

<b>Country – capital</b>	Republic of Iraq – Baghdad. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Population</b>	Total population 46.8 million (est. 2025). <sup>2</sup> Ethnic groups: Arab ~75-80%, Kurd ~15-20%, other ~5% (includes Turkmen, Yezidi, Shabak, Kaka'i, Bedouin, Romani, Assyrian, Circassian, Sabaeen-Mandaean, Persian). <sup>3</sup>
<b>Geography</b>	Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Languages</b>	Arabic (official), Kurdish (official); Turkmen (a Turkish dialect), Syriac (Neo-Aramaic) recognised as official languages where native speakers are present. <sup>5</sup>
<b>Writing system</b>	Arabic (from right to left). <sup>6</sup>
<b>Education and literacy</b>	85.6% is literate, females lower than males (79.9% and 91.2% resp.). <sup>7</sup> Literacy used to be approaching 100% but decreased, due to the destruction of schools and loss of teachers since 2003. Education is state-funded: 6 years of primary education, 3 years of intermediate secondary education, then 3 years of preparatory secondary education or vocational education. <sup>8</sup> Tertiary education is possible. <sup>9</sup> Conflict and under-investment have severely reduced the quality and accessibility of education. Close to 3.2 million school-aged Iraqis are out of school (and almost half of displaced children) and one in every two schools are damaged and require rehabilitation. <sup>10</sup>
<b>Religions</b>	Muslim 95-98% (official; Shia 64-69%, Sunni 29-34%), Christian 1% (includes Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Assyrian Church of the East but may be less, as 50-90% of Christians have fled since 2003), other 1-4% (includes Yazidis) (2020 est.). <sup>11</sup>
<b>Conflict history and overview</b>	The Baathist party gained power in 1968, led by Saddam Hussein from 1979-2003. Territorial disputes led to war with Iran (1980-1988), and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait led to the First Gulf War (1990-1991). This triggered severe UN-imposed economic sanctions and embargoes, contributing to thousands of deaths from malnutrition, hunger, and disease. The Baathists brutally suppressed oppression, especially against Kurdish separatists. In 2003 a US-led coalition toppled the Hussein government, and a democratic constitution was approved in 2005. However, growing sectarian violence led to civil war (2006-2008). Sunni insurgency intensified again in 2013 and in 2014 the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) gained control of Mosul and other key towns. A global coalition retook all former ISIS territory by 2019, however, jihadist sleeper cells are still active in parts of Iraq. Although Iraq is at its most peaceful since 2003, there are protests against unemployment and corruption, and for Kurdish independence. In 2017 the central government seized disputed territories from the Kurdistan Regional Government following a non-binding Kurdish independence referendum. <sup>12</sup>
<b>Humanitarian situation</b>	Life expectancy at birth: 73.7 yrs (2024). <sup>13</sup> Poverty rate: 17.5% (2024 gov. census). <sup>14</sup> Unemployment 16.5%, with youth unemployment 35.8%. <sup>15</sup> Insufficient access to basic services such as clean water, electricity, healthcare, and education (due to corruption, underinvestment a.o.). <sup>16</sup> 1.2 million Iraqis have insufficient food consumption (2023) and 12.9% of the population live in informal settlements due to housing shortages. <sup>17</sup>
<b>Human rights situation</b>	Governmental restrictions on fundamental freedoms and civic space have worsened over the past few years. This includes arbitrary or unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture, serious restrictions on free expression and media, serious government corruption, gender-based violence, and restrictions on freedom of movement, including the forced return of IDPs to areas where their lives and freedom are threatened. Sporadic attacks by ISIS and its affiliates continue in remote areas. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Situation of women FGM – early marriages</b>	Maternal mortality rate: 76 deaths per 100,000 live births (2020). <sup>19</sup> Child marriages: no minimum legal age of marriage, 7% of girls are married by the age of 15, and 28% by the age of 18. <sup>20</sup> FGM is prevalent in the Kurdistan Region (37.5% amongst women aged 15-49) despite it being criminalised under the 2011 Domestic Violence Act. <sup>21</sup>
<b>Situation of LGBTI</b>	In April 2024, the parliament passed a law to punish same-sex relations with 10-15 years prison and 'promoting homosexuality' with 7 years prison and a fine of 10-15 million dinars (US \$7,700-\$11,500). Gender-affirming medical interventions are met with 1-3 years prison. Violence against LGBTI individuals has been met with impunity. <sup>22</sup>
<b>IDPs/ Asylum / migration in Malta</b>	IDPs within Iraq: 1.1 million (2023). <sup>23</sup> Nr asylum applications in the EU: 29,785 (2023). <sup>24</sup> Malta: Iraqi sea arrivals: unknown. <sup>25</sup> Iraqi asylum applications in Malta: 2 (2023). <sup>26</sup>

# Country Factsheet Iraq

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This factsheet was compiled for BDE by volunteer Holly Farrell under supervision of Adri van den Berg. Adri worked for many years as a Country of Origin Information (COI) researcher, her final post before retiring being with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO, now EUAA) in Malta.