



# Diaspora engagement mapping

## IRAQ

### Facts & figures

Terminology: The term 'persons of Iraqi origin residing abroad' is usually used to refer to diaspora. The government does not use the term 'diaspora policy'.

#### Political rights



Dual citizenship<sup>1</sup>



Right to vote in national elections for citizens residing abroad<sup>2</sup>



#### Remittances



Remittances as a share of GDP: 0.35%  
Remittances inflow (USD million): 1,161

#### Voting from abroad:

At embassies/consulates



#### Data disclaimer

As diaspora definitions vary widely, we have chosen to use comparable data on emigration as a proxy. This does not include all who consider themselves diaspora and is not necessarily aligned with national definitions of diaspora. Emigration data comes from UNDESA (2024) and remittances from the World Bank (2023).

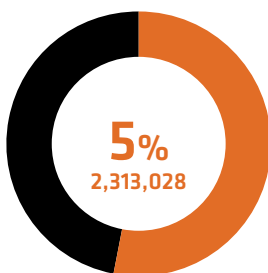
#### Emigration



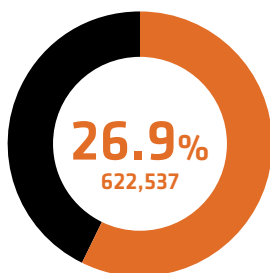
% of emigrants in total population



% of which in the EU



♂ 53.1%  
♀ 46.9%



♂ 57.4%  
♀ 42.6%

#### Top countries of destination



Türkiye	403,670
United States of America	272,370
Germany	263,918
Jordan	219,163
Syrian Arab Republic	209,390

1 Iraqi Nationality Law, Iraqi Official Gazette Issue 4019 dated March 7, 2006, No.26.

2 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/iraqi-expats-in-21-countries-vote-in-general-election/1141285>

## Overview of the policy and legislative framework



### National Policy for Engagement with Iraqis Abroad<sup>3</sup>

The policy has four broad objectives:

1. to facilitate connection between the diaspora and local communities and structures within Iraq;
2. to support the diaspora to accumulate and mobilise their knowledge toward Iraq's development;
3. to incentivise and create structures through which members of the diaspora may provide financial support for Iraq's development;
4. to foster close ties between the diaspora and the Iraq state through mutual trust, recognition, and cooperation.

In particular, the policy foresees to facilitate the exchange of the diaspora's human capital, including in areas such as academic exchange and skills transfer. It includes pathways for economic development of Iraq such as sharing information on regulations and requirements related to starting a business or investing in Iraq; and proposes an online platform to facilitate contact between the Iraqi population abroad and Iraq.

The General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the responsible national body for approving policies has, in principle, approved the policy with a score of 88%.

While, the Kurdistan Regional Government has promised to work with its diaspora in a range of areas, it does not yet have an institutionalised diaspora policy.<sup>4</sup>

### » Trends

Engaging Iraqis Abroad remains a relatively new policy discussion in Iraq. The country, however, recognises the potential of Iraqis Abroad and is enthusiastic to work with them. The priority of the Iraqi government is to address the internal and external displacement of its population. Iraq encourages its nationals abroad to return home and support the development of the country, with a strong emphasis on attracting qualified and skilled Iraqis. The Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad represents a landmark first step in Iraq on formalising relationships with the diaspora. However, it should be underlined that whilst institutionalising diaspora engagement through a policy is a new departure in Iraq, diaspora engagement initiatives have already been implemented for several decades.

**Institutional and leadership development:** There are a limited number of sustainable Iraqi diaspora organisations and it is important to connect those through networks.<sup>5</sup> At state level, there is the understanding that dedicated institutions should be created to support the mobilisation of Iraqis abroad by providing clear communication channels and to help build trust with the government.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.budapestprocess.org/news-events/news/368-icmpd-mission-to-iraq-5th-11th-june-2021>

<sup>4</sup> Bahar Başer (2019) Engaging Diasporas in Development and State-Building: The Role of the Kurdish Diaspora and Returnees in Rebuilding the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, *Ethnopolitics*, 18:1, 76-91, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1525167.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Russell, *The Iraqi Diaspora and Policy Development: A Situational Analysis*, ICMPD, 2017.

