

TERRITORIAL ORGANIZATION

Iraq is a federal republic. There has been a form of decentralized political and administrative government since 2008, when power was devolved to 18 provinces (governorates). Nevertheless, many challenges remain regarding the concretisation of this system of governance. Provincial councils are elected, but not the heads of local governments. The Kurdistan Regional Government is autonomous. At the municipal level, it is estimated that there are 91 districts and 141 *tracts*.¹



Unless otherwise indicated, all the information in this profile is taken from the previously published Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs).²

1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR SDG IMPLEMENTATION

The **Iraq Vision 2030** was launched in 2016. It is based on the sustainable development dimensions and covers 74% of the SDGs. The **National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022** aims at reducing the implications of the terrorist groups' occupation of some governorates and the falling crude oil prices in the global markets and the consequent sharp fall in Iraq's financial revenues. It incorporates 77% of the SDGs. The 2019 VNR states that the **Ministerial Platform** was inspired by these 3 documents, as well as the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Platform emphasizes on forward-looking areas of planning, taking into consideration that no one is left behind, efforts to empower women and youth, equality achievement, improving ecosystems and coping with climate change.

1.1 NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS

According to the 2019 VNR, the **Monitoring Committee** and the **SDG National Coordination Commission** are chaired by the Ministry of Planning. In addition, an SDG Secretariat, Technical Coordination Committees, Technical Working Groups, and an SDG High-Level Board have been created to ensure SDG implementation. National coordination mechanisms are not clearly presented in the 2021 VNR, but the **National Committee for Sustainable Development** seems to have an important role, and to be related to the Ministry of Planning.

1.2 VNR ELABORATION PROCESS

The 2019 VNR process was led by the Ministry of Planning which supervised the VNR drafting process in cooperation with local and federal entities, the parliament, the private sector, and NGOs. With the support of UNDP. There was a challenge regarding data, coverage, and classification by gender and environment (rural/urban) and governorate, despite efforts to provide them. The 2021 VNR was developed by the **National Committee for Sustainable Development**. Preparing the report relied on a participatory development approach involving the government represented by the **Ministry of Planning**, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and various ministries and government departments, particularly the Central Bureau of Statistics, and academic and research institutions. A broadly representative committee of stakeholders was appointed to ensure that their aspirations and visions were included. Different conferences and consultations were organized with these stakeholders. Also, some work has been done at the local level to produce sustainable development reports at the province level.

1.3 MONITORING

The government has divided the 17 SDGs into eight socio-economic sectors: security, education, health, governance, infrastructure, social protection, agriculture and rural development, and economy. It has identified 169 specific national targets

1. UCLG, 2021, Towards the Localization of the SDGs, https://gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/hlpf_2021.pdf

2. See: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23789Iraq_VNR_2019_final_EN_HS.pdf (2019); https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/285062021_VNR_Report_Iraq_English.pdf (2021)

and 217 indicators. The 2019 VNR mentions many challenges remain regarding data. Data published by the **Central statistical organization (CSO)** and the **SDG National Coordination Commission** still includes data gaps in a number of areas. Moreover, the ministries do not provide comprehensive and reliable administrative data. The total data gap reaches 69.9% of the total 230 indicators distributed to the 17 SDGs. In other words, the available data only covers 67 indicators. The data gap reaches its zenith in Goal 13 where there is no data on any of its indicators. On the other hand, the most available data are on the indicators of Goal 3.

To monitor the progress of provinces in sustainable development, the 2021 VNR developed two indices based on data for 39 SDG indicators mostly from the 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey. These are: the **Local Comparative Development Index (LCDI)** to measure progress towards each SDG using nationally available indicators, and in comparison with the global standard or national average if the global SDG is achieved; and the **Local Comparative Developmental Perseverance Index** to make a comparison based on the performance rank of each province according to available indicators. It considers progress compared to other provinces rather than just the nature of achievement and how close it is to the global standard (more details and the results of each province in the VNR, 2021, p. 91).

