of the prescribed medicines were available. It was also reported that men and women were treated unequally at PHCs.⁸⁴

⁸² WHO. The global health observatory, 2020.

⁸³ Mishari, A.K.; Essa, S.A.; Muhammed, A.N. Introduction of an Appointment System in Primary Health Care Setting in Baghdad: Views of Patients and Health Care Providers. *Al-Kindy Coll. Med. J.* 2021, 17, 45–49.

⁸⁴ USAID. USAID Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI); URC: Chevy Chase, MD, USA, 2011.

⁷⁹ Rahi and Halihan 2018

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch. Iraq's Failure to Manage the Water Crisis.

⁸¹ Nadhir Al-Ansari, Hydro-Politics of the Tigris and Euphrates Basins, Engineering, 2016.

The MoH highlights PHC as a priority, being the core of health service provision within an integrated health service delivery system, yet PHC facilities are inequitably distributed. Operational rules, regulations and performance standards are either absent or outdated and poorly implemented.

There is one PHC centre for every 10,000-45,000 people, while it is projected that the country needs about 3000 main PHCs, and each one should serve about 10,000 people.⁸⁵

Governorates like Sulaymaniyah with extensive PHC infrastructure but also a large population may necessitate a reevaluation of resource distribution to ensure optimal healthcare delivery. The high per capita visit rate in Duhok emphasizes the need for bolstering healthcare infrastructure to cater to the evident demand.

The Iraqi MoH has the 10-year National Health Policy (2014–2023) and the 4-year National Health Strategic Plan (2018–2022). While modernization of the public sector remains a top priority, limited focus on good governance is affecting the implementation of laws, provision of services and effective management of the country's resources. The Iraqi health policy is one of the only ones in the Arab region which recognize community participation and volunteering support for emergency preparedness and wider role in SDG 2 achievement.⁸⁶ The COVID-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges to Iraq, requiring the Iraqi Government to respond quickly amidst significant disruptions within the healthcare system, which was already struggling from previous armed conflicts and other economic sanctions that further disrupted economic activity and livelihoods. Iraq's capacities to prevent, detect and respond to any global health security threat scored 24 out of 100, as measured by the Health Emergency Preparedness Index in 2021.

Figure 48: Iraq's capacities to prevent, detect and respond to any global health security threat (2021)



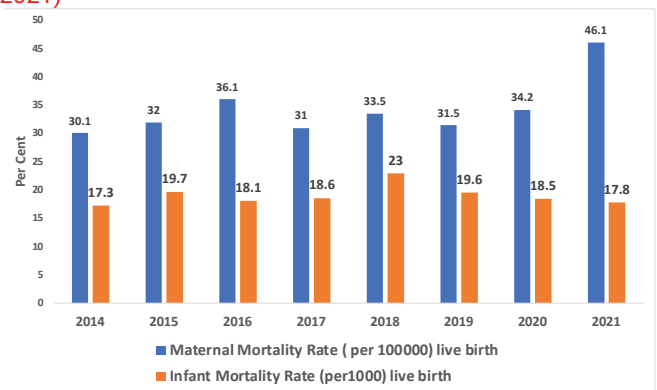
Source: The Health Emergency Preparedness Index in 2021.

Life Expectancy and Fertility: In 2021, Iraq's life expectancy at birth stood at 72.5 years, marginally below the global average of 73 years. Furthermore, the nation's

fertility rate was 3.9 percent, significantly surpassing the global rate of 2.3 percent. This elevated fertility rate positions Iraq among the top in its region, underscoring the potential implications for women's health outcomes.

Mortality Rates: Iraq has made commendable strides in reducing child mortality. The under-five mortality rate declined from 23 per 1,000 live births in 2018 to 17.8 in 2021. However, maternal mortality, after decreasing to 34.2 per 100,000 live births in 2020, saw an uptick to 46.1 in 2021. Additionally, while infant and neonatal mortality rates witnessed a slight decrease in 2021, they have yet to meet the SDG target of 12 per 1,000 live births.

Figure 49: Infante and maternal mortality rates in Iraq (2014-2021)



Source: ICSO, the annual statistical report 2022/2023.

Healthcare Infrastructure and Services: A positive trend is evident in the realm of childbirth. In 2021, 86.1 percent of births occurred within health facilities, an increase from 84 percent in 2020. Moreover, births attended by skilled personnel rose from 90.2 percent in 2020 to an impressive 96 percent in 2021. However, challenges persist. The availability of family planning services remains limited, and the rate of exclusive breastfeeding stands at a mere 25.8 percent.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and Health Targets: Iraq's journey towards achieving SDG targets, particularly concerning NCDs, has been gradual. The nation aims to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by a third by 2030 and halve global road traffic deaths by 2020. While mortality from NCDs remained relatively stable between 2014 and 2021, road traffic deaths saw a concerning rise. Additionally, the probability of dying between ages 30 and 70 from major NCDs showed minimal change between 2014 and 2021.

Communicable Diseases: Despite efforts, Iraq has not made significant progress in eradicating epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and other diseases. However, a silver lining is the report of zero new malaria cases in 2021.

Health Workforce: Between 2014 and 2021, Iraq experienced a modest increase in the availability of healthcare professionals, from 7 to 9 per 10,000 population. Yet, the

⁸⁵ MoH, Health Status in Iraq-Challenges and Priorities; Ministry of Health: Baghdad, Iraq, 2019; pp. 2–3.

⁸⁶ Iraq National Health Policy 2014-2030. Page 34.

nation grapples with a critical shortage, falling below the threshold needed to advance universal health coverage.

Health Information Systems (HIS): Iraq's health facilities operate with a degree of fragmentation, with each service managed independently. The nation's e-health infrastructure is in its nascent stages, with the current HIS components possessing only about 24 percent of the attributes of a fully functional HIS.

Pharmaceutical Sector: The Ministry of Health in Iraq centralizes the procurement of medicines and medical equipment through KIMADIA. While the system has been instrumental during emergencies, routine services often face delays. The pharmaceutical sector, on the whole, confronts challenges in procurement, quality testing, and sustainable production. Iraq's health sector, while showcasing areas of progress, confronts multifarious challenges. As the nation navigates the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and looks beyond 2022, the emphasis should be on fortifying health systems, ensuring preparedness, and advancing towards a robust universal health coverage.

Education and Training

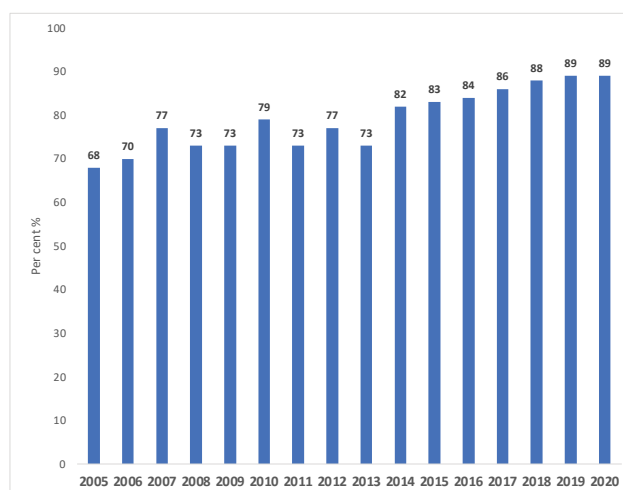
Article 34 of the Iraqi Constitution⁸⁷ guarantees the right to education and defines it as a fundamental factor in the progress of society. In addition, the constitution provides that primary education is mandatory, guarantees the right to be educated in one's mother tongue, and sets out the commitment by the State to combat illiteracy. All Iraqis also have the right to free education in all its stages. These constitutional guarantees are paralleled by federal and regional regulations and policies.⁸⁸

Iraq is facing a "human capital crisis fuelled by a learning crisis".⁸⁹ A child in Iraq can expect to complete only 6.9 years of schooling, amounting to 4.0 learning-adjusted years of schooling, by age 18. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in over 11 million children missing 25 weeks of access to face-to-face education between 2020 and 2021.⁹⁰ Although alternative learning approaches were introduced, many students without access to the Internet could not benefit from learning and skilling opportunities.

According to the World Bank data from 2018, there is a discernible disparity in literacy rates among countries. For individuals aged 15 and above, most European nations boast a literacy rate nearing 100 percent. In stark contrast, countries like Niger and South Sudan record significantly lower rates, with 31 and 35 percent re-

spectively. This discrepancy can be attributed to their minimal GDP allocations to the education sector, which adversely impacts the quality of education. In the Arab region, countries such as Jordan and Kuwait achieved a commendable literacy rate of 99 percent in 2018, while Lebanon reported a rate of 95 percent for the same year.

Figure 50: Adult literacy rate, population 15+ years, both sexes (%), 2005-2020



Source: ICSO, the annual statistical report 2022/2023.

From 2005 to 2020, Iraq exhibited a noteworthy ascent in its adult literacy rate, surging from 68 percent to 89 percent. This 21 percent augmentation over a decade and a half is emblematic of the nation's unwavering commitment to education.

From 2005 to 2012, Iraq saw primary education enrolment rise from 86 percent to 96 percent, marking significant progress. However, the subsequent period experienced setbacks due to the Da'esh crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to a drop in enrolment to 90 percent by 2019/2020. Notably, one in ten children aged 6-11 remains out of school.

Secondary education enrolment improved from 35 percent in 2005 to 58 percent in 2016 but fell sharply to 46 percent in 2019/2020 due to the pandemic. This decline underscores the system's vulnerability to external shocks and the need for enhanced investment in technology and infrastructure. The enrolment gap between primary and secondary levels points to structural imbalances and a rise in dropouts and repeaters.

Higher education enrolment remained stable but low at around 12-13 percent in the early years, gradually increasing to 20 percent by 2017/2018, then slightly decreasing to 18 percent in 2019/2020. Despite this growth, the rates are still modest, indicating a need for greater focus on expanding access to tertiary education.

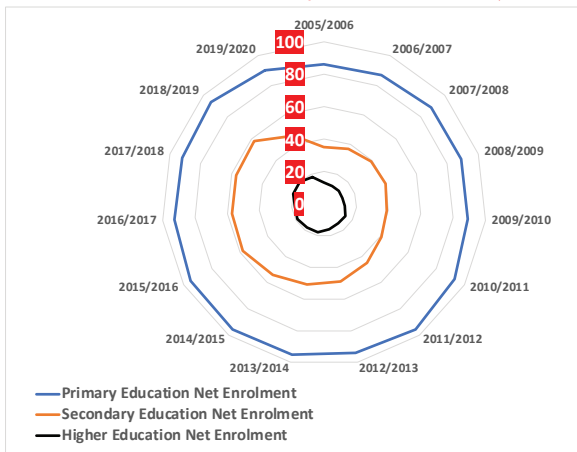
⁸⁷ Iraq's 2005 Constitution

⁸⁸ See: Minister of Education Law No. 124 of 1971; Minister of Education Law No. 34 of 1998 and Minister of Education Law No. 4

⁸⁹ World Bank 2021

⁹⁰ ICSO

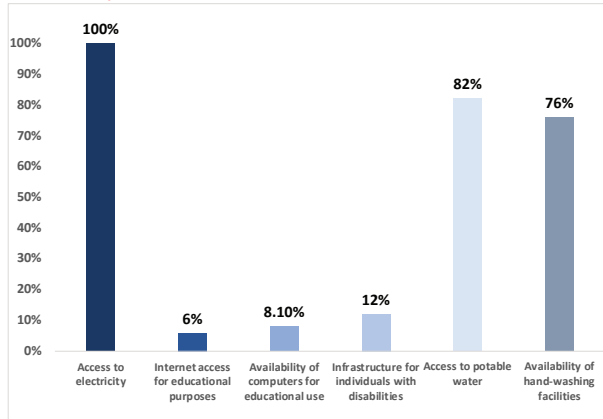
Figure 51: Net enrollment rates by education level, (2005-2020)



Source: ICSO; MoE.

Iraqi schools boast universal electricity access, essential for their operation. Yet, this achievement contrasts sharply with the digital gap shown by the mere 6 percent having educational internet access and 8.10 percent with computers, hindering skill development for a digital era.

Figure 52: Percentages of schools receiving services for the academic year 2020/2021



Source: ICSO; MoE.

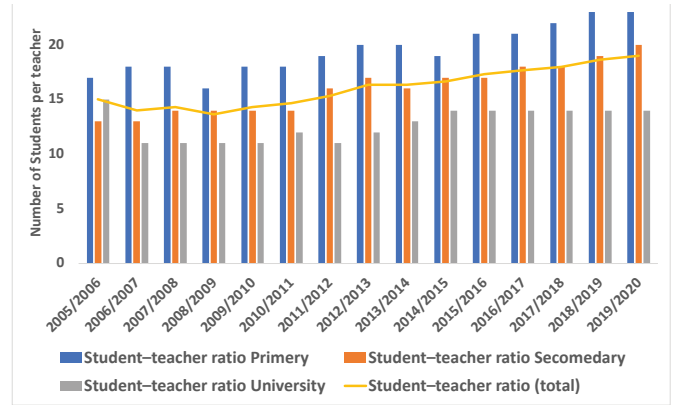
Additionally, only 12 percent of schools accommodate individuals with disabilities, indicating a need for greater inclusivity. While most schools have access to potable water (82 percent) and hand-washing facilities (76 percent), these essential services are not yet universal.

In summary, despite full electricity access, Iraqi schools face challenges with digital resources, inclusivity, and basic sanitation. Addressing these disparities through policy interventions is vital for enhancing education quality and student success opportunities.

The government currently allocates an average of merely 10 percent of its general government expenditure and 4 percent of its GDP to education, significantly trailing the international and regional benchmarks of 15-20 percent of GGE and 6 percent of GDP. Furthermore, the education sector is grappling with shortages or inefficiencies

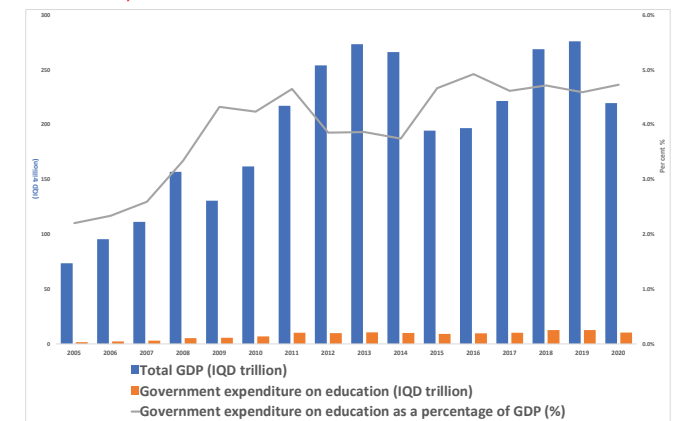
in the distribution of teaching staff, textbooks, and learning materials. Additionally, a dependable education management information system, crucial for strategic planning, is still in the development stages.

Figure 53: Student-teacher ratio by education level, (2005-2020)



Source: ICSO; MoE.

Figure 54: Government expenditure on education (% of GDP; 2005-2020)



Source: ICSO; MoE; MoF.

Non-formal education is available across all Iraqi governorates but doesn't fully meet demand. The Accelerated Learning Program, catering to 12-18-year-olds, compresses the 6-year primary curriculum into three years, offering formal certification and secondary school enrollment eligibility upon completion.

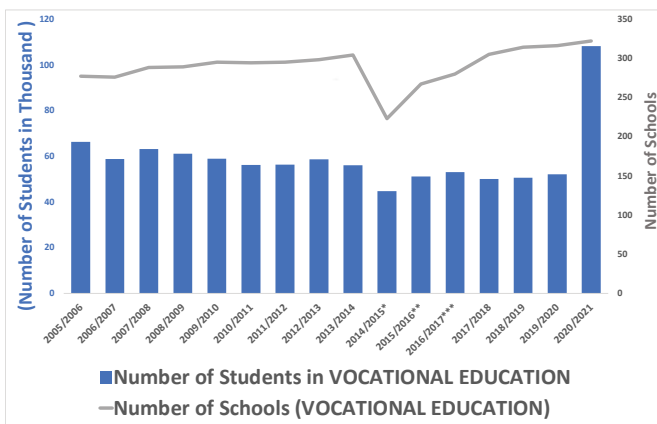
Adolescent schools targeting 10-15-year-olds who started late have seen declining numbers due to the rise of accelerated programs. These schools condensed the standard curriculum into four years and have, as of 2019, served 10,507 learners across 80 locations.

For adults, literacy centers offer the most extensive non-formal education, with 72,242 enrollees in 983 centers nationwide. The curriculum spans two seven-month levels, culminating in a certificate equivalent to formal fourth-grade education, and includes subjects like math, Arabic, and general education.

Post-primary vocational education in Iraq, as of 2019/2020, fell short of meeting the needs of its large youth population and the labor market, with only about 52,000 students enrolled in 316 vocational schools and a gross enrollment ratio of roughly 2.1 percent.

This shortfall was due to societal perceptions of TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) and limited availability. However, in 2020/2021, enrollment doubled to approximately 108,000 students across 322 schools, raising the gross enrollment ratio to 4.3 percent.

Figure 55: Vocational education in Iraq by number of students and schools (2005-2021)



Source: ICSO; MoE.

* Excluding data from governorates under Da'esh control at the time (Nineveh, Salah Al-Deen, Kirkuk, Al-Anbar).

** Excluding data from Nineveh and Al-Anbar.

*** Excluding data from Nineveh.

According to ministry staff, this surge resulted from regulatory changes allowing vocational students to pursue post-secondary education. The MoE implemented afternoon and evening classes to accommodate this growth and recruited volunteer teachers. Yet, due to the predominance of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the implications for learning outcomes and future vocational enrollment trends remain uncertain.

In 2020/21, kindergartens showed no gender disparities, and primary schools had a minimal gap, with 95 girls for every 100 boys. This ratio slightly dropped to 94:100 in preparatory schools. Despite higher female dropout rates post-primary, boys' enrollment significantly dips at the preparatory level, equalizing the gender ratio. Economic factors affect boys' education, while early marriage and security issues often hinder girls' access to post-primary education.