Human capital support and investment: In post-conflict settings, diaspora contributions are key as they can contribute to knowledge sharing and capacity building<sup>6</sup>. Iraq has already benefitted from short-term knowledge transfer schemes, as presented in the Spotlight section, and sees the value of strengthening such practice. Moreover, social remittances, such as networks, are considered as key to push for the development of civil society and human rights as well as democratisation.<sup>7</sup>

Financial mobilisation and investment: In 2006, the Government of Iraq passed Investment Law No. 13<sup>8</sup> (last amended in 2015), laying out the foundation for attracting foreign investment into Iraq. The law laid out several strategic initiatives including tax incentives, investor guarantees, and obligations of investors. However, no specific scheme was targeting the diaspora. The Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad shows a shift in Iraq's approach as it aims at specifically targeting diaspora direct investment and job creation.

## Obstacles



- **Trust:** Between the diaspora and Iraq government there is an issue of trust, particularly in terms of corruption in the public sector and concerns about how their personal information or data would be used. Engagement is sometimes considered as a “one-way street”, in which the state would like to receive information and resources from the diaspora without meaningfully trying to meet their needs.<sup>9</sup>
- **Perceived unresponsiveness** of the government to the needs of the diaspora is rooted in the sentiment that consular services for Iraqis are poor, and that the communication strategy between Iraqis abroad and the state is absent or weak.<sup>10</sup>
- **Divided diaspora:** Each group has a particular history of persecution that it tends to emphasise over those of others.<sup>11</sup> As a possible consequence, Iraqis Abroad have troubles creating strong organisations, and they are designated as a fairly weakly organised diaspora in the literature.<sup>12</sup>
- **Lack of funding:** Iraq will need sizeable and systematic donor support in the early phases of developing the Policy on Engagement with Iraqis abroad and implementing its action plan to make it viable.<sup>13</sup>
- **Transfer of money to Iraq is difficult:** Less than 25% of Iraqi adults have a bank account, mainly because banking services are seen as too expensive and due to a lack of trust in financial institutions. The banking sector is largely dominated by public banks with few branches and a very small number of ATMs making banking inaccessible for many.<sup>14</sup> Western Union is an alternative to the inadequate banking system but its high costs still makes it an undesirable option.<sup>15</sup>

6 Hamdouch, B., & Wahba, J. (2015). Return migration and entrepreneurship in Morocco. *Middle East Development Journal*, 7(2), 129-148.

7 Bahar Başer (2019) Engaging Diasporas in Development and State-Building: The Role of the Kurdish Diaspora and Returnees in Rebuilding the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, *Ethnopolitics*, 18:1, 76-91, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1525167.

8 [http://investpromo.gov.iq/nic\\_flash/laws/english/investment\\_laws/investment\\_law\\_no.\\_13\\_en/mobile/index.html](http://investpromo.gov.iq/nic_flash/laws/english/investment_laws/investment_law_no._13_en/mobile/index.html)

9 Policy on engagement with Iraqis abroad (draft), ICMPD, 20 June 2019.

10 Policy on engagement with Iraqis abroad (draft), ICMPD, 20 June 2019.

11 Maegan Hendow, *Iraqi Diaspora and Temporary Return Migration: The Role of Opportunity, Motivation and Expectation*, Master Thesis, Universität Wien, 2010. Available at [http://othes.univie.ac.at/13444/1/2011-01-11\\_0868185.pdf](http://othes.univie.ac.at/13444/1/2011-01-11_0868185.pdf).

12 Danish Refugee Council, *Iraqi Diaspora Organisations in Denmark*, November 2018. Available at: [https://drc.ngo/media/5230180/iraqi-diaspora-organisations-in-denmark-mapping-report\\_design-phase-2-003.pdf](https://drc.ngo/media/5230180/iraqi-diaspora-organisations-in-denmark-mapping-report_design-phase-2-003.pdf); Walt Vanderbush, 'The Iraqi Diaspora and the US Invasion of Iraq' in Josh DeWind and Renata Segura (eds) 'Diaspora Lobbies and the US government: convergence and divergence in making foreign policy' (New York University Press, 2014).