2. LRGs INVOLVEMENT IN SDG IMPLEMENTATION

Regarding national strategy and coordination, in 2018 the governorates of **Basra, Anbar, and Karbala** took part in a workshop dedicated to integrating the SDGs into the NDP. The 2019 VNR mentioned the **Governorate committees for sustainable development** (with representatives of the municipalities): their mission is to monitor the achievement of SDGs and indicators at the governorate level and submit their report to the National Commission for Sustainable Development.³ A Social Fund for Development has been established to support the implementation of the SDGs at the local level. The Global Initiative Towards a Sustainable Iraq (GITSI) is a further acknowledgement of the importance of including LRGs in SDG implementation.⁴ According to the 2019 VNR, the Kurdistan Region's Vision 2020 is aligned with SDGs by 71%.

Governorates (provinces) were part of some workshops, seminars and meetings to prepare the 2019 VNR. LRGs are not mentioned among the stakeholders involved in the 2021 reporting process.

2.1 LRGs PARTICIPATION

► In the VNR process



Comments: No reference to LRG participation.

► In national coordination mechanisms for SDG implementation



Comments: Neither LRGs nor their association are members of the National Coordination Council.

This assessment is based on the information collected in the VNRs and in the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments' annual survey on the localization of the SDGs.

2.2 VNR REFERENCES

Governorates are mentioned throughout the 2019 report, while there are only a few mentions of municipalities, without much specific examples. In its introduction, the 2021 VNR advocates for a decentralized approach in the preparation of the national report to include the local level and mentions decentralization as "an enhanced approach to equality and justice".

► The Chapter 4 is entirely dedicated to local governments (the report talks more about governorates than cities or municipalities). The title of this chapter is "Decentralization and local sustainable development: main challenge". The report stresses the importance of good governance and of the means to strengthen it because it helps consolidate relations between the state and citizens on the one hand and between the central state and LRGs on the other hand.

► The Chapter 5, entitled "Performance of provinces in sustainable development: perseverance restrictions", is entirely

3. However, they are not mentioned in the 2021 VNR.

4. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

devoted to the analysis of the implementation of the SDGs in 7 provinces of the country: **Baghdad, Sulaymaniyah, Dhi Qar, Basra, Karbala, Anbar** and **Nineveh** (see VNR, 2021, p. 89-114): “these provinces offer narratives from which lessons can be drawn for other provinces”.

2.3 SPECIFIC PROJECTS AND CASES

- ▶ Cities in the governorates of **Al Basra, Al Anbar** and **Kerbala** have been preparing local reports on SDG implementation.
- ▶ **Al Basra**'s strategy for sustainable development is titled “Al Basra Capital of a Promising Economy”. This governorate has developed a vision for the SDGs, and its objective is to improve living conditions in terms of health, education for its inhabitants with a social peace that allows everyone to participate in the achievement of the SDGs (see VNR, 2021, p. 100).
- ▶ In chapter 5, there are two comparative tables; the first concerns the ranking of the governorates in the achievement of the SDGs (**Souleymania** is the first, **Irbil** the second), and the second indicates the ranking of the governorates in the efforts put in place to achieve the SDGs (**Souleymania** is in the lead followed by **Irbid**). See the VNR, 2021, p. 92 and
- ▶ One of the prominent features of the province **Souleymania** has been a focus on infrastructure projects in education, health, services, water, electricity, sewer systems and transport. The province has committed to proper planning in the service of citizens in urban and rural areas, and has reached even the farthest points deep inside the countryside. A total of 2,248 villages have been built and the province is one of the cleanest areas of Iraq. Billions of dollars have been spent to improve the environment and for afforestation campaigns. The province has also made progress in reducing poverty to as low as 6.7% compared to the national average of 20.1%. This percentage is expected to decrease even further following the launch of the provincial Social Development Fund on October 1, 2020, with an effort to involve the local poor in the fund's projects and turn them into producers.
- ▶ The province of **Dhi Qar** has a success story in local youth leadership. It has changed the local government more than once, amended the electoral law, created the foundation of the Dhi Qar Reconstruction Fund, and increased budgetary allocations in 2021 pursuant to its declaration as a disaster-stricken province.
- ▶ The province of **Basra** set its development path following a local vision of sustainable development for 2030. It aims to ensure well-being, good living standards, and universal health care with a quality educational system, based on an institutional system and community security to achieve the SDGs. The province in its management of development has moved closer to risk-conscious frameworks, planning, policy-making and decision-making, on a path to high-level development governance.
- ▶ At the national level, the **Region's Development Program** was launched in 2006 to respond to provincial diversity and demographic and economic characteristics and advantages. This diversity requires the distribution of investments in a way that achieves the optimal use of resources, and takes into account the comparative advantage of each province and its natural, agricultural, and mineral resources. The **2018 National Urban Strategic Framework for urban development** in the provinces of Iraq is aligned with SDG 11, and seeks to make “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and contributes to balanced spatial development for all cities in the Iraqi provinces. It supports decentralization and good governance, and enhances community participation.