Vocational schools see low female enrollment, with women constituting only 24,712 of 108,155 students in 2020/21. The participation rate varies drastically between governorates due to cultural views on women in technical and vocational roles, ranging from 2 percent in Al-Muthanna and Maysan to 36 percent in Baghdad. Despite a surge in universities and enrollment in the last decade, Iraq's higher education still falls short of the youth's quantitative needs. As of 2020/21, Iraq had 35 public and nine private universities, with 670,570 stu-

dents enrolled by 2020/21. Around 93 percent of 12th-grade graduates pursue higher education, equating to roughly 18,500 undergraduates per 100,000 inhabitants in the 18-20 age bracket, out of an estimated 3.47 million people.⁹¹

As of February 2023, Iraq hosted 82,339 Syrian refugee children aged 5-17, with the majority (78,692) in the KRI and a smaller number (3,647) in other federal areas.⁹² Despite the high number of refugees, only 44,937⁹³ Syrian children were enrolled in schools in 2022, highlighting significant educational challenges. Factors like the COVID-19 pandemic, the switch to online learning, teacher boycotts, and language barriers (Arabic to Kurdish) have contributed to declining student performance and a lower success rate.

Additionally, 32 percent of IDP households in camps have school-aged children not regularly attending formal education.⁹⁴ Displaced children often face trauma, affecting their learning, while broader issues in Iraq's education system – such as overcrowded classrooms, the need for school renovations, and a lack of qualified teachers – continue to impact the quality of education.

After experiencing several years of displacement, refugee children are traumatized and that may affect their learning outcomes. In addition, ensuring quality education is still a concern in Iraq, where classrooms are overcrowded, schools need renovation, and number of qualified teachers is insufficient. In fact, many schools operate with two or three shifts to accommodate students, which impacts the quality of education and student learning.

To improve this situation, the KRG's Ministry of Education initiated the Refugee Education Integration Policy in September 2022. This policy allows refugee children in grades 1-4 to enroll in KRI public schools and follow the Kurdish curriculum. United Nations agencies have supported these efforts, providing teacher training, language classes, and resources for school construction and rehabilitation, all aimed at enhancing access to quality education.

The Iraq National Education Strategy (INES) 2022-2031 aims to enhance public services by strengthening educational institutions, fostering scientific and creative thinking, ensuring quality outcomes for the labor market, and supporting a diversified knowledge economy for sustainable development. Aligned with Iraq's socio-economic vision, education laws, and SDG 4, INES prioritizes equitable, high-quality, inclusive education and skill development for youth's contribution to Iraq's progress.




⁹¹ National Education Strategy for Iraq 2022-2031

⁹² Data from Progress, 22 Feb 2023

⁹³ E-Parwarda, January 2023

⁹⁴ MCNA 2022

Figure 56: Projections of key education information in Iraq (2022-2031)

2017/18	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	University
	719	14,901	6,630	35
	5,952	271,597	153,506	42,907
	202,937	6,197,870	2,910,816	743,825
	Age 4 to 5	Age 6 to 11	Age 12 to 17	Age 18 to 24
School-age population projection by 2031	2.7 million	7.2 million	6.2 million	3.6 million

Source: The Iraq National Education Strategy 2022-2031.

The education sector ambitious vision, guided by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, involves strategic goals specific to general, technical, vocational, and higher education. Central themes include equitable education access, quality and relevance enhancement, stronger labor market ties, improved governance, and efficient resource management.

The INES acknowledges cross-cutting issues like gender, geographical disparities, conflict, and poverty, proposing programs for crisis-affected children and youth. It emphasizes crisis-sensitive planning for system resilience, considering challenges like COVID-19, displacement, infrastructure destruction, and psychosocial needs.

The INES success hinges on key reforms, anticipated to commence in 2022 with gradual progress. It presupposes that regulatory and policy frameworks precede improvements in enrollment, repetition, and retention. Initial focus areas include regulations for teacher recruitment, allocation, and efficient education spending (2022-2025).

Electricity outages

Iraq, a key OPEC member, holds a 17 percent of Middle Eastern and 8 percent of global oil proven reserves.⁹⁵ Predominantly reliant on fossil fuels, over 80 percent of the nation's power generation emanates from this source.⁹⁶ Paradoxically, Iraq's abundant energy reserves stand in stark contrast to its compromised electricity output. Despite its rich fossil fuel reserves, Iraq faces significant electricity losses due to poor infrastructure, with 67 percent of electricity lost through technical and billing inefficiencies. This situation places a heavy financial burden on the government. Additionally, in terms of energy efficiency, Iraq ranks 19th out of 20 Arab countries, underperforming in almost all key areas such as subsidies, pricing, and regulatory framework.⁹⁷ While there has been progress in energy planning with initiatives like the "Electricity Master Plan 2030," this has not translated into effective energy efficiency laws or regulations.

⁹⁵ OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin

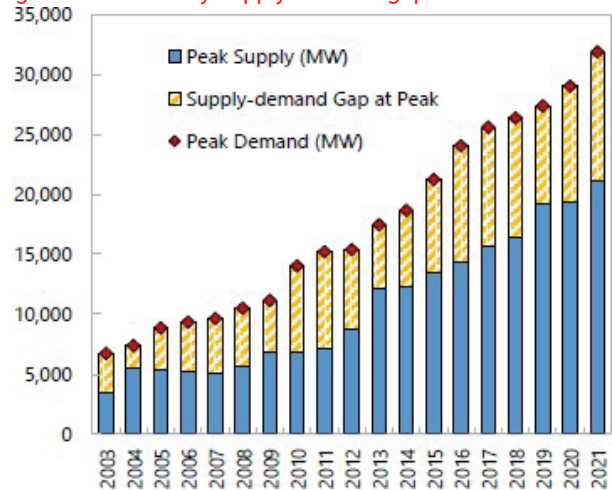
⁹⁶ World Bank: Iraq's Electricity

⁹⁷ The Regional Center for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (RCREEE)

Efforts at post-conflict reconstruction and power grid expansion have not kept pace with the increasing demand, resulting in a brittle electricity infrastructure and inconsistent supply.

In lieu of a stable grid supply, many Iraqis resort to household generators or rely on local private providers. Not only are these alternative sources environmentally detrimental and noisy, but they also impose substantial economic strains. It's notable that private generator operators charge residential consumers approximately USD0.4/kWh7.

Figure 57: Electricity supply-demand gap



Source: IMF Staff Country Reports 2023.⁹⁸

The electricity sector predicament is two-fold: an exponential increase in demand juxtaposed against glaring underinvestment in its infrastructure. While the country has an installed power generation capacity of 30 GW, merely 23.4 GW is accessible, falling short of the peak demand of 34.18 GW noted in summer 2022.⁹⁹

Further exacerbating the situation is the prevalent use of diesel generators, placing Iraq fifth worldwide in per capita usage. This reliance suggests that the actual power deficiency might be greater than current assessments suggest.

A significant cause of concern is the substantial grid losses attributed to fragile infrastructure, resulting largely from continued conflicts and endemic corruption. Alarming, the combined losses from grid inefficiencies, unbilled electricity, and non-collection can reach up to 40-50 percent, a figure significantly higher than the global average of 8 percent.¹⁰⁰

5.2 Human rights challenges

5.2.1 Threats and violations against refugees in Iraq boundaries

Iraq stands commendably as a haven for almost 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers. Of these, the KRI is home

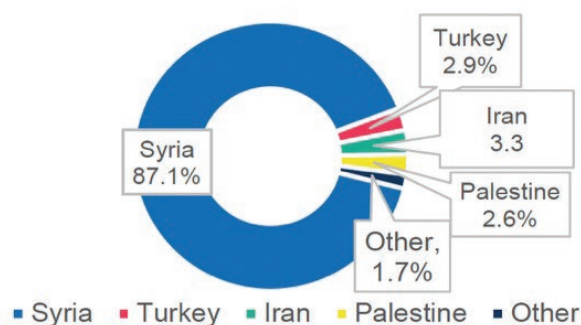
⁹⁸ IMF

⁹⁹ International Energy Agency: Iraq

¹⁰⁰ World Economic Forum

to over 90 percent, which includes a significant count of over 260,000 Syrians, primarily of Kurdish origin. This figure is complemented by refugees from nations such as Iran, Türkiye, and the State of Palestine. Notably, the majority of Syrian refugees, more than 60 percent, have integrated into urban settings, with the remainder accommodated in nine structured refugee camps.¹⁰¹

Figure 58: Refugees in Iraq by country of origin



Source: UNHCR, 2023.¹⁰²

However, there are pressing concerns to address. Foremost among these is the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV), with numerous reports, predominantly from female Syrian refugees, highlighting domestic and sexual violence, as well as distressing issues like forced and child marriages and resource denial.¹⁰³ Economic constraints,¹⁰⁴ combined with limited livelihood avenues, have pushed certain vulnerable demographics, especially women and girls, to resort to detrimental coping strategies, including forced marriages. Particularly, female-led households outside camp settings face amplified GBV risks owing to their pronounced economic hardships.

Further accentuating the gravity is the extended nature of the Syrian refugee situation, amplifying child protection challenges. Such challenges span psychological traumas, compelled child labor, and distressing incidents of sexual violence within and outside camp environments. Additionally, the quest for education for Syrian children in KRI presents hurdles, particularly for those lacking requisite documentation. The persistent challenge of obtaining steady, dignified employment prompts refugees to use harmful coping tactics, with repercussions often burdening the young, manifesting as early marriages or forced labor.

To encapsulate, while Iraq's efforts in hosting refugees are noteworthy, there's an imperative to address the aforementioned concerns to ensure the welfare and security of this vulnerable populace.

5.2.2 Freedom of press

While the Iraqi Constitution guarantees freedom of the press, ambiguous legal language has paved the way for

potential misuse. Legacy laws, such as the 1968 Publications Law, criminalize critiques against the government, permitting up to seven years of imprisonment for perceived insults.¹⁰⁵ This legislation, however, lacks a clear definition of what amounts to an "insult", leading to arbitrary implementation. The 1969 Penal Code, still in effect, subjects journalists to potential prosecution for libel and defamation. Despite constitutional provisions against specialized courts, a separate judiciary was established in 2010 to prosecute media personnel.

In 2011, legislation aiming to shield journalists was ratified. Nevertheless, many regard it as deficient, with clauses against "inciting violence" frequently misapplied to detain journalists. As per the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ),¹⁰⁶ Iraq has witnessed the tragic deaths of 186 journalists since 1992, with an alarming 112 believed to be premeditated assassinations. Iraq's persistent presence in the CPJ Impunity Index, and its third-place rank in 2018, raises substantial concerns.¹⁰⁷ While there is a plethora of media organizations, the lion's share is politically affiliated. Public confidence in the media remains tenuous; television emerges as the most trusted medium at 75 percent, while radio garners a mere 5 percent, and print publications are trusted by a scant 2 percent.

Additionally, female journalists, despite civil society support initiatives like the Iraqi Women Journalists Forum,¹⁰⁸ often find themselves pigeonholed into covering strictly "women's issues". A long-anticipated bill addressing these concerns remains stalled in the legislative process, containing contentious clauses that may perpetuate the cycle of undue penalization.

Iraq faces challenges widening its civic space, with a moderate level of civic engagement, ranking 43 out of 100 on the Civic Engagement Index,¹⁰⁹ similar to Iran, Luxembourg, and South Africa. The country ranks 75th out of 180 countries in the World Giving Index,¹¹⁰ with a 10 percent volunteering score. Despite these challenges, the Iraqi Red Crescent Society is a prominent institution in the voluntary sector, with over 12,037 active volunteers in 2021, playing crucial roles in gender equality, social inclusion, disaster response, healthcare initiatives, and refugee aid.

5.2.3 Threats against human rights defenders and protesters

The roots of these threats stem from a confluence of factors. Post-conflict political instability, the proliferation of armed groups, impunity for human rights violations and abuses, lack of accountability, and in some instances, governmental apathy, have created an environment

¹⁰⁵ Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, Press release regarding the draft law on freedom of expression and peaceful demonstration, 13/04/2023

¹⁰⁶ Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019. Journalists killed in Iraq since 1992. [online] CPJ.

¹⁰⁷ Witche, E., 2018. Getting Away with Murder. [online] Committee to Protect Journalists.

¹⁰⁸ ICSSI, 2017. Freedom of Expression and Access to Information: The Iraqi Women Journalists Forum Works to Promote Essential Rights. Iraq Civil Society Solidarity Initiative.

¹⁰⁹ Civic Engagement Index. Gallup.

¹¹⁰ CAF Online. World Giving Index.

¹⁰¹ UNHCR Iraq Situation

¹⁰² UNHCR Iraq fact sheet August 2023

¹⁰³ UNFPA Regional Situation Report 2022

¹⁰⁴ Closing the Gap: From Work Rights to Decent Work for Syrian Refugees in KRI

conducive to such threats. Moreover, the resurgence of extremist ideologies has further narrowed the space for objective discourse, pushing human rights to the fringe. Amidst Iraq's intricate socio-political dynamics, civil society activists and human rights defenders steadfastly champion justice, fairness, and societal equity. Their pivotal role, central to reviving and fortifying democratic ideals, faces formidable challenges.

Amnesty International delineates a spectrum of threats besieging these defenders, encompassing targeted assassinations, abductions, and persistent harassment.¹¹¹ A report by UNAMI human rights reveals that between 1 October 2019 and 30 April 2020, a staggering 487 protesters were killed and 7,715 injured, attributing the casualties to excessive use of force by Iraqi Security Forces and other armed factions.¹¹²

Despite the formation of investigative committees since 2019, tangible results in terms of truth or justice remain elusive. The 'Fact-Finding Committee,' constituted in October 2020, aimed at amassing evidence and pinpointing accountability for crimes. While the Committee has judicial referral rights, transparency regarding its actions is scanty. By November 2022, under Prime Minister Shia al-Sudani, the Committee activation led to the review of 215 cases and 5,375 official documents, a process still underway.¹¹³

A significant development came on 6 August 2023, with the Iraqi Council of Ministers propounding a "Missing Persons Law" draft, aiming to assist the kin of the missing. However, the draft falls short by not criminalizing enforced disappearances nor stipulating penalties for culprits.¹¹⁴

Underlying these threats are Iraq's post-conflict political volatility, the surge of armed entities, and, occasionally, governmental inertia. This, combined with the re-emergence of extremist ideologies and instances of hate speech, has constricted the realm of unbiased dialogue, sidelining human rights thus increasing protection concerns, including restricted civic space, the freedom of expression, violence against women, and protection of vulnerable groups.

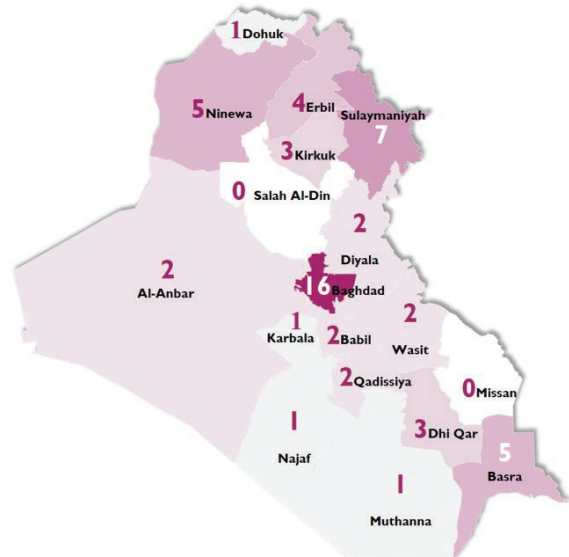
5.2.4 Challenges facing women's participation

Iraq, a nation bearing the brunt of decades of repression, conflict, and economic sanctions, has observed significant repercussions on the lives of women. These repercussions manifest as limitations in their educational, economic, and health opportunities, increasing violence, and enduring inequalities.

(a) Women's Participation in Governance Systems

Despite marked strides in women's political representation, challenges persist. In the October 2021 national elections, women secured 96 out of 329 seats, an increase from 25 percent in 2018 to 29 percent. Notably, 57 of these women won outside the standard quota system. However, these achievements came against the backdrop of challenges reminiscent of 2018: online gender-based attacks, financial constraints, and deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes. Furthermore, the period during the October 2019 protests witnessed an exacerbated security situation, marked by threats and attacks on many women activists.

Figure 59: Number of women who won in the 2021 elections without the Quota System, by governorate (57 seats in total)



Source: Joint Analysis Unit, UNAMI.¹¹⁵

(b) Economic Empowerment of Women

Economically, Iraq's gender disparity is profound. The nation is ranked second to last worldwide for the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity. Notably, the female labour force participation stands at a mere 10.6 Percent,¹¹⁶ and the gender-based labour force participation disparity is ranked 155 out of 156 countries.¹¹⁷ According to LFS results, about 30.2 percent of the total working-age population were outside the labour force in 2020/21. The great majority of persons outside the labour force were female.

¹¹¹ Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights, 2023

¹¹² IRAQ UN 2023

¹¹³ Amnesty International 2023

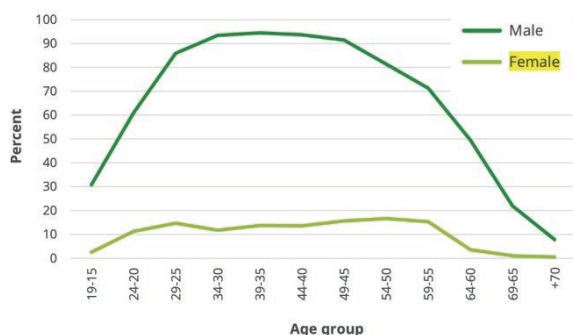
¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Gender analysis Iraq's october-2021 national elections

¹¹⁶ ILO, LFS 2021, Iraq

¹¹⁷ WEF, Global Gender Gap Index 2021

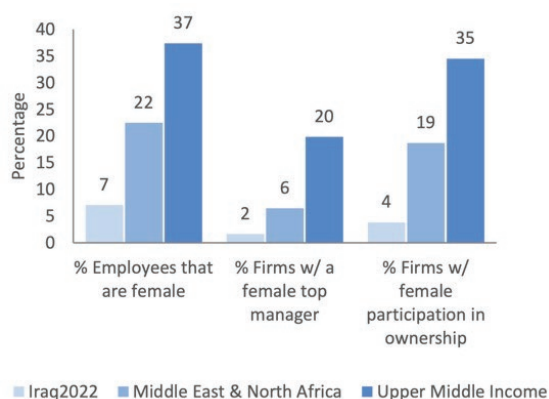
Figure 60: Labor force participation rate in Iraq by sex and age group



Source: LFS 2021.