13 Policy on engagement with Iraqis abroad (draft), ICMPD, 20 June 2019.

14 International Monetary Fund, *Iraq country Report No. 19/249*, July 2019. file:///C:/Users/Tittelf/Downloads/1IRQEA2019002%20(1).pdf

15 <http://www.irfad.org/iraq-banking/>

- **Statistical data on Iraqis abroad is scarce** and can be difficult to collect. In depth information on the characteristics and structures of the Iraqi community abroad is limited.
- **Difficult return and reintegration:** The diaspora engage in grass-roots and political activities to support Iraq from abroad. There are clear signs that whilst the Iraqi diaspora is open to participation in Iraq's development, the return option is not popular.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, returnees have faced several issues impeding their reintegration such as access to education for their children.<sup>17</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT: Effective practices

Explore 400+ practices by country, SDG or sector of engagement in the [interactive database!](#)



### Iraqis Rebuilding Iraq (IRI) 2004-2007

SKILLS  
TRANSFER

IRI was implemented jointly by IOM, UNDP and the Ministry of Planning and development Cooperation (MoPDC). The objective was to fill gaps in Iraqi ministries with expatriate expertise in order to encourage diaspora members to return to their home country, to develop local experience, and to create a roster of potential experts willing to return to their home country.

### Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals 2012-2016

SKILLS TRANSFER +  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Temporary Return of Qualified Nationals<sup>18</sup> programme has facilitated 48 assignments in Iraq in the areas of education, health, engineering and humanitarian assistance. A second phase of the project is currently ongoing within which members of the Iraqi diaspora in the Netherlands could contribute to the development of Iraq through their expertise, knowledge and entrepreneurship by participating to the IOM's Connecting Diaspora for Development (CD4D) project<sup>19</sup>. Through temporary assignments, professional diaspora members were linked to the selected institutions in Iraq to share knowledge and expertise. Through this project, IOM also enabled diaspora entrepreneurs to start or expand a business in Iraq. Selected candidates could participate in go-and-see missions in Iraq to scan the business climate to decide if their business idea is viable.

### Germany-Iraqi Management Training Academy (AGI)

SKILLS  
TRANSFER

The AGI is a German consultancy company. Since 2005, hundreds of Iraqi scientists, medical doctors and company leaders gained expertise through qualification programmes arranged by AGI. AGI builds a human bridge between Germany and Iraq that brings knowledge, understanding and development from both sides.

### Electronic registration of Iraqi competencies abroad

SKILLS  
TRANSFER

In 2023, Iraq's Ministry of Migration and Displacement launched an online platform to register Iraqi professionals living abroad. The initiative aims to create a database of skills and expertise to strengthen national development efforts by facilitating future knowledge transfer and diaspora engagement.

16 [https://drc.ngo/media/5230180/iraqi-dispora-organisations-in-denmark-mapping-report\\_design-phase-2-003.pdf](https://drc.ngo/media/5230180/iraqi-dispora-organisations-in-denmark-mapping-report_design-phase-2-003.pdf)

17 Bahar Başer (2019) Engaging Diasporas in Development and State-Building: The Role of the Kurdish Diaspora and Returnees in Rebuilding the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, *Ethnopolitics*, 18:1, 76-91, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1525167

18 TRQN III, 1 December 2012- 31 March 2016 <https://iom-nederland.nl/en/migration-and-development>

19 <https://iom-nederland.nl/en/migration-and-development/connecting-diaspora-for-development-cd4d>

## Annex:

# List of Actors

Explore the institutionalisation of diaspora engagement worldwide via the [typology of 430+ institutions](#)

### Diaspora related institutions

- **National institutions**
  - At ministerial level

#### **Ministry of Migration and Displaced**<sup>20</sup>

Created on 30 September 2003. The ministry is in charge of the return of Iraqi refugees and of diaspora affairs. The Policy on Engagement with Iraqis Abroad envisions that the Ministry of Migration and Displacement (MoMD) will act as focal agency for all matters related to the community of Iraqis abroad. The MoMD will lead further development of the policy and the action plan for its implementation. As the central body, MoMD will consult and coordinate with other state bodies in further tailoring of the policy and in generating resources needed for its implementation. The MoMD has the clearest mandate to execute activities for and with the population of Iraqis abroad, but other institutions within the government of Iraq have valuable expertise, knowledge, and resources that can address the needs and interests of Iraqis abroad, such as the other ministries listed here.

