

Sustainable Development Goals Tracker

IRAQ 2025

Voluntary National Review



The Republic of Iraq
Ministry of Planning
National Committee for Sustainable Development

The Second National Voluntary Review Report on the Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

2021

Iraq .. And the Path Back to the Development

July 2021



Iraq VNR 2021
Report

Iraq VNR 2019
Report



Iraq VNR 2025
Report



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Iraq
2025

Voluntary National Review (VNR)

VNRs Submitted: 3 (75%)



SDGs Achieved: 0 (0%)

SDGs On-Track: 1 (6%)



SDGs Off-Track: 16 (94%)



SDGs No Progress: 0 (0%)

Introduction

Iraq's third Voluntary National Review (VNR), submitted in 2025, presents a comprehensive assessment of the country's progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) amid years of crisis. Following the war against terrorist groups, political instability, and the triple shock of the COVID-19 pandemic and oil price collapse, Iraq faced major setbacks in poverty reduction, education, and healthcare. Despite these challenges, the report conveys a narrative of resilience, centred on "*Responsible Investment, Reconstruction and Justice*." It highlights renewed optimism and Iraq's commitment to aligning national recovery with global sustainability frameworks, including the Paris Agreement and regional reconstruction partnerships (United Nations, 2025a; United Nations, 2025b).



VNR Framework Approach to assess of Iraq's Progress Towards the 2030 Agenda

A VNR is a self-assessment process through which the United Nations (UN) Member States review and report on their progress in implementing the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development and its **17 SDGs**. These reviews are voluntary, country-led, and inclusive, allowing each nation to share experiences, identify challenges, and highlight best practices.

VNRs are essential because they promote accountability and transparency in the implementation of the SDGs, allowing countries to demonstrate their commitment and progress openly. They help governments track progress, identify gaps, and strengthen policies, ensuring that national development strategies remain aligned with the **2030 Agenda**. Moreover, VNRs facilitate knowledge sharing among nations by enabling the exchange of experiences, innovations, and lessons learned. They also encourage multi-stakeholder participation, bringing together government institutions, civil society, the private sector, and academia in a collaborative effort to advance sustainable development. Finally, the VNRs serve as the foundation for the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) reviews, providing evidence-based insights that guide global discussions on accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs.

Objectives of VNRs

- Assess a country's progress towards achieving the SDGs.
- Identify key challenges and barriers to implementation.
- Share lessons learned and innovative approaches.
- Mobilise support, partnerships, and policy coherence for sustainable development.

Methodology to Measure VNRs Progress

VNRs assess development performance using quantitative and qualitative data, aligning national priorities with SDGs targets. Countries use available indicators and national statistics to evaluate whether they are:

- Achieved, on-track, moderately off-track, seriously off-track or no progress.
- Facing data gaps or methodological challenges.

Due to incomplete or inconsistent data, some assessments rely on proxy indicators or qualitative descriptions of progress. Each SDG is rated on a **0–5 scale** to measure Iraq's progress toward the **2030 Agenda**.

- 0 – No Progress:** No measurable progress or data available.
- 1 – Severely Off-Track:** Very little advancement; major gaps persist.
- 2 – Off-Track:** Limited progress with minimal improvement.
- 3 – Moderately Off-Track:** Some progress achieved, but key challenges remain.
- 4 – On-Track:** Noticeable progress made; close to achieving the target.
- 5 – Achieved:** Goal fully met with sustained performance and monitoring in place.

This scale helps to quantify Iraq's SDGs performance, showing where strong progress exists and where further policy actions are needed.

VNRs are vital tools for evaluating and accelerating progress towards the **2030 Agenda**. They enable countries to reflect on achievements, recognise shortcomings, and strengthen collective action for a more sustainable and equitable world.

Explanation of Analysis (Applied to Iraq SDG Report)

This analysis applies the *VNR framework* to Iraq's SDG Report. Initially, the report was processed using an AI tool to extract, summarise, and categorise data related to the **17 SDGs**. The AI provided preliminary insights into Iraq's progress, challenges, and measurable indicators. Following the AI

review, the information was cross-verified by two independent human experts to ensure factual accuracy, contextual relevance, and alignment with the official UN SDG indicators. This validation step strengthened the reliability of the data interpretation.

Finally, a team of SDG experts conducted an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis to identify key challenges, potential solutions, and policy-level recommendations. The comprehensive approach, integrating AI-driven insights with expert validation, provides a balanced, evidence-based assessment of Iraq's progress towards achieving economic growth, highlighting strategic areas for improvement, innovation, and sustainability.