Figure 60 shows that the female labour force participation does not exceed 20 percent for any age group. Women’s participation in employment, top management, and business project ownership in Iraq is lower compared to that in the MENA region and upper-middle-income countries.

Figure 61: Female participation in employment, top management, and ownership



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022.

Women’s participation in Iraq’s economic recovery is hampered by discriminatory laws, limited employment opportunities, harassment, and domestic violence. Rural women, though pivotal to local and rural economies, are inhibited by traditional practices restricting their access to resources, healthcare, and community decision-making processes.¹¹⁸

5.3 Security challenges

5.3.1 Armed groups outside state control and security sector reform

The security landscape in Iraq remains intricate. The presence of multiple armed entities not only challenges the government efforts at security reform but also threatens the safety and rights of the Iraqi people.

Post the conflict with Da’esh, the security situation in Iraq has become increasingly fragmented, with two

separate structures, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) – the latter has not been fully integrated into the former. Efforts since 2014 have been made to integrate the PMF into Iraqi security architecture,¹¹⁹ transitioning them from a diverse mix of armed entities to an organization firmly under Iraqi state control but without clear terms of references and synergies with the Iraqi security forces.

Non-state actors, including armed groups operating outside of state control, continue to pose a significant threat to Iraq’s peace and security. Notably, since the beginning of the Gaza conflict in October 2023, armed groups have resumed attacks on international anti-ISIL Coalition targets inside Iraq. The International Coalition is deployed in Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government. Moreover, despite its military defeat in Iraq, Da’esh continues to pose a threat illustrated by its capabilities to launch asymmetrical attacks to this day. Among the deadliest were the attacks against a crowded market in Baghdad in January 2021 killing at least 32 people, and near Kirkuk and Albu Bali in December 2022 killing at least eight civilians and nine Iraqi policemen.

These threats underscore strengthening State control over all armed forces as well as the necessity to bridge the stability gaps, especially in the disputed territories and enhance cooperation between the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga forces. The unchecked proliferation of arms outside of state control weakens the government influence on the international stage, including at the grassroots level. This has resulted in a rise in the informal justice system and economic fragmentation, further undermining state legitimacy.

For Iraq to witness long-term stabilization and peace, a comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) is imperative. The government, recognizing the SSR importance, unveiled a programme in October 2022. This programme prioritizes enhancing the professional capacities of the PMF and fortifying their role within the security and military system. Furthermore, the formation of two key committees in February 2023, namely the SSR High Committee and the SSR Executive Committee, indicates a forward momentum in this direction.

The Iraqi government signalled its dedication to reforming the security sector through its strategic financial allocations and recent initiatives. However, the multi-dimensional challenges that lie ahead necessitate a coherent, comprehensive, and well-coordinated approach for a more stable future in Iraq.

5.3.2 Explosive ordnance contamination

Iraq ranks among the globe’s most affected nations by

¹¹⁹ The presence of PMF in some locations remains an obstacle to the return of some displaced families. Returns to some locations in Babylon (villages in Eskandaria and Jurf Al-Nasr), parts of Salah Al-Din, Anbar and Ninewa are blocked to families and will require a concerted political will to engage with the PMF controlling these areas and to facilitate the return of families to their areas of origin.

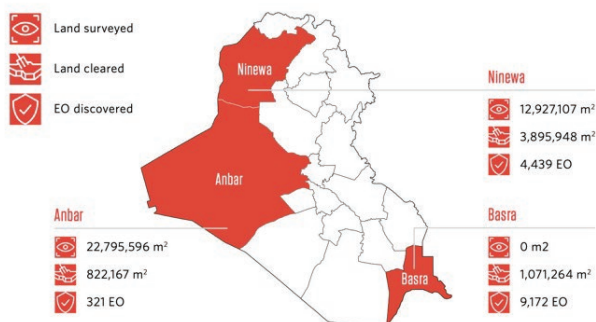
¹¹⁸ <https://data.unwomen.org/country/iraq>

explosive ordnance (EO), with recorded contamination spanning approximately 2,336 square kilometres.¹²⁰ This encompasses mines, cluster munitions, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) from past conflicts, including the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), the Gulf War (1990-1991), the 2003 U.S.-led military operation, and Da'esh occupation (2014-2017).

From 2016 to 2022, the UN concerted efforts in Iraq resulted in the clearance of 21,665,631 square meters, removing 89,962 EO items. This includes 2,677 IEDs, 3,586 IED main charges, 3,671 victim-operated IEDs, 2,557 explosive components, 1,229 suicide belts/vests, 74,704 ERW, and 1,538 landmines. Notably, 3,162 infrastructure sites were surveyed, and 2,055 previously riddled with substantial EO contamination – including hospitals, bridges, schools, and water treatment plants – were cleared.

Figure 62: Clearance Activities in Iraq (2022)

In 2022, UNMAS teams continued clearance activities in the governorates of Anbar, Basra and Ninewa and **cleared 5,789,379 m² of land** and **rendered safe some 14,000 explosives** from agricultural and residential areas.



Source: UN Mine Action Service, Iraq 2022.¹²¹

Yet, these commendable strides are overshadowed by persisting EO contamination, inhibiting reconstruction, stalling livelihood revival, and dissuading displaced citizens from returning.

Both the United Nations Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Strategic and Operational Framework¹²² and the Gol's National Plan underscore EO contamination as a paramount barrier for safe, dignified repatriations.¹²³ Clearing residential and agricultural zones is pivotal for ensuring sustainable returns and realizing overarching humanitarian goals.

Mine action remains integral to Iraq's stabilization, reconstruction, and development agenda. This involves restoring primary services, propelling agricultural and economic growth, enabling the safe return of IDPs, and curtailing the repurposing of components for new IED production. Embracing a gender-sensitive lens, mine action has mitigated EO risks for vulnerable groups. Women, constituting 24 percent of the national staff in UN mine action operations in 2022 and have been instru-

¹²⁰ Directorate for Mine Action and Iraq Kurdistan Mine Action Agency databases

¹²¹ UN Mine Action Service IRAQ PROGRAMME REPORT 2022

¹²² <https://iraqdurablesolutions.net/>

¹²³ *ibid*

mental across various roles, bolstering Iraq's rehabilitation and reconstruction journey.

5.3.3 Regional security dynamics affecting Iraq

Iraq, sharing borders with Jordan, Iran, Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye, is located in a volatile region with complex security challenges. Moreover, Iraq faces multifaceted transboundary issues, encompassing terrorism, sectarian violence, drug and arms trafficking, and the challenge of water scarcity, all of which threaten regional stability.

Within this intricate landscape, PM Sudani and his administration consistently emphasize Iraq's efforts to develop good relations with all its neighbours and enhance its role as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution. Iraq's proactive diplomatic engagements, combined with bolstered border security measures, have proved effective in de-escalating tensions.

The Iraqi government continues to endorse the US presence for advisory, training, and informational roles while reaffirming its sovereignty. Although notable progress was made in repatriation efforts in the first six months of 2023, the challenges associated with the camps and detention facilities in north-eastern Syria, and the risks they generate, persist. One member state reported that Da'esh has maintained its "Cubs of the Caliphate" program, which had involved children recruited in the overcrowded Hawl camp¹²⁴ between 2014 and 2017 but was now characterized as more operationally experienced and more organized, and assessed it to pose a heightened threat in the short term. Iraq has now repatriated more than 5,000 individuals from the camps in 10 waves. At the current pace of repatriation of all nationalities, however, the risks associated with these camps and detention facilities will persist for several more years.

¹²⁴ Seventeenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat.



6 Economic Transformation



6.1 Country-level trends

Economic transformation is crucial for Iraq's sustainable growth, necessitating a shift away from oil and an emphasis on the private sector to spur job creation and productivity. Digitalization and governance reforms are also vital. Despite prioritizing job creation, Iraq faces challenges due to a bloated public sector. In 2023, public sector employment rose by 833,000, with wages and pensions swelling by 15 percent, consuming 37 percent of total expenditures.¹²⁵

The maturity of the Iraqi public sector was assessed as 'basic' in terms of digital transformation. When measured against its neighbors and peers across the Middle East, the comparatively low scoring of Iraq leads to a set of recommended priority actions required to establish the ground rules for e-government. The current economic model stifles the potential of the private sector, demanding urgent reform. Businesses in Iraq struggle with credit access, bureaucratic hurdles, and inadequate infrastructure, compounded by the aftermaths of conflict.

While COMSEC has made strides in approving national e-governance strategies, the transition from paper-based processes remains incomplete across many ministries. The focus on physical data centers has inadvertently side-lined critical aspects such as governance, operational procedures, standardizing IT specifications for government procurement of proprietary technology, and building human resource capabilities not only in technology use but also in leveraging data for informed decision-making.

Productivity growth, especially in non-oil sectors, is essential for diversification. Real GDP growth accelerated to 7.0 percent in 2022, driven by the tapering of OPEC+ production cuts in the first nine months of 2022. Oil GDP, accounting for 61 percent of real GDP in 2022, grew by 12.1 percent despite the OPEC+ agreement in the last quarter of the year. In contrast, non-oil GDP growth was muted, as non-oil industries stagnated, and agricultural activities contracted due to drought and associated water shortages.¹²⁶

To achieve economic transformation, the Iraqi Government needs to consider and adopt digitization to improve overall macro and microeconomic outcomes. One of the axes of intervention is propelling the country toward a substantive digital transformation. This digital transformation could play a critical role in accelerating the reconstruction of the national economy, leading to fundamental changes in various sectors, including commerce, education, health, and public and financial services. To achieve this, Iraq can rely on a highly educated population that will acquire various highly technical skills, which can be leveraged to support the country's digital transformation. As of January 2024, there were an estimated 36.22 million internet users in Iraq, a 2.3 percent increase from 2023. The number of mobile connections stood at 46 million in January 2024, a 0.5 percent increase from January 2023.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Iraq federal budget 2023-2025

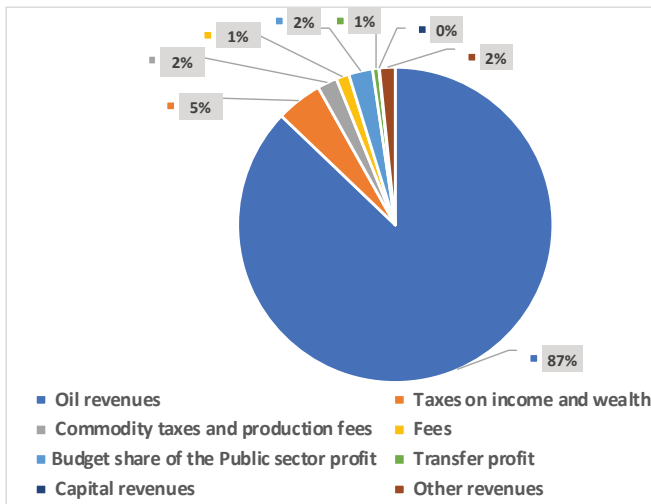
¹²⁶ ECONOMIC MONITOR Re-emerging Pressures: Iraq's Recovery at Risk, World Bank, Spring 2023

¹²⁷ Data Portal

6.2 Macro-economic and structural vulnerabilities

Iraq is heavily reliant on oil revenues, which represent 87 percent of the Iraqi federal budget revenue. This reliance can be a double-edged sword due to potential price fluctuations in the global market.

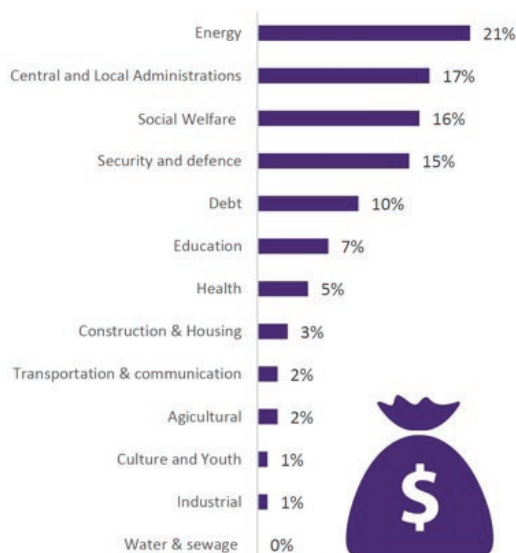
Figure 63: Federal budget revenues (2023-2025)



Source: MoF.

Compared to oil revenues, taxes on income and wealth revenue is quite modest, accounting for only 5 percent of the total budget revenue. This suggests that taxation is a significantly smaller portion of government revenue, attributable to a relatively smaller formal economic sector outside of oil. Strengthening tax administration and expanding the non-oil tax base could be immediate areas for reform, crucial for economic transformation. Expenditures, heavily skewed toward recurrent spending, are set to increase by 59 percent, notably due to a sharp increase in the wage bill.

Figure 64: Federal budget expenditure by sector, 2023-2025



Source: Federal Budget Law 2023-2025, MoF.

The oil and gas sector will remain a driving force in the Iraqi economy for the coming years. Iraq possesses one of the largest proven oil reserves and the largest proven gas deposits globally.¹²⁸ Leveraging these reserves, however, would require significant investments. The energy sector receives the highest allocation, 21 percent of the total budget, as the Iraqi oil industry is entering a new phase of production, one that is more expensive and complex than the upstream development of the past decade. Oil output is projected to gradually rise from 4.4 to 5 million bpd by 2027. Non-oil real GDP growth is expected to accelerate to 4 percent in 2023.

Significant infrastructure damage, impacting economic production and livelihood opportunities, must be addressed. This will require substantial investment through the federal budget and external contributions, as well as a restructuring of the economy to diversify revenue streams. Partnering with the private sector, particularly in reconstruction activities and employment creation, is necessary. This approach needs to be complemented by a reform of the public sector, which represents around 39 percent of total employment.

In February 2023, the Iraqi government reviewed the Iraqi currency and set the official exchange rate at ID 1,310 per U.S. dollar. Previously, in December 2020, the rate was ID 1,460 per U.S. dollar, including the Central Bank commission (ID 1,450 plus ID 10 in fees).¹²⁹

The currency revaluation will negatively impact the competitiveness of the Iraqi dinar, rendering it uncompetitive against the currencies of the country's main trading partners and leading to decreased demand for Iraqi national products. Market demand for imported products will shift to countries with lower exchange rates (Iran and Türkiye), resulting in a decline in Iraq's non-oil export revenue.

Inflation is expected to ease in 2023, driven by lower global commodity prices, which reduce the cost of essential imports such as food. However, inflationary risks remain high as the agricultural sector faces the prospect of severe droughts, driven by chronic water shortages due to climate change, gradually diminishing the availability of fertile land in Iraq. The limited size of the domestic manufacturing and agricultural sectors will continue to expose Iraq to fluctuations in global goods and commodity prices, presenting a persistent source of price volatility.

6.3 Agriculture sector and food security

The agriculture sector, pivotal to Iraq's economic transformation and food security, contributed 2.9 percent to

¹²⁸ At nearly 131 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), Iraq's proven natural gas reserves at the end of 2022 were the 12th largest in the world. Most of Iraq's natural gas reserves are associated with oil, and most of the associated natural gas is in large oil fields in southern Iraq.

¹²⁹ According to the closing prices of the daily bulletin of gold & main currencies published on the CBI website (www.cbi.iq)

the GDP in 2022. This figure is notably lower than the MENA region's average of 4.5 percent. The broader agri-food sector, including related value chain activities, has a more substantial GDP contribution. Notably, demand for agricultural products in Iraq is expected to be approximately USD5.6 billion by 2025, according to the International Trade Centre (ITC).¹³⁰

Agriculture accounts for approximately 78 percent of Iraq's annual freshwater withdrawals, a concerning figure given the escalating water scarcity driven by increased demand, diminished runoff, and reduced transboundary water flows. The reliance on irrigation for crop production, due to limited efficacy of rainfed methods, underlines the sector's vulnerability to water-related challenges.

In Iraq, crop production constitutes the primary source of income for approximately 75 percent of farmers, with the remainder relying on livestock or integrated crop-livestock systems. Predominantly small-scale, these farming systems employ traditional practices and minimal capital investment, leading to low productivity and limited social capital, which in turn affects supply chain integration adversely. Over recent decades, Iraq has transitioned from a self-sufficient food producer to a significant food importer due to challenges including sanctions, conflict, policy inefficiencies, extreme weather, water scarcity, and competition from imports. Da'esh crisis, starting in 2014, further exacerbated these challenges by displacing communities, destroying agricultural infrastructure, and limiting access to inputs and markets, resulting in a loss of about 40 percent of agricultural production.

Focusing on recovery and potential growth, key value chains identified for development include wheat, tomatoes, dates, and livestock. The livestock sector, an essential component of Iraq's agriculture, has been severely impacted, losing up to three-quarters of its livestock to conflict, with recovery efforts ongoing. The dairy sector, characterized by low productivity and local market limitations due to inadequate marketing opportunities, faces challenges in milk productivity, animal breeding, and management practices. Traditional dairy products, processed predominantly by women, remain popular despite the absence of a structured milk collection system to facilitate urban market access. The marketing infrastructure is underdeveloped, with cooperative support and private sector investment lacking, thus hindering value chain optimization.

The dairy value chain is further compromised by poor milk quality standards and lack of cooling and pasteurization facilities, leading to health risks such as the transmission of diseases like tuberculosis and brucellosis. Inadequate knowledge and technical skills in farm management, milk hygiene, handling, and processing are prevalent among farmers and processors.

¹³⁰ ITC, 2021, Identifying agricultural and agri-food products with potential for production and commercialization in Iraq

Employment and Labor Conditions: According to the 2021 Iraq LFS, the sector employs over 725,000 workers, representing 8.4 percent of the country's economic activities. A striking 96.7 percent of these jobs are informal, the highest ratio within Iraq's labor market. Conditions in this sector are challenging, characterized by low wages, minimal social security, and high incidence of child labor and discrimination. Notably, the sector also sees the largest proportion of low-paid workers and ranks among the world's most hazardous in terms of work-related fatalities and diseases.

Gender and Rural Dynamics: Agriculture is a crucial livelihood source for rural women, with 30 percent of national female employment and 40 percent in rural areas tied to this sector. In contrast, agriculture employs only 8 percent of men nationally and 5 percent in rural regions. A significant majority of agricultural workers, both female (88 percent) and male (85 percent), are unpaid, reflecting the dominance of subsistence farming. The food system also plays a vital role in rural employment, offering manufacturing jobs to a relatively low-skilled workforce, with around 16 percent engaged in food-related manufacturing.