2.4 VOLUNTARY SUBNATIONAL AND/OR LOCAL REVIEWS (VSRs / VLRs)

The 2019 VNR mentions that the governorates of **Basra, Karbala,** and **Anbar** were preparing their first local reports on SDGs, expected to be completed in 2019.

2.5 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In Iraq, central transfers are still essential for the sustainability of local government. They are allocated, however, in a highly unbalanced way: the four governorates included in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) – due to the particular status of this union as the country's only autonomous region – receive about 17% of the national budget via grants; the remaining 15 governorates combined only receive about 5%.⁵

3. RELEVANT INFORMATION

General comments: The experience of **decentralization** in Iraq is recent even though laws have existed since 1962. Eight ministries (Education, Health, Municipalities and Public Works, Agriculture, Finance, Housing and Urbanization, Social Affairs and Youth and Sport) have an effective role in strengthening decentralization, which allows LGs to have technical prerogatives, administrative and legislative matters in the aforementioned fields. The recent experience of decentralization suffers from the

5. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

lack of a legislative, administrative and political arsenal to support their actions. In addition, the country's legislative framework favors centralization and concentration much more. The report recommends making decentralization a strong instrument to support sustainable development.

The **National Development Plan 2018-2022** emphasizes provinces that have suffered from security problems, such as **Kirkuk, Salah al-Din, Anbar, Nineveh, and Diyala**. The most important challenges they face are: changing their economic identity; refugees and displaced populations; the collapse of infrastructure; the suspension of projects; the decline in the economic situation; societal lawlessness and clan conflicts; the deterioration of agricultural, animal, and industrial production; and high unemployment and poverty rates. In addition, the plan identifies challenges faced by other provinces, especially the southern ones. The most important are: the lack of administrative and financial powers granted to local administrations, which limits decision-making; the lack of economic activity regulations; deterioration of the investment environment; the weak role of the private sector; and an insufficient water quota, which negatively affects the needs of the population and the agricultural sector.

3.1 WOMEN PARTICIPATION

In Iraq's second election for governorate councils in 2013, 117 women were elected to a total of 440 seats, seven more than in the 2009 elections.⁶ The 2021 VNR mentions the objective of strengthening the role and place of women in local authorities and in particular at the level of political decision-making. In March 2021, the government formed a higher committee to oversee the empowerment of women in the political process and the Council of Representatives elections. It is preparing its work plan, expected to be announced in June 2021.

3.2 COVID 19

The 2021 VNR presents the impact of the pandemic and the recovery strategy at the national level, and acknowledges that "addressing the current complex crisis in the context of the SDGs requires great cooperation between various local and international stakeholders, particularly since development financing needs are one of the most important problems".

4. SDG INDICATORS⁷

| | | |
|---|-------|----------------------|
| 5.5.1. (b) Proportion of seats held by women (%) in local governments | | - |
| 6.1.1. Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%) | Urban | 65 (2020) |
| | Rural | 48 (2020) |
| 6.2.1. (a) Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (%) | Urban | 42 (2020) |
| | Rural | 44 (2020) |
| 11.1.1. Proportion of population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%) | | 45.7 (2018) |
| 11.6.1. Proportion of municipal solid waste collected and managed (%) | | 51.8 (2012, Baghdad) |
| 11.6.2. Air pollution – annual means of particulate matter in cities (population weighted) | | 55.4 (2016) |
| 11.b.2. Proportion of local governments that have adopted local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national strategies (%) | | 100 (2018) |

6. UCLG, 2019, GOLD V Report, <https://www.gold.uclg.org/sites/default/files/ENG-GOLD-V-2020.pdf>

7. The data used for this table come from the UN SDG Indicators Database. See: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/UNSDG/IndDatabasePage>. More information on the country's progress towards the SDGs here: <https://country-profiles.unstatshub.org/irq>