Overall Progress

Table 1 presents Iraq's progress across the **17 SDGs**, with ratings assigned to each goal based on the report's findings. The ratings reflect the extent of progress made, highlight areas where challenges have been addressed, and identify those that remain unresolved.

Table 1. SDG Progress Scoring

Score: 3		1 NO POVERTY
Justification	- Poverty declined from 20.05% (2018) to 17.5% (2023). - However, rural southern provinces still record poverty rates above 30%, showing uneven progress.	
Challenges	- Stark regional disparities, with poverty exceeding 30% in rural southern areas. - Despite progress, poverty remains high in several governorates, particularly in rural southern areas, indicating uneven progress in poverty reduction.	
Progress/Solutions	- National poverty rate declined from 20.05% (2018) to 17.5% (2023); implementation of successive Poverty Reduction Strategies.	
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for more targeted, data-driven social protection and sustainable livelihood programmes.	
Score : 2		2 ZERO HUNGER
Justification	- The government has increased cereal production and improved seed quality, but the VNR provides no data on malnutrition or stunting. Lack of evidence on food security outcomes justifies a lower score.	
Challenges	- Droughts and water scarcity threaten food production and rural livelihoods.	
Progress/Solutions	- Food assistance and agricultural recovery programmes continue; emphasis on rural development.	
Unsolved Challenges	- Weak agricultural infrastructure and limited investment in climate-resilient farming.	

Score: 3	
Justification	- Life expectancy increased from 58 years (2010) to 74.9 years (2024). - Gains in primary healthcare and vaccination are noted, though per capita spending remains below regional averages.
Challenges	- Health spending remains below regional averages; inequities across provinces. - Economic Dependence: Iraq still produces only 10% of its pharmaceutical needs, revealing dependency on imports and limited local production capacity in the health sector. - Health Spending: Health expenditure remains low compared to regional standards, affecting access to quality healthcare and medical services.
Progress/Solutions	- There is some progress in the quality of life and increase in health expectancy however, still spending on health services remain below average in the regions and inequities exist across the provinces.
Unsolved Challenges	- Insufficient healthcare infrastructure and low per capita health expenditure.

Score: 3	
Justification	- Literacy programmes enrolled 74,180 learners (2023-2024), but dropout rates remain high and rural-urban disparities persist.
Challenges	- Overcrowded classrooms, high dropout rates, and regional inequality in education access.
Progress/Solutions	- Adult education programmes enrolled 74,180 learners in 2023-2024; literacy initiatives ongoing
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for comprehensive reforms in education quality, infrastructure, and teacher training.

Score: 3	
Justification	- Women hold 29% of parliamentary seats and 17.5% of senior administrative roles. Despite this, low female labour force participation shows limited progress in economic empowerment.
Challenges	- Low female labour participation; cultural and institutional barriers persist. - Women's representation and employment remain limited beyond formal quotas, reflecting ongoing barriers to equality and empowerment
Progress/Solutions	- Women hold 29% of parliamentary seats and 3 of 23 ministerial posts; national strategies on gender justice and empowerment.
Unsolved Challenges	- Limited progress in economic empowerment and leadership opportunities for women.



Score: 2

Justification	- Iraq faces severe water stress from upstream damming and poor management. Few improvements are documented, and access gaps remain significant.
Challenges	- Drought, pollution, and inadequate infrastructure threaten sustainable water access.
Progress/Solutions	- Continued investments in water management and service delivery improvements.
Unsolved Challenges	- Weak capacity for integrated water resource management and adaptation to scarcity.



Score : 3

Justification	- Commitments to renewable energy exist, but integration into the grid is minimal, and fossil fuel dependence dominates the energy sector.
Challenges	- Implementation delays and limited renewable energy integration into the grid.
Progress/Solutions	- Commitment to renewable energy and emission reduction projects.
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for stronger institutional frameworks to expand renewable energy capacity.



Score : 3

Justification	- A national programme to create jobs exists, but unemployment remains high, particularly for youth, and oil dependency limits economic diversification.
Challenges	- High unemployment, especially among youth and women; weak private sector diversification.
Progress/Solutions	- National programmes launched to create jobs and stimulate investment; major projects (Grand Faw Port, Development Road).
Unsolved Challenges	- Labour market reforms and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (SME) development remain limited.



Score: 3

Justification	- Strategic projects (Grand Faw Port, Development Road) are underway, yet industrialisation and innovation indicators remain weak.
Challenges	- Slow progress in industrial diversification and innovation ecosystems.
Progress/Solutions	- Strategic infrastructure projects underway to improve connectivity and logistics.
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for stronger industrial policy and support for research and technology transfer.