Water Use and Efficiency Challenges: Agriculture is the primary consumer of Iraq's surface water, accounting for 75 percent. The sector faces substantial water losses due to inefficient irrigation systems, including poorly maintained earth canals and ditches. These issues necessitate urgent reforms and adoption of modern technologies and water management practices.

Strategic Initiatives and Growth Opportunities: Iraq's cabinet has implemented measures to enhance agricultural efficiency and bolster food security, including re-orienting fertilizer subsidies towards modern irrigation and setting strategic wheat purchasing prices. A growth strategy for the sector should focus on improving productivity, quality, and domestic market capacity, integrating new technologies, and developing agribusiness, particularly in high-value crops.

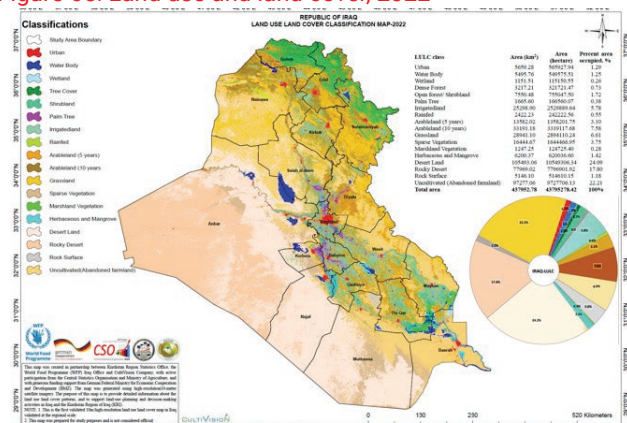
Moreover, addressing underdeveloped agribusiness value chains and increasing the processing of primary agricultural products present significant job creation opportunities. High potential agriculture products with significant opportunities for increased production, value chain development and commercialization in Iraq are chicken and eggs, horticulture (particularly tomatoes and potatoes), beef and bovine animals, and dairy products, in addition to dried fruits and nuts.¹³¹ The Gol has led the development of national sector strategies for tomatoes, poultry and potatoes, under the aegis of the Ministry of Agriculture and with ITC technical support.

Most agricultural practices occur in small, privately-owned farms. However, these units often suffer from inadequate investments and incentives, leading to a low

¹³¹ ITC, 2021

input-low output system. The sector is also challenged by land fragmentation, with over 80 percent of farms being less than 10 hectares and often dispersed across nonadjacent plots. ITC research¹³² highlights the importance of linking small businesses in agriculture to buyers to overcome fragmented markets. Interventions that consider market dynamics, enhance profitability and competitiveness, and forge market linkages can enable farms to connect to the market in a more sustainable manner.

Figure 65: Land use and land cover, 2022



Source: WFP-Iraq.

The comprehensive analysis of land use and land cover (LULC) in Iraq reveals a landscape predominantly characterized by desert and rocky desert terrains, which together account for 41.89 percent of the country's total land area. These regions are largely devoid of vegetation and human settlements, highlighting the environmental challenges and limited agricultural viability. Urban areas and water bodies, including the pivotal Tigris and Euphrates rivers, constitute minor portions of the land, covering 1.29 percent and 1.25 percent respectively, underscoring the constrained urban expansion and the essential role of water resources.

Wetlands and irrigated lands, though covering small fractions of the total land area at 0.26 percent and 5.78 percent respectively, play critical roles in biodiversity conservation and agriculture. The significance of rain-fed agriculture is noted with arable lands designated for cultivation over 5 and 10 years, indicating the reliance on seasonal rainfall for crop production.

Additionally, grasslands and sparse vegetation areas are vital for livestock grazing, supporting local communities, while marshlands, herbaceous, and mangrove areas, though limited in coverage, are crucial for sustaining diverse species. Abandoned farmlands emerge as a significant concern, representing the second-largest LULC class and covering 22.21 percent of Iraq's land area.

This highlights the acute challenges facing the agricultural sector, including water scarcity, soil degradation, and lack of support, and underscores the urgent need

¹³² ITC (2023), SME Competitiveness Outlook 2023: Small Businesses in Fragility: From Survival to Growth

for strategic land use planning, improved natural resource management, and robust conservation efforts to promote sustainable development and enhance agricultural productivity in Iraq.

Addressing these challenges through strategic reforms, enhanced value chain efficiency and market linkages technological advancements, and investment in infrastructure, knowledge sharing, and sustainable practices is essential for the sector's sustainability and economic transformation.

6.4 Productivity and private sector in Iraq

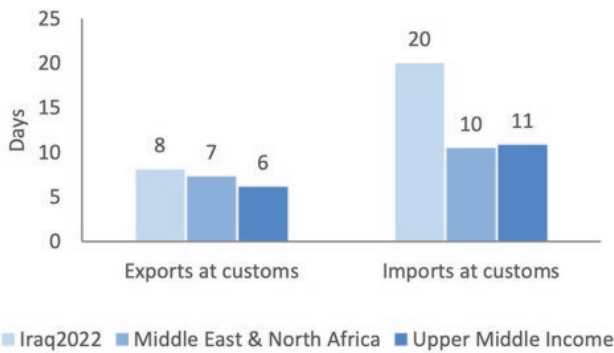
The private sector potential in Iraq remains underdeveloped. Inhibiting factors for investment and hiring in the private sector include public payroll patronage and the dominance of state-owned enterprises as large employers due to the weakness of the investment climate. Additionally, high public sector wages and guaranteed job security provide little incentive to work in the private sector. Iraq does not provide incentives for private-sector employment or outside investment.

The private sector in Iraq has long suffered from many constraints. The latest World Bank Enterprise Survey for Iraq, conducted in 2022, shows that formal firms often report difficulties obtaining specific licenses, accessing finance and having to pay informal payments (bribes) to manage their business. These challenges are part of the broader issues that the country faces.

The public sector, for instance, remains a key player in employment, with almost 38 percent of workers employed by the state. Moreover, state-owned enterprises absorb many graduates, compete in the private sector, and are often exempt from the taxes and regulations that burden other businesses. Unstable electricity, as well as corruption and lack of transparency, weaken trust in the economy and limit the prosperity of the private sector (World Bank, 2020).

A well-developed physical infrastructure, including roads, electricity, water, and telecommunications, is central to the competitiveness and growth of an economy. Quality infrastructure efficiently connects firms to markets for inputs, products, and technologies, reduces production costs, and enhances firms' competitiveness in domestic and international markets. The World Bank Enterprise Survey highlights the dual challenge of not only providing robust infrastructure for electricity, water supply, and telecommunications but also developing institutions that effectively maintain these public services. Efficient customs procedures enable businesses to export and import goods directly. Figure 66 shows the average number of days required to clear customs for exports and imports. Delays in customs clearance for exports and imports incur additional costs for firms, can disrupt production, interfere with sales, and may lead to damaged supplies or merchandise.

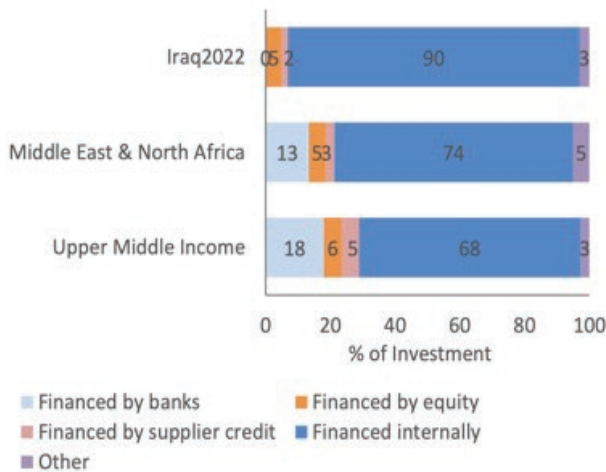
Figure 66: Average days to clear exports and imports through customs



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022.¹³³

Robust financial markets are crucial for offering payment services, mobilizing savings, and facilitating the acquisition of fixed assets and working capital. Efficient markets connect creditworthy firms with various lenders, reducing dependence on internal or informal funding sources. The Enterprise Surveys provide insights into firms' financing sources and financial transactions, with figures illustrating financing methods and the usage of financial services like deposit accounts and credit facilities. In Iraq, over-reliance on internal funding indicates financial intermediation inefficiencies, while access to credit enables firms to undertake potentially constrained projects.

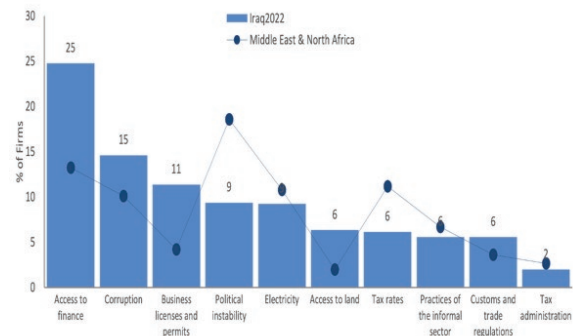
Figure 67: Sources of financing for purchases of fixed assets



Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022.¹³⁴

The primary challenges confronting the business landscape in Iraq include securing financing, navigating corruption, obtaining business licenses and permits, coping with political instability, ensuring reliable electricity, acquiring land, managing tax rates, dealing with the informal economy practices, adhering to customs and trade regulations, and handling tax administration.

Figure 68: Top ten business environment constraints in Iraq vs. MENA

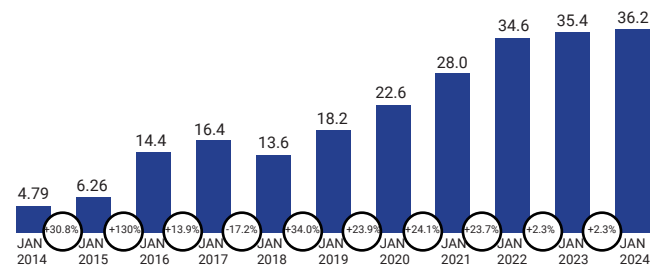


Source: World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022.¹³⁵

6.5 Digital transformation

Digital transformation in Iraq faces several key challenges, including a critical need for digital skills, knowledge, and awareness among the population. Schools and educational institutions play a small but vital role in this aspect, preparing individuals to effectively harness digital transformation's benefits.

Figure 69: Internet users over time in Iraq, 2023



Source: KEPIOS Analysis; ITU; GSMA Intelligence; EUROSTAT; GWI; CIA world factbook; CNNIC and Local Authorities.¹³⁶

As of January 2023, Iraq had 33.72 million internet users. The country's internet penetration rate was 74.9 percent of the total population at the beginning of the year. Analyses indicate that the number of internet users in Iraq rose by 7.3 million, marking a 27.7 percent increase between 2022 and 2023. These statistics imply that 11.28 million people in Iraq were not using the internet at the start of 2023, meaning 25.1 percent of the population remained offline at that time.¹³⁷

However, significant infrastructure challenges exist, such as incomplete telecommunication structures and inadequate digital infrastructure. The National Data Centre is not ready, and there's a lack of a comprehensive national database. Existing systems suffer from outdated technology and insufficient cybersecurity measures, while internet connectivity is suboptimal, affecting offices with low bandwidth and high number of users.

¹³³ World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022
¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022
¹³⁶ Data Portal
¹³⁷ Data Portal

The benefits of digital transformation are manifold, including improved productivity, streamlined data sharing, and enhanced decision-making capabilities. However, the digital divide needs to be addressed, particularly through empowering women and rural residents, and promoting e-commerce to support small businesses and rural economies.

Significant hurdles include resistance to change, frequent government changes, and the absence of a dedicated governmental entity for leading the operational components of digital transformation to realize the e-governance policies of COMSEC. The constant re-shuffling of committees and the lack of stable policies and regulations hinder progress. There's a need for cross-governmental strategic planning, an integrated management information system, and improved public awareness about the benefits of digital transformation.

Another challenge is the lack of skilled professionals in the ICT sector due to budgetary constraints and inadequate training programs. A legal framework is needed for an agency to lead digital transformation, handle data integration, and communicate between different governmental entities.

Iraq's digital transformation maturity has been assessed as 'basic', and several actions are recommended to enhance e-government readiness. These actions encompass providing digital infrastructure, introducing digital financial services, reforming the telecommunications market, and liberalizing and privatizing the public sector. Additionally, empowering government regulation to specify IT standards is crucial to facilitate interoperability among key ministries such as Interior, Justice, Health, Labour and Social Affairs, and Education. This will enable the most vulnerable Iraqis to access critical social services.

Figure 70: Financial inclusion factors in Iraq, 2023



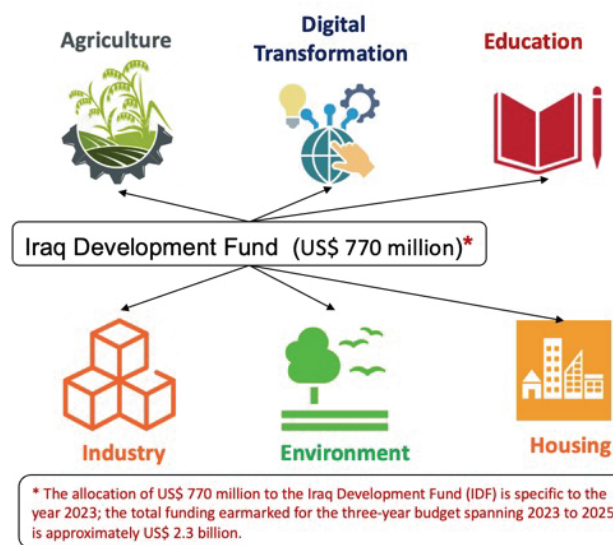
Source: KEPIOS Analysis; ITU; GSMA intelligence; EUROSTAT; GWI; CIA world factbook; CNNIC and Local Authorities.¹³⁸

The rise of streaming services and e-payment systems like Tabadul indicates progress, but challenges like

¹³⁸ Data Portal

limited internet bandwidth, digital piracy, and a lack of consumer trust in online payments persist. Government initiatives to modernize billing and taxation systems, promote online payment methods, and support e-commerce are crucial. Talent development is also essential, with initiatives like Earthlink Academy and the Ta3leem e-learning platform playing significant roles in building a skilled digital workforce. In conclusion, collaboration between the private sector, government, and stakeholders is imperative for sustaining digital progress and driving economic growth in Iraq.

Figure 71: Iraq Development Fund (2023-2025)



Source: FBL; MoF.

Financing is pivotal in digital transformation, particularly at the governmental level, underscoring the importance of securing adequate funding and maintaining robust budgeting through mechanisms like the Iraq Development Fund (IDF).

On August 7, 2023, the Iraqi government inaugurated the IDF with an allocation of approximately USD 770 million, as stipulated in the Federal Budget Law of Iraq. The IDF has a multifaceted mission: it aims to improve the investment climate, promote sustainable economic and social development, and ensure representation from all governorates, including those not organized into a region. Furthermore, the IDF seeks to diversify Iraq's non-oil economic sectors by financing investment projects and tackling economic, social, and environmental challenges. This objective is achieved by attracting capital, technology, and expertise and converting these resources into feasible investment opportunities. The IDF comprises six sub-funds, each dedicated to a specific sector: 1) Environment; 2) Digital Transformation; 3) Education; 4) Agriculture; 5) Industry; and 6) Housing.



Climate Change and Environment Analysis

Iraq is experiencing significant environmental challenges, and its environment has been further destabilized by the impacts of climate change, including frequent droughts, floods, and extreme heat. The UN Environment Programme ranks Iraq as the world's 5th most vulnerable country¹³⁹ to these climatic changes. Experts predict that by 2035, Iraq will only be able to meet 15 percent of its water needs and problems like desertification, soil erosion are leading to food security disruptions. Pollution is another concern, with industrial waste contaminating much of Iraq's water sources.¹⁴⁰

To tackle this growing crisis, Iraq needs comprehensive strategies that involve robust environmental management and governance at all levels, just and inclusive climate change adaptation and mitigation, investment in clean energy and infrastructure development, and an investment in a transition to a green economy that support sustainable growth and social and political stability.

7.1 Climate change impacts

7.1.1 Extreme weather events

Intense heatwaves, often exceeding 50°C, are becoming increasingly regular in Iraq, such temperatures strain human well-being and the nation's resources. The country has also faced recurrent droughts, notably in 1970–2013, with the worst episodes observed in 1998–99 and 2008–09. During these times, vast regions were affected, accounting for up to 87 percent of Iraq.¹⁴¹ While the southern and central zones experienced more frequent, albeit shorter, droughts, the northeast grappled with prolonged and severe episodes, adversely impacting rain-fed crops.

Furthermore, Iraq's vulnerability to heavy rains, especially during winter and spring, has led to increased incidents of flooding, with the Tigris and Euphrates basin areas particularly susceptible. Cities such as Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul have borne the brunt of these deluges which damaged infrastructure, displaced communities, caused casualties, and interrupted farming and agricultural production. The risk of waterborne diseases also escalates post-flooding, especially in regions with insufficient sanitation infrastructure. Additionally, sand and dust storms have increased from an average of 24 dusty days annually between 1951-1990, to 283 day per year by 2012. The Iraqi Ministry of Environment predicts this number to reach nearly 300 days within the next decade.¹⁴² In addition, climate also causes displacement and affects the ability of families to find durable solutions. The cumulative



¹³⁹ United Nations Environment Programme 2910 Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People

¹⁴⁰ Alwash, A, Istephanian, H, Tollast, R and Al-Shibaany, Z Y (eds), 2018. Towards Sustainable Water Resources Management in Iraq. Iraq Energy Institute.

¹⁴¹ Hameed, M., Ahmadalipour, A. and Moradkhani, H. (2018). Apprehensive Drought Characteristics over Iraq: Results of a Multidecadal Spatiotemporal Assessment. Geosciences, Vol. 8, Issue 2 (2018), p. 58.

¹⁴² UN Iraq, 2013, Sand and Dust Storms Fact Sheet

nature of these issues underscores the urgent need for comprehensive adaptation and mitigation measure.

7.1.2 Climate change and inequality

Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities in Iraq, disproportionately impacting women and girls.¹⁴³ Women and girls often carry the primary burden for securing household necessities such as water and energy, as climate change increases resource scarcity, this burden becomes increased, enhancing inequalities, such as the gender education gap, and gendered health risks from waterborne diseases due to reduced river flows and pollution areas.