#### **Ministry of Interior**

Moi deals with requests for reinstatement of nationality for persons who have lost or given up Iraqi citizenship and with Iraqis returned through bilateral or multilateral agreements<sup>21</sup>.

#### **Ministry of Planning**<sup>22</sup>

MoP is in charge of the development of Iraq. It is also in charge of developing investments in the country, and of international cooperation (including implementation of foreign-funded development projects).

#### **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**<sup>23</sup>

Is in charge of consular services provided to Iraqis abroad.

#### **Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works**

The ministry grants Iraqis who left the country prior to 2003 and are now returning with the right to receive a piece of land from the state.

#### **Council of Ministers**

The Cabinet Secretary is in charge of national coordination at inter-ministerial level, and is comprised of various Directorates, which can be directly relevant in this context.

20 [https://momd.gov.iq/En\\_Posts/Index?categoryId=74](https://momd.gov.iq/En_Posts/Index?categoryId=74).

21 <https://moi.gov.iq/>

22 <https://mop.gov.iq/en/>

23 <https://www.mofa.gov.iq/en/>

- At sub-ministerial level

### **The Iraqi National Committee for Investment<sup>24</sup>**

The UBCU was established in 2007 to be the face of private investment in Iraq and serve as promoter, facilitator, monitor, and policy advisor for investment into Iraq.

### **High-level National Committee on the Status of Iraqis Abroad, their Voluntary Return, and their Reintegration 2023**

Established by order of the Prime Minister. The Committee is headed by the Minister of Migration and Displacement. While it targets the diaspora, the main focus of the committee is on return and reintegration.

- At local level

Specific activities and policies relating to the population of Iraqis abroad have been largely led by implementing agencies, often on a very local level (such as the Ministry of Municipalities and Public Works in terms of return and reintegration support).

Since April 2003, women's organisations and initiatives have been mushrooming all over Iraq. Many organisations – such as the National Council of Women (NWC), the Iraqi Women's Higher Council (IWHC), the Iraqi Independent Women's Group and the Society for Iraqi Women for the Future – have been founded by prominent professional women with close ties to political parties. Many were initiated by returnees, Iraqi women activists who were part of the diaspora before 2003. While mainly founded and represented by elite women, some have broad memberships and branches throughout the country. Their activities revolve around humanitarian and practical projects, such as income generation, legal advice, free health care and counselling, as well as political advocacy. Many of the initiatives fill gaps in state health and welfare provision.<sup>25</sup>

## **Diaspora organisations in Europe**

### **Dansk Irakisk Hjelpeorganisation Denmark**

#### **☑ Development activities**

The organisation implements projects in Iraq to create jobs for women (e.g. micro loans, jobs in farming, cooking, sewing), improve infrastructure and conditions in slum dwelling in rural Iraq, and provide boarding school for poor or orphaned children. They mainly work with Muhammad Ameen Organization based in Iraq.

### **Den Irakiske Kvindeliga** Denmark

#### **☑ Development activities**

The organisation works to integrate Iraqi women into Danish society. The organisation supports Iraqi families and communicates with others women's associations. They also provide courses on empowerment for young women in Iraq and courses to train teachers in Iraq about progressive thinking.

Read more about diaspora organisations in "[Starting guide: What is a diaspora organisation](#)"



<sup>24</sup> <http://investpromo.gov.iq/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.fmreview.org/sites/fmr/files/FMRdownloads/en/iraq.pdf>

### **Iraqi Association** United Kingdom

The Iraqi Association is a non-profit organisation that exists to enable Iraqis to settle and integrate in this country with rights to express their cultural identities. Its work is aimed at Iraqis, by providing volunteerism, advice, public health support, counselling, training, employment guidance, information services, and organising cultural events. Its mission to raise awareness about relevant events in Iraq and the integration process in this country.

### **Iraqi-Swedish Business Centre** Sweden

The Iraqi-Swedish Business Centre (ISBC) role is to expand the business communication exchange between Iraqi and Swedish Companies. The concept is to allocate and broaden the business information channels in response to the huge demand for information from both Iraqi and Swedish companies. ISBC efforts are therefore to assist companies from both countries with the necessary information and to support all partners to establish successful business relationships.

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