Furthermore, the social and economic impacts of climate change escalate gender-based violence risks, including sexual violence, trafficking, and child marriages. Particularly in rural areas and the more gender-unequal southern Iraq, women confront more significant climate-induced challenges.¹⁴⁴ Their limited access to resources, decision-making, and mobility hinders their adaptive capacities. However, integrating women and minorities into decision-making can enhance climate mitigation and adaptation. Empowering women, especially in rural settings, is crucial for community resilience and improved livelihoods.

7.1.3 Climate-induced migration

As of August 2023, the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix has recorded 83,520 people displaced from the central and southern governorates due to drought, the majority (77 percent) being hosted in urban locations.¹⁴⁵ Climatic and environmental change also affects vulnerable communities who are already displaced by conflict and reduces the opportunities for sustainable return and reintegration.

At the end of 2021, IOM recorded approximately 20,000 people displaced due to water scarcity (looking at only 10 of Iraq's 19 governorates), high salinity, and poor water quality across Iraq.¹⁴⁶ As of 15 September 2022, 10,464 families (62,784 individuals) remain displaced because of drought conditions across ten southern governorates. Of these, 3,854 families (37 percent) are displaced within their district of origin. The displaced families are dispersed across 259 locations, with the majority (76 percent) being urban. Maysan governorate hosts the most significant number of families experiencing climate-induced displacement (2,712), followed by Najaf (2,586) and Thi-Qar (1,473).

7.1.4 Climate change, peace and security

When interacting with other drivers of conflict, climate change worsens fragility. Climate change in Iraq increase the susceptibility of communities to conflict because it undermines the local structures and resources that support stability.¹⁴⁷ This can lead to more intense and volatile security situations (for example, increased episodic inter-community violence resulting from decreased access to productive land and water limitation). National-level assessments in 2023 identified four primary climate-security risks in Iraq. These include: climate-induced migration and rapid urbanization, reduced natural resource base for livelihoods, heightened tensions over shared water resources and, eventually, the economic consequences of global reduction in the use of oil and gas.¹⁴⁸

The security risks that are seen on a national scale, such as large movements of people into urban centers, are the results of community-level stressors that force people into negative coping strategies. Addressing these requires localized, community-owned solutions including conflict-sensitive climate action and adaptation and mitigation programmes that include peace-building and conflict resolution mechanisms.

7.2 Environmental degradation impacts

7.2.1 Environmental pollution

Pollution is one of Iraq's most pressing issues. It ranges from water pollution and air pollution to soil salinity and degradation of vital ecosystems from the unregulated discharge of solid and liquid pollutants. The improper waste management is widespread and is contaminating the land, air, and water. This affects public health by compromising clean water, air, and food safety. From 2010 to 2016, the country witnessed a surge in municipal solid waste generation from 11.4 million tons to 14.9 million tons, more than a third is not collected or managed in anyway.¹⁴⁹ The mounting waste, particularly in urban areas, has severely degraded Iraq's soil. The nation's soil is further contaminated by hazardous wastes containing toxic compounds like PCBs, CFCs, PVCs, lead, mercury, and cadmium.

Air pollution remains a severe problem in Iraq, driven by factors like the use of substandard fuel, an explosion in personal car ownership, the lack of efficient public transportation, and rampant industrial emissions. Open waste burning further deteriorates air quality. To make matters worse, Iraq flares approximately 40 percent of its produced natural gas, releasing around 20 million tons of carbon dioxide annually, contributing to climate change and creating negative health and environmental consequences.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴³ World Economic Forum, 2021, Global Gender Gap Report 2021.

¹⁴⁴ UNDP, 2021, Ahwari Women, The Beating Heart of the Iraqi Marshes.

¹⁴⁵ IOM DTM, 2023, Climate-Induced Displacement Southern Iraq, June 2023

¹⁴⁶ IOM, 2022, Migration, Environment, and Climate Change in Iraq

¹⁴⁷ The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2022, Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet - Iraq

¹⁴⁸ DPPA, 2023, The interlinkages between climate, peace and security in Iraq

¹⁴⁹ UNDP, 2022, Solid Waste, Iraq towards a clean environment

¹⁵⁰ World Bank Group, 2017, Iraq Systematic Country Diagnostic

Water pollution incidents are causing grave health concerns. For instance, the water crisis in Basra led to over 120,000 hospitalizations due to water-borne diseases.¹⁵¹ The unchecked discharge of untreated industrial and household wastewater, amounting to millions of cubic meters daily, pollutes most of Iraq's rivers. Pollution on land is also a pressing issue. The overuse of fertilizers and pesticides in agriculture, driven by lack of oversight and easy availability, results in the accumulation of non-biodegradable chemicals in the soil.¹⁵² Iraq's history of war and conflict has left toxic remnants of war, posing additional soil contamination threats.

7.2.2 Water scarcity

Iraq is grappling with a critical water crisis. Over the past 40 years, the flow from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, accounting for nearly 98 percent of Iraq's surface water,¹⁵³ has dropped by 30-40 percent.¹⁵⁴ Forecasts indicate that by 2025, the nation's water supply might contract by a massive 60 percent compared to 2015.¹⁵⁵ Several factors are exacerbating this water scarcity. Along with the widespread and devastating levels of pollution, there are serious inefficiencies and water wastage both in how water is delivered and in its usage. Alarming, 18 percent of Iraq's population now dwells in regions where water is scarce. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, supplemented by several productive groundwater reservoirs, remain Iraq's lifelines yet sustainable management and protection of these water sources has been seriously lacking.¹⁵⁶

Outdated wastewater treatment facilities and a lack of clear development plans exacerbate these issues. Water quality is extremely low due to untreated waste, especially discharge from informal settlements without solid or liquid waste management, and from industrial activities and agriculture. Notably, the UNICEF-MOP surveys reveal disturbing statistics: two out of five children lack access to safely managed water services, and three out of five don't have access to sanitation. Half of Iraq's schools and healthcare facilities still need essential water services.

The damage inflicted on the water sector by conflicts, notably the destruction caused by Da'esh, is valued at IQD 134 billion (around USD115 million) and a significant financing gap remains despite increased public spending on the water sector between 2007 and 2012. Upstream water used in neighboring countries also has an impact on Iraq and international cooperation is needed to develop equitable and environmentally conscious water use policies to meet each nation's needs.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ WASH Cluster, 2020, Water Pollution Assessment of the Canals in Basrah City, Iraq

¹⁵² Issa and Alshatteri, 2021, Source Identification, Ecological Risk and Spatial Analysis of Heavy Metals Contamination in Agricultural Soils of Tanjaro Area, Kurdistan Region, Iraq. UKH Journal of Science and Engineering, 5(2), pp. 18-27

¹⁵³ Iraq heavily relies on surface water and groundwater resources with recurring droughts for the past two decades (Al-Quraishi et al., 2021). During this period, there was a noticeable increase in land surface temperatures, a decrease in vegetation coverage, and a lack of average precipitation leading to declining crop yields and decreasing surface water availability

¹⁵⁴ Alwash, Istepanian, Tollast, Al-Shibaany and Zeyad, 2018, Towards Sustainable Water Resources Management in Iraq, Iraq Energy Institute

¹⁵⁵ Al-Ansari 2013 Management of Water Resources in Iraq: Perspectives and Prognoses. Journal of Engineering, 5, 667-668

¹⁵⁶ UNICEF 2021 Running Dry: Water Scarcity threatens lives and development in Iraq

¹⁵⁷ Arab Center for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands and United Nations Economic and Social Com-

7.2.3 Land and soil degradation

Iraq classifies around 16 percent of its land (7 million hectares) as arable. Of this, six million hectares are rain-fed crops or under irrigation. Rain-fed farming is concentrated mainly in northern Iraq, where cereals are the main crops.¹⁵⁸ Yet Iraq's agricultural productivity is declining and the amount of land that can be allocated for irrigated agriculture has been reduced by 50 percent in some governorates. Along with the widespread pollution of lands and soils discussed above, Iraq is also facing desertification and erosion. Serious increases in sand and dust storms are resulting from erosion from wind and water.¹⁵⁹ Poor land and catchment management has removed large amounts of vegetation and exposed bare topsoil to erosion and run-off. Land degradation and the removal of vegetation has opened large areas of dry land and removed natural windbreaks. Winds further remove the vital topsoil which contains nutrients and organic matter, leaving the remaining soils more fragile and less productive.

7.2.4 Environmental impacts of conflict

Military operations, the sabotage and looting of oil, mining, chemical and pharmaceutical facilities and power plants are common features of conflicts. The remnants of war have created a toxic environment in many conflict-affected areas.

This led to the direct exposure of civilians to poisonous and sometimes radioactive materials and contaminated soil and groundwater and will likely have a long-term environmental and public health impact.¹⁶⁰ A major environmental problem created by the Da'esh conflict is massive quantities of debris, not only in major urban centers such as Mosul, Kirkuk, and Ramadi but also in secondary towns and villages in Ninewa, Anbar, Salah El-Deen, and Diyala governorates. Over 55 million tons of debris were created by the conflict. For example, in Mosul city alone, it is estimated that the conflict created around 8-10 million tons of debris.¹⁶¹

mission for Western Asia 2021 Impact of Climate Change on Shared Water Resources in the Euphrates River Basin. RICCAR Technical Report 11, Beirut

¹⁵⁸ FAO and WFP 2021 Agricultural value chain study in Iraq – Dates, grapes, tomatoes and wheat

¹⁵⁹ Planetary Security Initiative, 2021, Iraq's Growing Desertification Problem

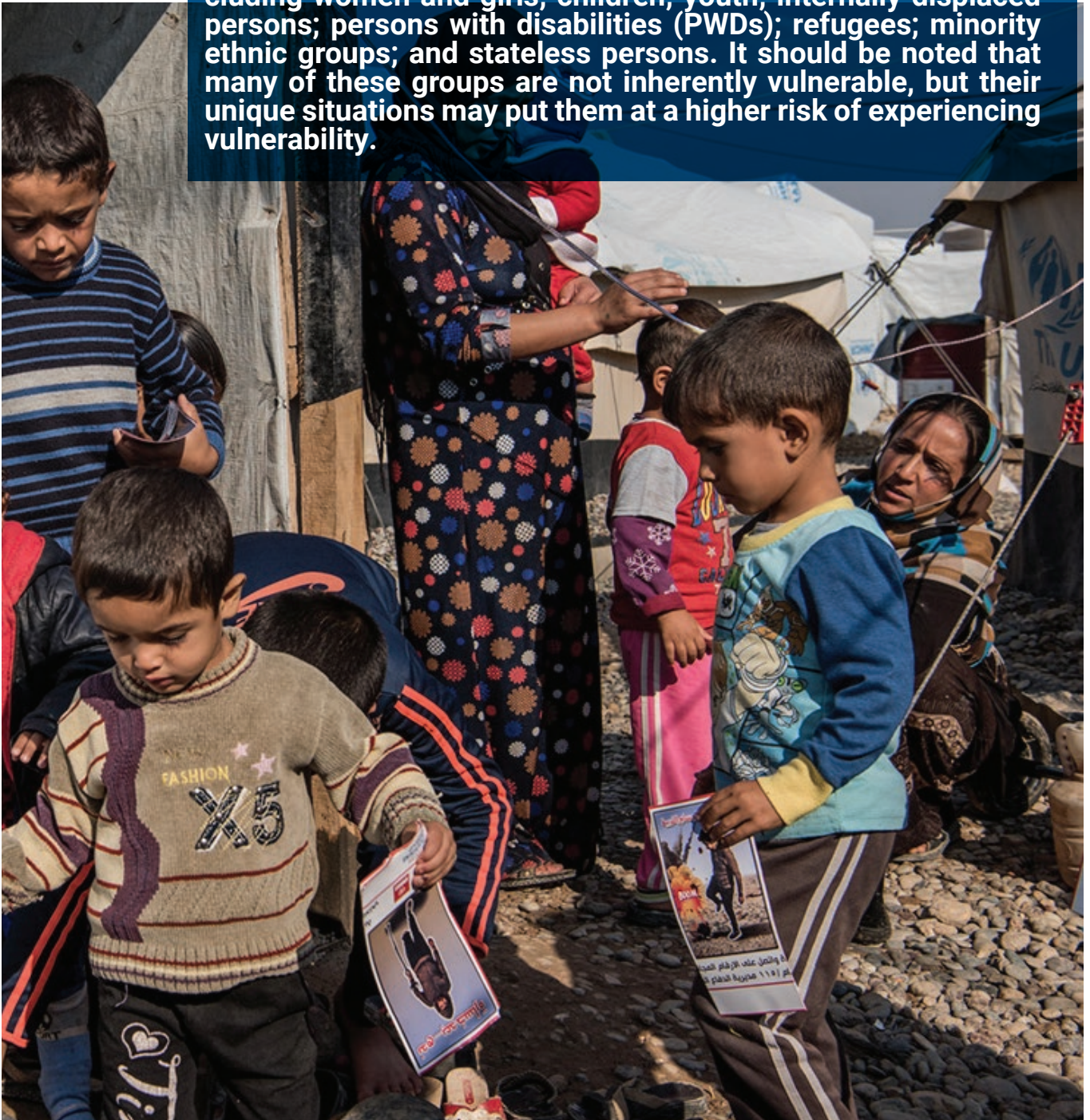
¹⁶⁰ Toxic Remnants of War Project, 2014, Pollution Politics: Power, Accountability and Toxic Remnants of War

¹⁶¹ UNEP, 2022, Mosul's recovery moves towards a circular economy



8 *Leave No One Behind (LNOB)*

Several social groups in Iraq are identified as vulnerable, including women and girls; children; youth; internally displaced persons; persons with disabilities (PWDs); refugees; minority ethnic groups; and stateless persons. It should be noted that many of these groups are not inherently vulnerable, but their unique situations may put them at a higher risk of experiencing vulnerability.



8.1 Women and girls

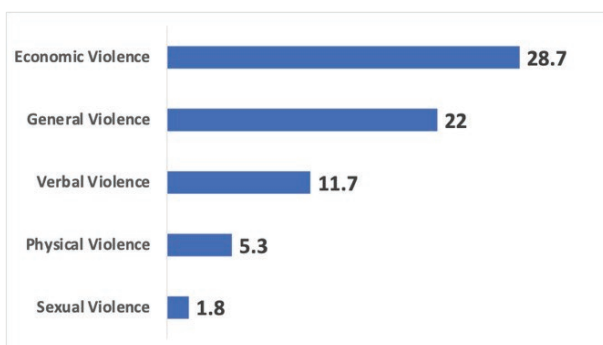
The societal and cultural fabric of Iraq has inherent gender-discriminative practices. While exact data on violence against women is lacking, available metrics provide insights. The Ministry of Interior recorded 14,000 cases of domestic violence in Federal Iraq in 2021. The KRI reported 14,449 domestic violence incidents in the same year. Moreover, 90 percent of reported GBV incidents among refugees in 2022 involved women and girls.

Violence directed at women and girls within the family is often normalized and legitimized by survivors, perpetrators, and communities by referencing cultural and religious norms. Forty percent of women and girls aged 15 to 49 are still unfamiliar with the legal provisions and their legal rights. Sexual violence and exploitation and domestic violence, persists.

Forced marriage and child marriage are other types of GBV against women and girls in Iraq, particularly in Basra governorate, due to the application of tribal code in reconciliation for killing incidents committed by men.¹⁶² The harmful practices and human rights violations committed by tribe members are allegedly justified as (traditions and customs). The harmful practices were recognized in the Iraqi constitution.¹⁶³ The State shall prohibit the tribal traditions that are incompatible with human rights.

Girls, particularly in IDP or refugee communities, or whose mobility outside the household is constrained, face massive disengagement and isolation, impacting their mental well-being.

Figure 72: Percentage of women in Iraq reported experiencing forms of violence by husband, 2021



Source: ICSO, Integrated survey of the social and health conditions of women in Iraq, 2021.

In 2021, a substantial number of Iraqi women aged 15 and over experienced one or more forms of violence in their marriages, with specific prevalence rates of 1.8 percent for sexual violence, 5.3 percent for physical

violence, 11.7 percent for verbal abuse, 22 percent for general violence, and 28.7 percent for economic violence. These figures underscore the urgent need for the adoption of the draft Anti-Domestic Violence Law as well as comprehensive legal reforms, accessible support systems for victims, educational initiatives to shift societal perceptions, and programs promoting women's economic independence. The issue of GBV prevalence in Iraq demands immediate, multifaceted interventions from policymakers and the global community.

Deep-seated conservative culture, economic sanctions, and armed conflicts have impeded the progress of women in Iraq. Key contributors include declining literacy rates among rural women, increased school dropouts among southern girls, and barriers like early marriage and limited access to contraceptives. Misinterpretations of religious texts, societal norms, and lack of women's rights awareness have further compounded these challenges. Notably, there is increasingly worrying anti-gender rhetoric that demands the government to ban the term "gender equality," which poses risks to the safety and security of individuals and organizations working on gender issues. Moreover, discriminatory laws, norms, and attitudes persistently undermine women's decision-making capacity, especially in sexual and reproductive health issues.

The endorsement by the federal parliament of the Yazidi Female Survivors and Other Components Draft Law on assistance and reparations for survivors of Da'esh's sexual violence focusing on Yazidis and other minority groups, is a positive development on transitional justice in addressing the needs of survivors. However, it fails to include provisions on children born of sexual violence, which will require further legislation.

To forge a transformative path for Iraqi women, there's an urgent need for institutional, legal, and societal changes. The foundations for these changes are already being laid, as evidenced by political participation and government initiatives, but more needs to be done. For sustained progress, it's imperative to mainstream gender equality at all levels of governance, fortify women's roles in decision-making avenues, and continually challenge and change discriminatory norms and practices.

8.2 Children

Children often suffer the gravest consequences of terrorism, falling victim to abduction, trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence, and exploitation by terrorist groups. Technological advancements and the strategic objectives of such groups have made it increasingly challenging to detect recruitment efforts, which expand the reach of recruitment campaigns, and subject children and young people associated with these groups to heightened vulnerability, stigma, and discrimination.

¹⁶² Article in Arabic at raseef22.net

¹⁶³ Article 45(Second) of the Constitution states: "The State shall seek the advancement of the Iraqi clans and tribes, shall tend to their affairs in a manner that is consistent with religion and the law, and shall uphold their noble human values in a way that contributes to the development of society."

In 2022, the United Nations verified 202 grave violations against children in Iraq, and by December 2022, 936 children remained detained on national security-related charges, including their actual or alleged association with armed groups. Explosive remnants of war were responsible for most child casualties in 2022, accounting for 67 percent. The signing, in March 2023, of the Gol's Plan of Action for the prevention of use and recruitment of children by the Popular Mobilization Forces will contribute towards efforts for increased child protection from grave violations. The implementation of the Plan is key to achieving this objective.

The caregivers of these children, grappling with poverty and limited livelihood opportunities, often resort to domestic violence and experience psychological distress, child neglect, and harmful coping mechanisms, such as child marriage and child labor. These behaviors by caregivers, in turn, affect children, leading to aggression, distress, and isolation. Child labor and child marriage among refugees are linked to limited livelihood opportunities and cultural norms, with few available cash-based interventions considered unsustainable. Child protection actors, with lesser involvement from livelihood actors, mainly address responses to child labor among refugees.

The UNICEF-supported 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6) indicates that 5 percent of children aged 5-14 years in Iraq are engaged in child labour, with higher rates among children living in low-income households and in rural areas.

Iraq has ratified fundamental conventions safeguarding children from child labor, such as ILO Convention No. 138 on Minimum Age and ILO Convention No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labor, which have been in force since 1985 and 2001, respectively. Iraq is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Efforts by the Gol and social partners have been made in recent years to address children's needs effectively. The institutionalization of the ILO-supported Child Labor Monitoring System (CLMS) is a noteworthy example. This system identifies vulnerable children from host, refugee, and internally displaced communities at risk of or engaged in child labor and provides them with necessary protection and support.

Nevertheless, Iraq faces challenges, including outdated child welfare legislation, the need for subsidiary legal frameworks and standard operating procedures, and the necessity for a comprehensive child protection law. A National Child Protection Policy (2017-2027) has been issued by the Gol, offering a strategy for the protection, prevention, rehabilitation, and response to child protection concerns. A new Child Protection Law is under review by the Federal Parliament, and a comprehensive Child Rights Act, incorporating the rights of refugee chil-

dren, awaits endorsement by the KRG Parliament. While authorities have expressed their commitment to providing child protection services, including for refugees, public sector investment in child protection remains limited, and institutional capacity remains weak.

Legislation related to GBV and child protection has yet to meet international standards, and government-led protection systems require substantial technical and financial support for both local and refugee survivors of such violence.

8.3 Youth

The number of young people in Iraq is projected to reach 16.4 million by 2030,¹⁶⁴ constituting 31 percent of the total population, and is expected to grow to 23 million by 2050.¹⁶⁵ These young Iraqis hold significant promise and positive energy, representing the potential for a demographic dividend. However, they encounter formidable challenges, vulnerabilities, and impediments that hinder their ability to achieve their full and equitable potential. The youth population has disproportionately borne the brunt of recent conflicts and adverse economic conditions, including high unemployment rates, inadequate educational opportunities, and limited support for young entrepreneurs' startups.

According to the 2022 LFS, Iraq's overall national unemployment rate stood at 16.5 percent at the end of 2021. Notably, youth unemployment was alarmingly high at 35.8 percent, more than three times the adult unemployment rate of 11.2 percent.

The national labor force participation rate, representing the percentage of the working-age population engaged in the labor force, was 39.5 percent. Regrettably, the female labor force participation rate remained exceptionally low at 10.6 percent, in stark contrast to the male labor force participation rate of 68.0 percent.

Within the youth demographic (15 to 24 years), the labor force participation rate was 26.5 percent, while adults (aged 25 years and above) had a participation rate of 45.8 percent.

A concerning 36.7 percent of the youth population fell under the category of Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). Notably, the NEET rate was substantially higher among female youth, standing at 52.3 percent, compared to male youth at 22.1 percent. Furthermore, rural areas recorded a higher NEET rate of 41.1 percent compared to urban areas with 34.8 percent.

The primary challenges impeding labor force participation, youth employment, and equal opportunities encom-

¹⁶⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision (UN WPP), United Nations, New York, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ MENA Generation 2030, UNICEF, 2019

pass a burgeoning labor force due to the youth bulge, the government and private sector's inability to harness the demographic dividend, nepotism, corruption, and lack of accountability. Additionally, there are constraints associated with limited private sector development, low enterprise creation, and gender inequalities. ITC's second youth barometer (2023)¹⁶⁶ highlights a strong positive perception of entrepreneurship in Iraq, despite the variations across governorates in terms of access to business development support, as well as a need for increased job opportunities and job improved match-making between employers and job seekers, as many respondents reported difficulties in finding employment after graduating.

A bloated public sector, ill-targeted social transfers, declining quality of health and education services, and patronage networks that favor older workers have further constrained youth participation in productive activities. Violence, exclusion, absence of adolescent and youth-friendly spaces and platforms for meaningful and equitable civic engagement, internal displacement, and psychological impacts have affected Iraq's youngest population. Despite that, the Iraqi National Education Strategy 2021-2031 recognizes the value of the participation of CSOs and communities, with a role leveraging the nonformal education sector, there is still a gap in integrating the youth into civic participation, non-formal and lifelong education, and skills/capacity transfer for work, innovation, and technology.

These factors have engendered feelings of hopelessness, particularly among the most vulnerable segments, leading to a sense of prolonged disempowerment as young people perceive their voices as unheard, with limited avenues for active engagement at community, local, and national levels. Young people yearn to be valued and provided with greater opportunities to contribute positively to the community and address issues affecting them. Evidence demonstrates that when empowered to play meaningful roles within their communities and given a sense of purpose, young people make healthy choices and transcend violence and discrimination. Poverty poses a significant barrier, impeding educational attainment, skills acquisition, and health outcomes, thereby limiting the potential of many Iraqi youth.

8.4 Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

The post-conflict period has seen the gradual return of more than 4.97 million people to their areas of origin, but according to IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) as of December 2023, about 1.12 million IDPs remain displaced in camps, informal sites and within host communities.¹⁶⁷ There is recognition that those who remain displaced face significant obstacles to pursuing durable solutions and require government and aid community assistance to attain such solutions.

¹⁶⁶ The Youth Entrepreneurship Barometer developed by the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), analyzes the results of a survey conducted on 504 youth.

¹⁶⁷ Iraq Crisis Response Plan 2022-2023

As of 31 December 2023, the KRG's Joint Crisis Coordination Centre reported that 631,174 IDPs remained in the KRI. Of these, 158,368 individuals resided in 24 camps, predominantly Yazidis in Duhok. The distribution of IDPs across governorates was as follows: Erbil (23,811 in-camp individuals), Duhok (124,710), and Sulaymaniyah (9,847), with a total of 472,806 individuals living outside camps.

Figure 73: IDP figures in KRI, 2023

Governorate	Families Inside Camps	Individuals Inside Camps	Families Outside Camps	Individuals Outside Camps
Duhok	4,839	23,811	36,069	216,414
Sulaymaniyah	25,170	124,710	22,380	134,280
Erbil	2,052	9,847	20,352	122,112
Total	32,061	158,368	78,801	472,806

Source: Joint Crisis coordination Centre (JCCC), Dec 23.

A significant proportion face additional obstacles to durable solutions due to vulnerabilities, such as belonging to minority ethnic/religious groups, being a female/child-headed household or having a disability.

The Sudani government program included initiatives targeting IDP displacement issues. Notably, the program aimed to resolve the displacement situation within six months, applying political and operational pressure on the Ministry of Migration and Displacement to coordinate solutions with KRG authorities.

Since February 2023, efforts have been made to respond to the Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement, involving collaboration between various Iraqi government entities, the KRG, and the United Nations (DSRSG/RC/HC, IOM, and UNHCR). These efforts culminated in a strategic roadmap aligning with the Iraqi government program for ending displacement, focusing on broader factors like shelter, public services, social protection, and sustainable reintegration.

In January 2024, the Iraqi Council of Ministers decided to close all remaining IDP camps in the KRI and appointed a quartet committee for implementation. Subsequently, on 23 January 23, the CoM adopted recommendations to facilitate this decision, involving various ministries and international organizations.

The government stance was that the primary causes of displacement no longer existed. Politically, the Yazidi IDPs played a significant role, with their presence previously benefiting candidates from some parties in the elections.

Populations in protracted displacement are often unable or prevented from returning or finding other durable solutions due to inconducive conditions in their areas of origin, including lack of safety, housing, land and property issues, access to public services, livelihoods or resistance from other community members. In some instances, IDPs are from areas of origin that are blocked from return by security actors.

The GoI decision to close or reclassify IDP camps to informal sites in all affected governorates, including the KRI, could lead to premature returns to areas where conditions are still severe or to situations of secondary displacement, especially to informal sites where IDPs have little access to public services or other forms of assistance. Secondary displacement to informal sites may also sometimes stretch the absorption capacity of host communities, undermining reintegration capacities.

To note, the KRG has always maintained that it does not pursue a policy of camp closures, underlining that returns should only happen on a voluntary basis. Efforts to address displacement, therefore, require a developmental approach that also addresses the needs of host communities and returnees and would align with SGD goals 1, 11, and 16. In some instances, households return to areas is highly affected by intra-group violence. Returnees with perceived affiliation to extremist groups such as Da'esh might be exposed to harassment or retaliatory attacks, which might, in turn, reignite community violence and result in failed returns.

Returnees also often face issues related to housing, land and property rights, and general access to documentation and public services. Secondary displacement to non-camp areas stretches the absorption capacity of the often already vulnerable host communities and jeopardizes social cohesion.

Recognizing the limitations of a purely humanitarian response to displacement, the aid community initiated some efforts towards joint planning and durable solutions. At the same time the government developed the National Plan for Returning the IDPs to their Liberated Areas to address displacement.¹⁶⁸ To compliment government efforts, the aid community developed the Inter-Agency Durable Solutions Strategic and Operational Framework which identified the critical areas of focus for humanitarian, stabilization, peacebuilding and development actors to support government and conflict affected communities to pursue durable solutions.

In 2023, the UN and GoI have developed a roadmap to accelerate the National Plan implementation. The Roadmap reaffirms the commitment of the government and the international community to address displacement and identifies priority actions to create durable solutions for the displaced and vulnerable returnees, addressing all their concerns (return, relocation, and local integration).

The Ministry of Migration and Displacement is modifying the Roadmap to reflect the recent CoM decisions. This revision aims to adapt to the evolving situation and address the broader IDP needs and challenges in Iraq. The updated Roadmap will expand its focus from four to six key areas, including:

1. Conducting two-level surveys in IDP camps to update existing information and determine families' needs and obstacles to return (newly added by the GoI).
2. Hosting a national conference, likely sponsored by the Prime Minister and potentially funded by the UN, to secure international support for policy implementation
3. Facilitating access to shelters.
4. Facilitating access to services.
5. Assisting families with political and security challenges hindering their return.
6. Ensuring sustainable reintegration of IDPs.

The IASC framework advocates for inclusive, durable solutions for IDPs, emphasizing equality across all population segments, including women, children, PWDs, and marginalized individuals. In evaluating these criteria, the CoM decisions have successfully met standards for voluntariness, long-term safety, security, freedom of movement, restoring housing, land, and property, providing compensation, and addressing humanitarian needs during the transition. However, they have only partially achieved the goal of ensuring an adequate standard of living, including basic necessities and access to employment and livelihoods.

With persistent political and fiscal fragilities in Iraq, displacement-affected population groups will remain vulnerable if not properly assisted in access solution pathways. Their vulnerabilities and conditions, therefore, need to be consistently assessed, highlighted, and represented to prevent their long-term deprivation and exclusion from accessing rights, which would eventually affect the rest of the country as well.

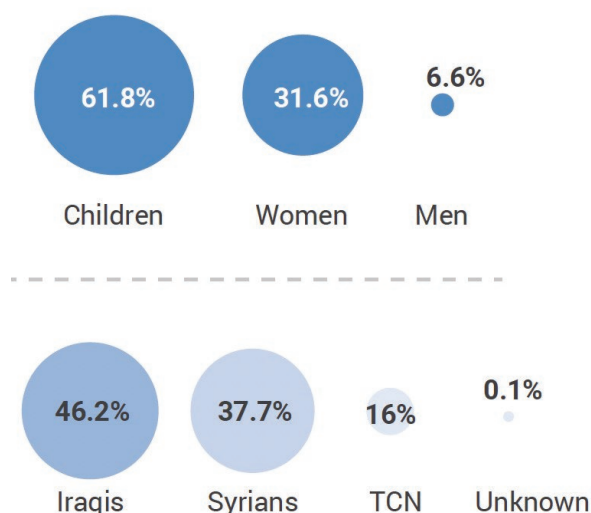
¹⁶⁸ GoI National Plan

8.5 Returnees from North-East Syria

Al-Hol camp in northeast Syria, where more than 43,000 displaced persons have been confined since 2014, was identified as one of the most urgent and complex humanitarian crises globally.

The Iraqi nationals (approximately 22,000) make up half of Al-Hol residents, the majority of whom are children, and a substantial number of the adults are women; both groups have specific needs. The camp confronts daily challenges due to increased criminality and violence, which threatens the safety of the camp residents, NGO personnel, and camp administration. In May 2021, the GoI began returning its nationals, after being screened and cleared of criminal liability, from Al-Hol to Jeddah One Rehabilitation Centre (J1) in Ninewa. Upon arrival, J1 residents are provided with a variety of services that prepare them to return to communities of origin or communities they choose to return to. By November 2023, the GoI organized 12 rounds of returns, bringing back 1,742 families (6,936 individuals) through this repatriation process. The GoI also facilitated the onward departure of 967 families (3,873 individuals) to areas of origin or a third location and a total of 825 families (3,079 individuals) remain in J1.

Figure 74: Al-Hol Camp population breakdown



Source: OCHA Syria.

The majority of Al-Hol residents and of the Iraqi returnees are children, women, and members of female-headed households, which means they face a variety of challenges during their time in J1 and after their departure. These challenges and vulnerabilities mirror the experiences of IDPs more generally in Iraq, as those returning from northeast Syria face challenges in obtaining civil documents and other documentation needed to reintegrate into communities, face concerns related to housing, community acceptance and fear of stigma or vio-

lence, and lack sustainable livelihoods opportunities.¹⁶⁹ Women and female heads of households experience these challenges most acutely.

The GoI concurrently arranges for the return of detainees from detention facilities in northeast Syria, as part of the repatriation process it is undertaking within the Global Framework. The transfer of detainees can also involve children in juvenile detention. This process represents a number of challenges for the long-term reintegration of these returnees, including risks associated with over-crowding in prison settings. Indeed, overcrowding and concerns about facilities are slowing down the repatriation process of detainees from North East Syria. In mid-2023, the UN in Iraq presented to the GoI the One UN Plan for the return of Iraqi nationals from North East Syria. This Plan falls under the Global Framework for United Nations Support on Syria/Iraq Third Country National Returnees and outlines the programming priorities for UN agencies supporting the GoI in returning its nationals.¹⁷⁰

8.6 Persons with disabilities

In Iraq, PWDs are disproportionately affected by armed conflict, violence and other emergencies, compounded by access barriers to services, including development, transitional, and humanitarian programming. Women with disabilities are particularly isolated due to social customs and the stigma and discrimination associated with their disability.¹⁷¹ Deaf people face significant discrimination, and IDPs and returnees with disabilities experience many barriers to accessing durable solutions.¹⁷²

PWDs experience difficulties in accessing education, public places, transport and healthcare due to inaccessibility and negative attitudes. Additionally, they experience challenges accessing assistive devices and accessible communication due to unavailability and high cost.

Many PWDs are unemployed with limited access to skills training, employment opportunities or business development support.¹⁷³ In addition, many are not able to access social protection payments. This means that they have little to no income and struggle to afford their basic needs.

Currently, there are no accurate statistics on the num-

¹⁶⁹ Schadi Semnani, Siobhan O’Neil, Mélisande Genat, and Yousif Khoshnaw, “Return and Reintegration Prospects for Iraqis Coming Back From Al Hol,” Findings Report 32, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2023.

¹⁷⁰ This framework is co-led at the global level by the United Nations.

¹⁷¹ IOM Iraq, 2021. Persons with disabilities and their representative organisations: Barriers, challenges and priorities

¹⁷² IOM Iraq, 2022. Deaf people in Iraq, a cultural-linguistic minority: Their rights and vision for the future report

¹⁷³ Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), 2018. Disability in the Arab Region 2018.

ber of PWDs living in Iraq. Government statistics vary between 0.9 percent and 8.4 percent. However, Iraqi disability advocates and related international organizations have reservations about these figures, suggesting that the actual numbers are higher. Given that the rate of disability is likely higher in humanitarian settings, it is probable that Iraq’s estimates exceed the global average of 15 percent. Similarly, in 2019, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that Iraq has one of the world’s largest PWD populations.

The Gol ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2012 and adopted Law No. 38 of 2013 on the Care for Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs. The Iraqi Commission for Care of Persons with Disabilities and Special Needs also operates to support this community under the fiscal and administrative authority of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

In order to reduce the barriers facing PWDs, both natural and conflict-induced, it will be essential to facilitate an active, empowered, and central role for these persons and their representative organisations in development, transitional and humanitarian programming and government services.

Iraqi Commission of Persons with Disabilities lacks the funds and the ability to carry out their mandate of representing this group, and to plan and implement activities or effective advocacy with decision-makers and community at large. Additionally, there is a general lack of knowledge and understanding of disability inclusion and PWDs rights among families, communities, teachers, humanitarian staff, and government officials. This results in stigma, isolation, and exclusion of PWDs.

8.7 Refugees and migrants

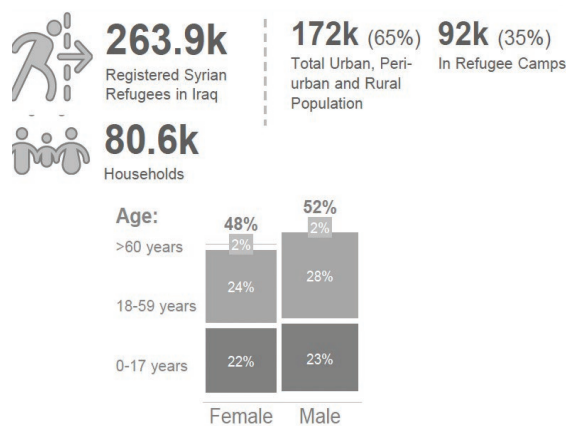
While significant progress has been made as mentioned below, there are major restrictions on refugees’ freedom of movement within Iraq depending on whether they hold a residency permit issued by the KRI or the PC-MOI (primarily issued in federal Iraq). Refugees are unable to travel outside the area covered by their residency permit or PC-MOI card.

Asylum-seekers and refugees without PC-MOI cards or valid residency permits continue to face restrictions on movement and risk of detention. Detention and deportation are used for migration-related offenses, including irregular entry, possibly with fines and deportation. Refugees face discrimination in employment, and the legal ambiguity on their right to work generally restricts their employment to low-paying jobs in the informal sector. Access to education and healthcare in the KRI, where

91 percent of the refugee population resides, requires a valid residency permit. Vulnerable Syrian refugees in the KRI, particularly PWDs, those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, women perceived as not conforming to socio-cultural norms (including female-headed households) and vulnerable children, have limited access to public services and employment. Refugees have limited prospects for meaningful local integration in Iraq due to legal impediments. They can neither access long-term residency nor naturalization although they have benefitted from inclusive health and education policies and are allowed to work with restrictions. However, many still face protection challenges linked to their precarious socio-economic situation and limited access to specialized services, as well as discriminatory practices especially against certain specific categories of refugees.

Large-scale voluntary returns of Syrian refugees presently residing in Iraq are not foreseen due to the prolonged conflict situation in Syria. The regular escalation of violence in north-eastern Syria, from where most Syrian refugees in Iraq originate, continue to force people to flee. Iraq is not party to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and lacks a comprehensive legal framework in line with international standards, despite hosting close to 300,000 asylum seekers and refugees. The status and treatment of refugees in Iraq are administered under the Political Refugee Act no. 51 of 1971. The Act is limited in scope and only recognizes refugees on political and military grounds. In December 2020, the Council of Representatives rejected a revised draft refugee law that was first submitted to it in 2018. Since then, the drafting process has resumed and has reached advanced stages for its finalization. In addition, administrative instructions for harmonizing the asylum process and protecting the asylum-related rights were finalized for KRI while it is at the final stage for Federal Iraq.

Figure 75: Syrian refugees in Iraq - key figures (as of 31 May 2023)



Source: UNHCR.

Trafficking in persons is a multi-faceted problem for both Iraqis and foreigners. In 2012 Iraq adopted Law No.

28 Combatting Trafficking in Persons, which is modelled on the Trafficking Protocol and has also set up a Central Committee on Combating Human Trafficking in 2012.

However, there remain fundamental issues with this law and its operationalization resulting in policy gaps and challenges for assistance. The law is silent on child trafficking and focuses on the criminalization of trafficking as an offense rather than on victim care. This is exemplified by the regulated access to the only government-run shelter in Baghdad, whose access is conditioned by the recognition of the case by a judge as well as victim prosecution under residency and prostitution laws.

8.8 Minority ethnic groups

The principle of leaving no one behind is particularly important in Iraq, where many suffer from extreme poverty, health and education inequalities and other forms of discrimination. The political situation adds to the difficulty of addressing the root causes of injustice, beginning with certain laws that lead to further marginalization.¹⁷⁴

Iraq also has several ethnic, religious and linguistic minority groups. Despite several constitutional provisions, these minority communities suffer from serious direct and indirect discrimination in access to services. Christian, Yazidi and Shabak communities, in particular, have faced severe violence and trauma that still hinder their desire to return home.¹⁷⁵ In 2021, Iraq adopted the Law on Support to Yazidi Survivors, which aims to provide redress to several categories of survivors of genocide from these communities, including survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

By the end of 2023, moderate progress had been achieved in the implementation of the law. Ensuring the protection of human rights, meaningful participation of minorities in decision-making and participatory processes, and safety and security of displaced minorities are essential to leaving no one behind.

8.9 Stateless individuals

Iraq is not a signatory to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, despite the exemplary Gol efforts in taking steps towards prevention and reduction of statelessness, most importantly through legal reform. The Constitution recognizes the

right to nationality for every Iraqi (Article 18), including anyone born to an Iraqi father or mother. While the 2006 Nationality Law of Iraq reinstated Iraqi nationality to all persons denaturalized by the former government, reinstatement of citizenship for persons who lack the necessary documentation to prove they originate from Iraq is a challenge. Therefore, to continue the positive steps already undertaken by the Gol, various measures could be taken toward resolving statelessness issues in Iraq, including continuing existing efforts to improve access to civil documentation, further strengthening legal safeguards against statelessness, and acceding to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.

A stateless person is not considered a national by any state under the operation of its law. Statelessness can often have a devastating impact, barring access to human rights and basic services. Iraq has historically hosted stateless populations such as the Faili Kurds, who were systematically stripped of their nationality in the 1980s, and Bidoons from Kuwait. The 2005 Constitution recognizes the right to Iraqi nationality for anyone born to an Iraqi father or Iraqi mother – a good practice in the region. The 2006 Nationality Law reinstated Iraqi nationality to all persons denaturalized on political, religious or sectarian grounds by the former regime. It also provides for the possibility of naturalization for non-Iraqis. Iraq achieved the world's largest reduction of statelessness in a single year (over 100,000 persons) in 2010.

Yet, despite a progressive Nationality Law in the Middle East, existing discriminatory provisions and gaps in the Law and relevant by-laws/instructions, could still lead to statelessness or increase its risks. Furthermore, administrative, and financial hurdles, as well as lack of awareness amongst at-risk populations, are reported to have contributed to some individuals' inability to access Iraqi nationality.

Resolving statelessness in Iraq is an achievable goal and the Gol has demonstrated its continuous commitment to addressing statelessness cases. Further work needs to be done to ensure foreign nationals, including asylum seekers, refugees and migrants have access to birth registration and other key civil and legal documentation.

8.10 Persons lacking civil documentation

The latest Multi-Cluster Needs Assessment from 2022 reports that an estimated 430,000 persons in Iraq lack at least one core civil document. These persons include IDPs and returnees, stateless persons or those at risk of statelessness as well as vulnerable Iraqi nationals. Civil identity documents such as birth certificates, civil IDs, nationality certificates, public distribution cards and the National Unified ID are key to accessing the most basic rights in Iraq. Missing civil documentation impedes ac-

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/leaving-no-one-behind-integrating-marginalized-groups-english.pdf>.

¹⁷⁵ Mansour, R, 2018. Rebuilding the Iraqi State: Stabilisation, Governance, and Reconciliation. European Parliament Director-General for External Policies. Available at [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU\(2017\)603859_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603859/EXPO_STU(2017)603859_EN.pdf).

cess to essential public services such as education, healthcare, and social security benefits, such as the Public Distribution System. It can also lead to restricted freedom of movement at checkpoints, increased risk of arrest and detention, exclusion from restitution and reconstruction programs and the inability to participate in most aspects of civic and political life.



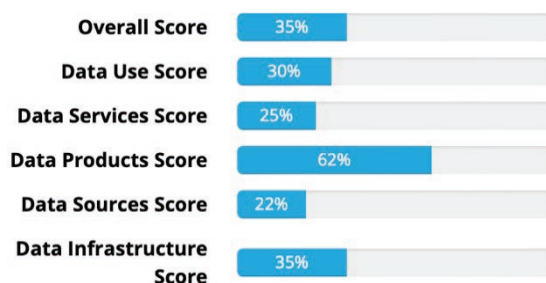


9 Shortcomings and Obstacles in Data Accessibility and Analysis

Iraq grapples with formidable challenges in its statistical capacity and data governance, with far-reaching implications for policymaking, development, and governance. The limited accessibility of crucial data sources, chiefly reliant on the Central Statistical Organization and the Central Bank of Iraq, in conjunction with first-party customer data and social media, poses substantial impediments to comprehensive data collection and availability. Over time, Iraq's statistical capacity¹⁷⁶ has displayed a fluctuating trajectory. Notably, its score exhibited improvement, ascending from 32.2 in 2004 to 52.2 in 2017.

Nevertheless, it is disconcerting that this positive trend reversed course from 2016 onwards, marked by a conspicuous decline in the overall performance indicator score. This regression can be attributed to security challenges, notably the ISIL crisis, and political unrest, which have hampered Iraq's statistical capacity and, consequently, its ability to collect and disseminate data effectively.

Figure 76: Statistical Performance Indicators, World Bank



Source: World Bank.

The Open Data Inventory measures how complete a country's statistical offerings are and whether their data meet international standards of openness. Iraq ranks 136th in the Open Data Inventory 2022 with an overall score of 40. The overall score is a combination of a data coverage subscore of 36 and a data openness subscore of 44.¹⁷⁷

The deterioration in statistical capacity and performance has led to significant constraints in data collection and the availability of disaggregated data, which is pivotal for well-informed policy formulation and the tracking of progress toward development objectives, including the SDGs – an aspect of utmost importance for this Common Country Analysis.

The scarcity of disaggregated data further compounds the challenge of assessing the status of various population segments within the nation, including those most

vulnerable, as emphasized in the 'Leave No One Behind' chapter.

Iraq presently grapples with a paucity of data-driven enterprises, resulting in a reduced demand for data analysts. Conventional education programs inadequately equip students with the requisite skills for data analysis, leading to a prevalence of self-taught data analysts in the job market.

This skill deficit undermines Iraq's capacity to harness the full potential of its data reservoirs. Ineffectual data pipelines, particularly within smaller organizations, underscore the deficiencies within Iraq's data infrastructure. While larger entities possess the capability to amass and store data effectively, subsequent processes of analysis and reporting remain deficient. Spreadsheets persist as the predominant tool for data management, even within government institutions, with a limited number of individuals employing programming and business intelligence tools.

In summation, Iraq confronts formidable challenges concerning population statistics and data governance. The absence of an all-encompassing population census¹⁷⁸ has led to approximations in critical statistics, exerting a substantial impact on policymaking and development planning. The compounding factors of natural terrain, village dispersion, and dwindling population density have further complicated data collection endeavors.

To surmount these challenges, Iraq should contemplate the formulation of a comprehensive national data strategy, along with embracing international data initiatives such as the Open Data Charter and the Open Government Partnership. Additionally, there is a pressing need to bolster data protection laws to ensure privacy and security. The recent endorsement of a draft Right to Information Law represents a commendable stride toward enhancing transparency and accountability. Nonetheless, concerted efforts are indispensable to establish a modern data governance framework and bridge the expertise gap in data analysis, thereby unlocking the full potential of data for Iraq's developmental and governance endeavors.

¹⁷⁶ World Bank

¹⁷⁷ ODIN, Iraq profile, 2022

¹⁷⁸ Historically, Iraq has struggled to obtain accurate population statistics, with the first official census occurring in 1935. Before that, population estimates were merely personal approximations, and the oldest available estimates date back to 1866. Iraq conducted seven censuses or population statistics between 1935 and 1997 but has not conducted documented statistics since then, mainly due to exceptional circumstances and reliance on population projections, which are prone to errors. The Iraqi Government has allocated USD74 million in its approved budget 2023-2025 to conduct the census.



Iraq National Development Plan 2024-2028.

NDP Assumptions:

1. The persistence of political, economic, and security instability.
2. Fluctuations in international crude oil prices.
3. Currency exchange rate fluctuations in the Iraqi market.
4. Continual exposure of the Iraqi economy to economic shocks.
5. Fragile commitment to integrated macroeconomic policies.
6. Leveraging international cooperation and the role of international organizations in development.
7. Escalation of demographic, social, and health crises and shocks.

NDP Development Approach:

The NDP adopts the following development approach:

1. Leveraging available capabilities and technical knowledge to prioritize public service sectors (infrastructure and societal) and productive sectors, ensuring sustainable development and enhanced citizen livelihoods.
2. Implementing gradual economic reforms within a well-defined economic framework, commencing with human capital development and culminating in an efficient economic system.

NDP Economic Management:

The NDP aims to establish an effective developmental state capable of navigating uncertainty, fostering economic growth, attracting investments, and promoting private sector engagement. It seeks to leverage international opportunities for cooperation in development.

NDP Objectives:

The NDP has the following objectives:

1. Diversifying the national economy's productive structure.
2. Enhancing human capital development.
3. Improving infrastructure and public service performance.
4. Promoting innovation and adopting modern technologies.
5. Encouraging private sector investment (national and foreign) in a conducive environment.
6. Facilitating strategic public-private partnerships.
7. Supporting climate change mitigation and adaptation policies.
8. Strengthening fiscal and monetary policy responsiveness within the context of economic reform.
9. Reducing poverty and unemployment rates, and empowering the youth.
10. Establishing effective international partnerships to achieve development goals.

NDP Programs:

The NDP outlines several programs aligned with national priorities:

- Completion of government projects with special focus on human capital development.
- Investment in infrastructure projects directly related to productive sectors (agriculture, tourism, industry).
- Economic diversification through industries with national comparative advantages (value chain-based industries).
- Implementation of major strategic projects to enhance sectoral interconnections and promote regional and international economic relations





Conclusions and Recommendations

To promote sustainable and peaceful development in Iraq, a robust partnership between national and international stakeholders is essential. This approach includes promoting public participation in environmental sustainability through educational and community initiatives, which supports multiple SDGs, such as integrated water resource management and pollution control.

Economic diversification is pivotal for reducing Iraq's reliance on oil, with an expansion into sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services poised to create employment opportunities, particularly for youth, and enhance economic stability.

The strengthening of SMEs is crucial for driving industrial growth and innovation. Transitioning to renewable energy is a key aspect of this strategy, aligning with SDGs on sustainable energy and production, while simultaneously supporting gender equality and economic inclusivity, especially through the empowerment of women in entrepreneurship.

Further, addressing the longstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil regarding oil management and revenue sharing is critical for fostering national unity, contributing to SDG 16. Implementing e-governance solutions is an important step in streamlining administrative processes and improving service delivery, which aligns with SDG 11 and enhances overall efficiency. Additionally, ensuring the integration and support of IDPs, by addressing their housing, employment, and documentation needs, is vital for fostering a more sustainable and resilient Iraq, in line with SDGs aimed at poverty reduction and sustainable communities.

Common Country Analysis: Key Findings

Key Finding #1: Climate Resilience and Efficiency of Natural Resources Management



Iraq is very vulnerable to climate change and environmental degradation and needs to address several issues regarding climate resilience, the management of natural resources, and environmental protection, including risk and disaster management.

Strengthening Climate Resilience: Iraq should prioritize the development and implementation of strategies to enhance its climate resilience. This includes building infrastructure that is robust against climate-related disasters and investing in sustainable water management systems. These measures are critical to advancing **SDG 13**.

Accelerating Renewable Energy Adoption: The government should expedite the deployment of renewable energy projects. By capturing gas flaring, Iraq can make significant progress towards **SDG 7**, ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

Effective Water Resource Management: Implementing integrated water resource management strategies is imperative. Addressing issues like water scarcity and pollution will contribute to achieving **SDG 6**, ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Enhanced Environmental Governance: Strengthening the frameworks for environmental governance will ensure the effective implementation and oversight of environmental policies, thus supporting Iraq's commitment to the SDGs, particularly **SDG 13** and **SDG 15** (Life on Land). **Promoting Public Awareness and Engagement:** Fostering public understanding and participation in environmental sustainability is vital. Educational and community-based initiatives can enhance engagement, aiding in the achievement of multiple SDGs.

International Collaboration for Climate Action: Iraq should actively seek partnerships with international

bodies to access technical expertise and funding. Such collaborations are essential for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts.

Policy Integration and Coordination: The integration of environmental considerations into all areas of policy and the coordination between different governmental sectors are essential. This approach will ensure a holistic and effective response to environmental challenges and climate change.

Key Finding #2: Sustainable Diversification for Future Economic Resilience



Overreliance on oil sector revenue makes Iraq highly vulnerable to shocks. Diversification of national economy and encouraging private sector investment will make Iraq more resilient and boost employment in productive sectors.

Economic Diversification and Job Creation: Iraq's economic diversification is crucial for reducing its dependency on oil. By expanding into sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services, especially in high-value-added chains, Iraq can create new jobs for youth and women and enhance economic stability. This aligns with **SDG 8**, which emphasizes decent work and economic growth. The expansion into these sectors will also provide diverse and inclusive employment opportunities, contributing to a more resilient economy.

Support for MSMEs: Strengthening the micro, small, and medium enterprise sectors is essential for driving industrial growth and innovation and supporting women and youth to lead enterprises. By improving legal, financial, and infrastructural support, Iraq can foster a more dynamic industrial environment. This approach is in line with **SDG 8** (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and **SDG 9**, focusing on industry, innovation, and infrastructure, and plays a vital role in building a diversified and sustainable economic landscape.

Renewable Energy and Environmental Sustainability: Transitioning towards renewable energy sources is imperative for Iraq to reduce its reliance on oil. This shift not only contributes to **SDG 7**, targeting affordable and clean energy but also supports **SDG 12**, which focuses

on responsible consumption and production. Embracing renewable energy sources will reduce environmental impact and promote a sustainable approach to energy consumption and production.

Fiscal Reforms and International Partnerships: Implementing comprehensive fiscal reforms to manage oil revenues efficiently is critical for stabilizing the Iraqi economy. These reforms resonate with **SDG 17**, which emphasizes partnerships for the goals. Efficient fiscal management will enhance Iraq's ability to engage in productive international partnerships and collaborations, bolstering its economic resilience.

Gender Equality and Inclusive Growth: Advancing gender equality in the workforce is paramount for achieving inclusive growth. Developing policies that promote equal opportunities and support for women in the labor market, including entrepreneurship and childcare facilities, aligns with **SDG 5**. This approach ensures a more inclusive and equitable workforce, contributing to the country's overall economic development.

Poverty Alleviation and Social Welfare: Focusing on targeted poverty alleviation programs, especially for women and vulnerable groups, is crucial and in line with **SDG 1**, which aims to eradicate poverty. By addressing the specific needs of these groups, Iraq can make significant strides towards reducing poverty and enhancing the social welfare of its population.

Water, Sanitation, and Urban Development: Investing in water and sanitation infrastructure is vital for public health and living conditions, aligning with **SDG 6**. Additionally, sustainable urban development, as advocated in **SDG 11**, is essential for addressing housing shortages and improving urban living standards. These investments will not only enhance the quality of life but also contribute to sustainable and resilient urban communities in Iraq.

Key Finding #3: Durable Political Engagement and Responsible Governance



Poor governance has undermined trust, quality of service delivery, and marginalised the recipients of the ser-

vices. The Government should implement transparent, responsive, and inclusive structural reforms of state and civil institutions.

Enhancing Public Trust: Focus on transparent and accountable governance practices. Engage in public dialogue and awareness programs to bridge the trust deficit and align with **SDG 16** (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

Judicial Reforms: Strengthen the independence of the judiciary and implement reforms to address backlogs and enhance documentation systems. Ensure access to justice for all, particularly vulnerable groups such as IDPs and refugees, in line with **SDG 16**.

Decentralization and Digital Transformation: Prioritize the decentralization of administrative functions to enhance efficiency and implement e-governance solutions, aligning with **SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities).

Combating Corruption: Strengthen anti-corruption measures, including updating legislation and enhancing the role and autonomy of the Integrity Commission. Align efforts with **SDG 16**.

Capacity Building and Financial Oversight: Invest in capacity building for public servants and strengthen financial oversight mechanisms in collaboration with international entities, supporting **SDG 17** (Partnerships for the Goals).

Socio-Economic Reforms: Continue to advance reforms in the banking, private sector, social protection, and infrastructure, aligning with various SDGs, including **SDG 8** (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and **SDG 9** (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).

Baghdad-Erbil Relations: Address the longstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil, particularly in managing oil resources and revenue sharing, to foster national unity and stability and contribute to **SDG 16**.

Hence, systemic change will prove vital for the country's future. That said, change will not come overnight. It requires challenging work, collective efforts, and the understanding that the time to act is now.

Key Finding #4: Inclusive and Sustainable Human Development



Iraq faces significant food security challenges, exacerbated by the displacement of over one million people since 2017 and the Syrian refugee crisis. Those who remain displaced, in camps and out of camp, vulnerable returnees and communities hosting them, will need assistance to pursue and achieve durable solutions. The healthcare system is improving but struggles with infrastructure damage, shortage of professionals, and inefficiencies, particularly in primary healthcare. In education, fluctuating enrollment rates and issues like digital disparities highlight a human capital crisis. Economically, fluctuating currency and high food prices are eroding the purchasing power of the poor, leading to migration for livelihoods.

Enhancing Food Security (SDG 2 - Zero Hunger): Implement comprehensive food assistance programs for IDPs and refugees, and promote sustainable agricultural practices to increase domestic food production. Achieving food security, improved nutrition, and sustainable agriculture are essential for ending hunger.

Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure (SDG 3 - Good Health and Well-being): Focus on equitable distribution of PHC centers, improve operational efficiency, and increase the number of skilled health professionals. Focus on comprehensive health and nutrition programs tailored for infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, ensuring they receive the foundational support necessary for lifelong well-being and productivity. This approach ensures healthy lives and promotes well-being for all ages.

Improving Education Quality and Access (SDG 4 - Quality Education): Invest in technology and infrastructure to bridge the digital divide in education, enhance inclusivity for individuals with disabilities, and strengthen vocational and higher education. These steps are key for inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities.

Promoting Gender Equality (SDG 5 - Gender Equality): Intensify efforts to combat child marriage, economi-

cally empower women, and effectively implement legal frameworks for promoting and monitoring gender equality. Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is crucial.

Economic Empowerment and Stability (SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth): Develop strategies to stabilize the currency, control food prices, and support the poorest communities to enhance their economic resilience. Promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all is imperative.

Improving Urban Planning and Management (SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities): Enhance urban infrastructure, ensure access to affordable housing, and develop sustainable and resilient cities. This aligns with the goal to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Aligning National Policies with SDGs: Ensure that national policies and strategies closely align with the SDGs, focusing on areas where Iraq is lagging, particularly in relation to non-communicable diseases, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. This comprehensive approach contributes to the achievement of all 17 SDGs, ensuring peace, prosperity, and environmental protection for future generations.

Key Finding #5: Fostering Employment Opportunities and Extending Inclusive Social Protection



As Iraq transitions from a humanitarian phase to a developmental one, it becomes imperative to reduce disparities and combat prejudice to support sustainable development and enhance social protection. Iraq must prioritize creating employment opportunities, improving human capital, providing comprehensive social protection, promoting inclusivity, and strengthening social unity. While focusing on vulnerability through effective targeting is important, it must be balanced with robust conflict analysis and a conflict-sensitive approach to ensure, once again, social cohesion. Moreover, optimizing social security systems by promoting efficiency measures and raising awareness about the benefits of economic empowerment over public assistance is necessary.

To advance the crucial mission of Fostering Employment Opportunities and Extending Inclusive Social Protection (LNOB) in Iraq, a comprehensive set of recommendations is imperative.

Firstly, addressing youth unemployment requires a multifaceted approach. Policies should be developed to create educational opportunities, support young entrepreneurs, and promote meaningful civic engagement for youth. Safe spaces for young people to participate in community development are vital, connecting with the objectives of **SDGs 4 and 8**.

Secondly, to combat the deeply ingrained GBV issue, comprehensive legal reforms should be swiftly implemented. This should encompass establishing accessible support systems for victims, conducting educational initiatives to raise awareness of legal rights, and promoting women's economic independence. These actions resonate with the objectives of **SDGs 5 and 16**.

Thirdly, strengthening child protection systems is paramount. This entails updating child welfare legislation and enacting a comprehensive child protection law. Simultaneously, substantial investments in child protection services, including psychosocial support, are essential. Raising awareness of children's rights should be integral to these efforts, aligning with **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** and **SDG 16**.

Fourthly, ensuring the coordinated and secure return of IDPs is a priority. This involves addressing housing and property rights issues, creating jobs, and improving access to civil documentation. Concurrently, increased investments in public services for IDPs are necessary, contributing to **SDGs 1 and 11**.

Fifthly, active PWDs participation in development and humanitarian programs is imperative. This includes providing access to education, employment, and social protection while promoting awareness and inclusion, aligning with **SDGs 4 and 10**.

Sixthly, advocating for comprehensive legal frameworks for refugees and combating trafficking is crucial. Ensuring refugees' access to education, healthcare, and social services is essential, in line with **SDGs 10 and 16**.

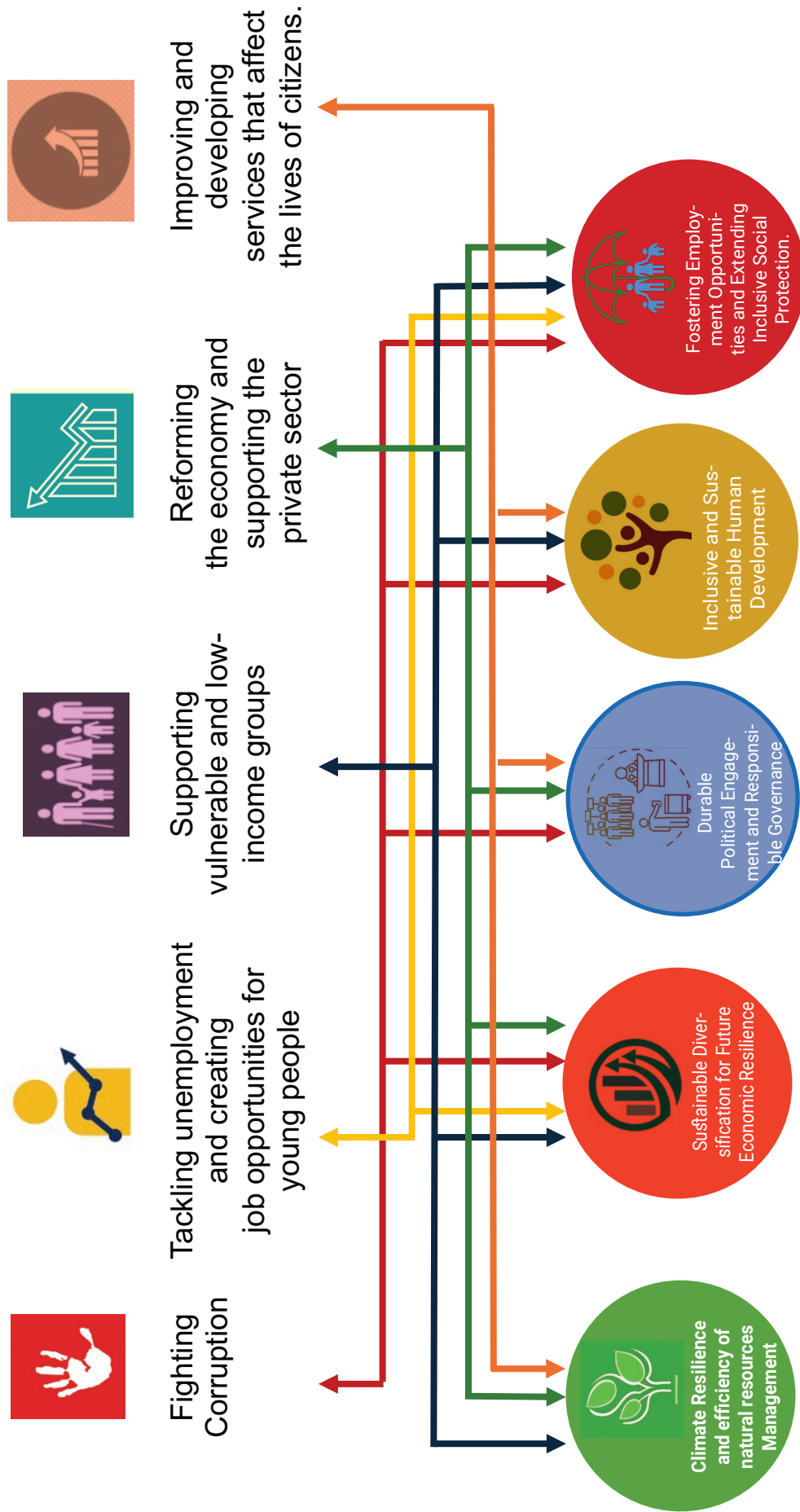
Lastly, prioritizing the safety and security of minority communities is indispensable. Supporting reconciliation initiatives and enhancing access to essential services are pivotal steps. Fostering effective collaboration between social protection programs and economic empowerment initiatives seeks to facilitate a transition

from reliance on social assistance to self-reliance and income-generating activities.

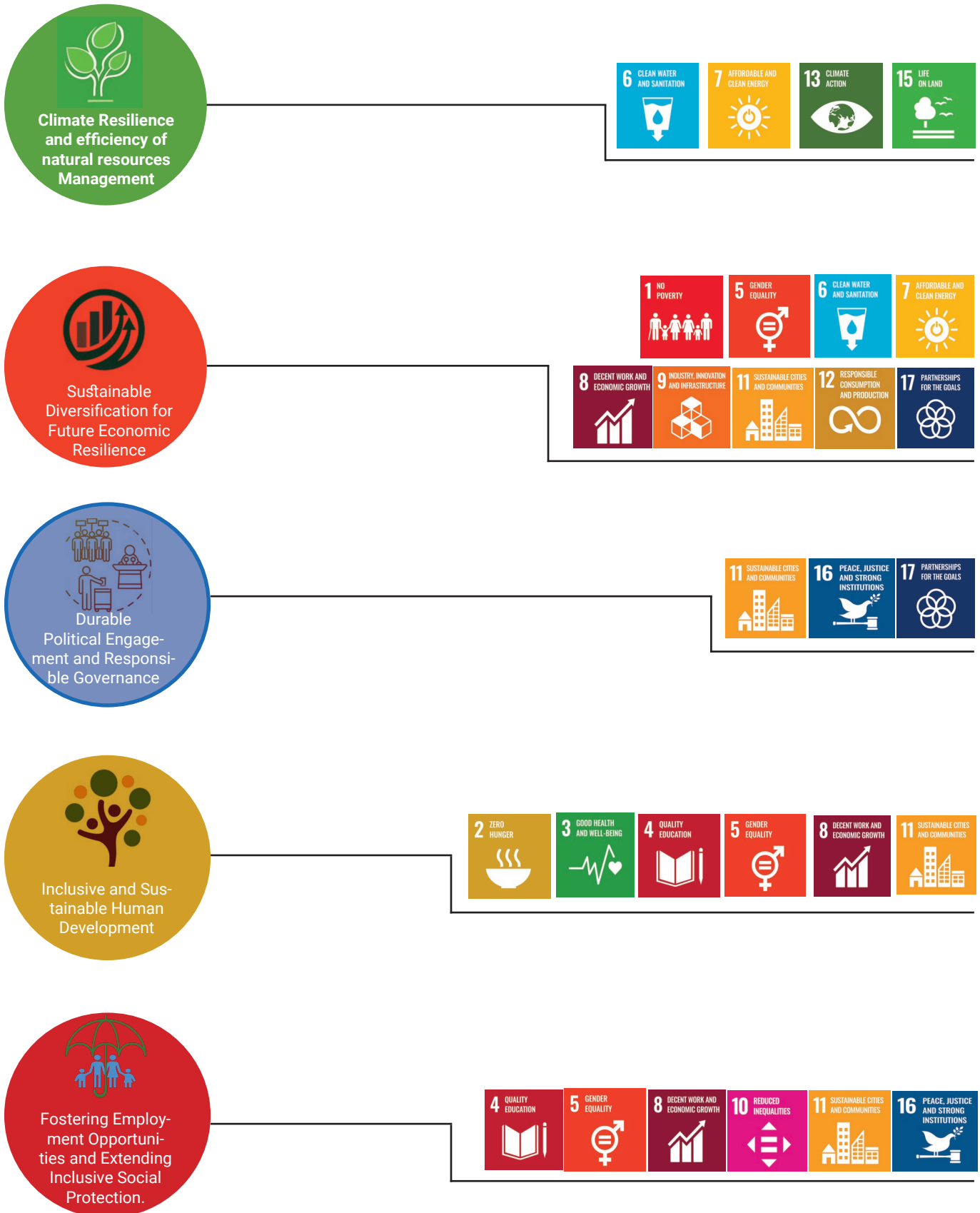
Trust-building measures should be promoted to enable the IDPs return, contributing to **SDGs 1, 10, and 16**.

Continuing efforts to resolve statelessness is fundamental. This includes improving access to civil documentation, strengthening legal safeguards, and acceding to relevant international conventions. Establishing mechanisms to provide civil documentation to individuals lacking essential documents is essential to ensure their access to rights and services, in line with **SDGs 16 and 1**

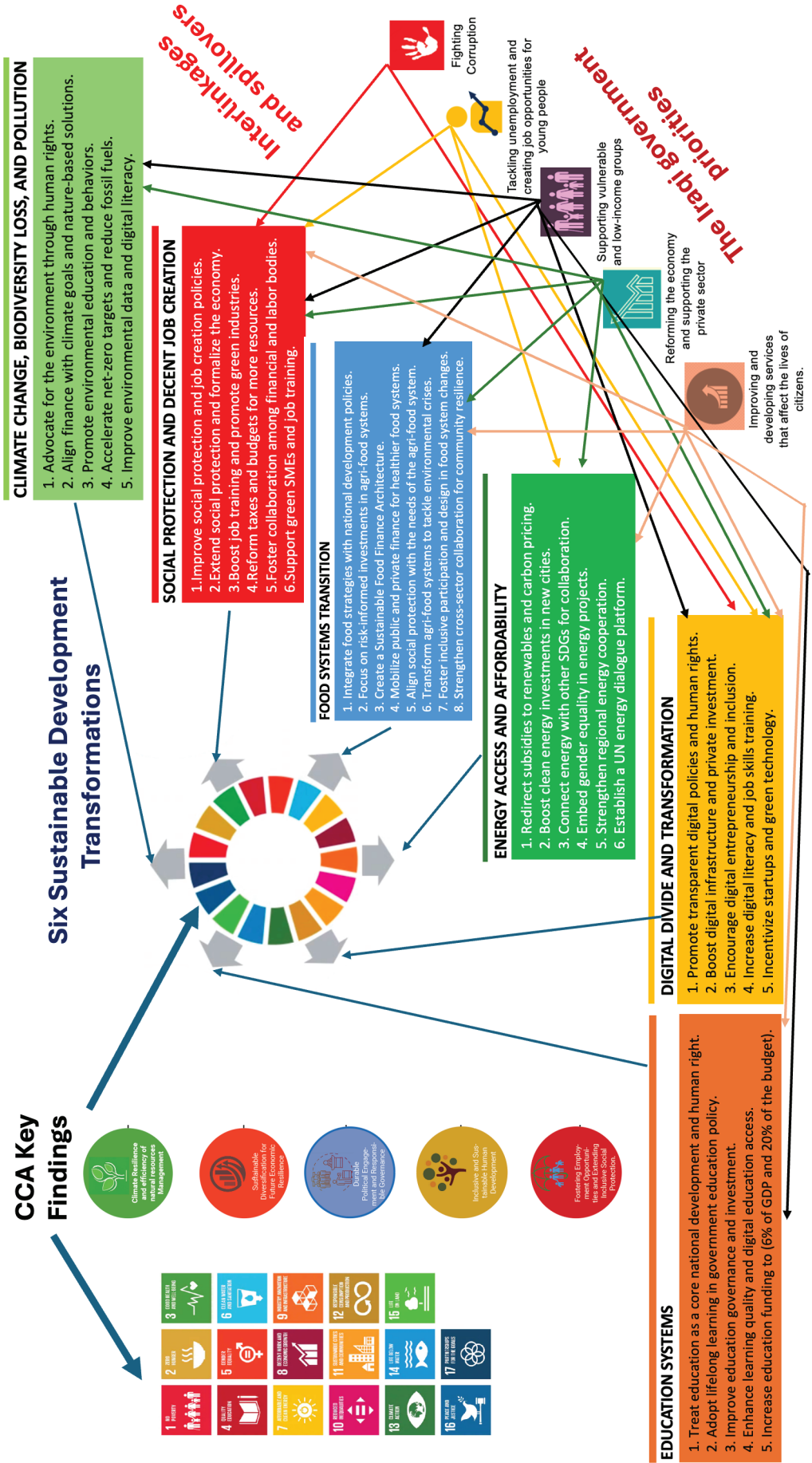
Linkages Between The Iraqi Government Priorities and The CCA 2023 Key Findings.



Linkages Between CCA 2023 Key Findings and SDGs



Linkages Between The Iraqi Government Priorities, Six Key Transitions, and The CCA 2023 Key Findings





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