Score: 3

Justification	- Regional disparities remain severe, with rural poverty rates high. - The Development Achievement Index provides insights but shows persistent inequality.
Challenges	- Persistent regional and gender disparities; uneven access to services.
Progress/Solutions	- Inclusion of marginalised groups in social programmes; governance reforms.
Unsolved Challenges	- Lack of disaggregated data and comprehensive equality measures.



Score: 3

Justification	- 70.2% of Iraqis live in urban areas (2024 census), and housing loans exceeded 1.6 trillion IQD. However, rapid urbanisation continues to strain infrastructure.
Challenges	- Rapid urbanisation, housing shortages, and limited urban infrastructure. - Rapid urbanisation (70.2%) places heavy pressure on housing, infrastructure, and service delivery, particularly in major cities.
Progress/Solutions	- Investment in sustainable urban housing and city planning; 70.2% urban population (2024).
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for resilient city planning and improved urban service delivery.



Score: 2

Justification	- References to “green economy” and “responsible investment” exist, but little detail is provided on SCP policies, waste management, or circular economy initiatives.
Challenges	- Weak enforcement of environmental standards.
Progress/Solutions	- Emerging policies on waste management and sustainable production.
Unsolved Challenges	- Limited awareness and implementation of sustainable consumption frameworks.



Score: 1

Justification	- Iraq is highly vulnerable to climate shocks. - Despite adopting the 2024–2030 Environmental Strategy, implementation is weak, renewable energy integration is minimal, and adaptation measures are insufficient.
Challenges	- Frequent heatwaves, droughts, and sandstorms; low adaptive capacity. - Continued water scarcity, pollution, and desertification threaten sustainable development despite the adoption of a national environmental strategy.

Progress/ Solutions	- Commitment to Paris Agreement and renewable energy transition.
Unsolved Challenges	- Insufficient implementation of mitigation and adaptation measures.

14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



Score: 4	
Justification	- No evidence of marine conservation or sustainable fisheries. - Port projects are mentioned, but environmental safeguards are absent.
Challenges	- Water pollution and degradation of aquatic ecosystems.
Progress/ Solutions	- Recognition of environmental protection needs in national policy.
Unsolved Challenges	- Absence of comprehensive marine and freshwater protection programmes.

15 LIFE
ON LAND



Score: 2	
Justification	- Commitments exist to improve resource management, but biodiversity loss, desertification, and weak enforcement undermine progress.
Challenges	- Desertification, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity due to climate stress.
Progress/ Solutions	- Government commitment to better resource management.
Unsolved Challenges	- Weak environmental governance and reforestation efforts.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



Score: 3	
Justification	- Violent crimes declined by 33.1% (2015–2018). - Anti-corruption efforts and digitalisation raised satisfaction with services to 96.6%, though gaps remain in rural areas.
Challenges	- Uneven governance quality and weak institutional capacity in conflict-affected areas.
Progress/ Solutions	- Improved peace and governance since 2014; anti-corruption reforms; digitalisation raised service satisfaction to 96.6%.
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for deeper judicial reform and decentralised governance.

17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



Score: 3	
Justification	- Partnerships with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), civil society, and regional actors are strong. However, persistent data gaps limit accurate monitoring of SDG progress.
Challenges	- Persistent data gaps, weak statistical systems, and limited research capacity.

Progress/ Solutions	- Strong coordination with UNDP and multi-stakeholder engagement in VNR preparation.
Unsolved Challenges	- Need for stronger data infrastructure and sustained international cooperation for SDG monitoring.

Source: (United Nations, 2025a; United Nations, 2025b).

Major Challenges

- **Economic Volatility and Lack of Diversification:** Iraq's heavy dependence on oil makes its economy highly vulnerable to shocks. The “triple crisis” of political instability, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the oil price collapse exposed this fragility. The VNR stresses the need for economic diversification and responsible investment to create sustainable jobs, particularly for youth.
- **Persistent Regional and Rural Poverty:** Although national poverty rates have declined, deep regional disparities persist. In some southern rural governorates, poverty exceeds 30%. The report calls for targeted, locally tailored poverty reduction strategies to address these inequalities.
- **Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Security:** Recovery from the war against terrorism remains incomplete. While security has improved, displacement, damaged infrastructure, and inadequate housing continue to hinder development in liberated areas, slowing equitable reconstruction.
- **High Population Growth and Urbanisation:** With over 46 million people and rapid urbanisation, Iraq faces mounting pressure on housing, infrastructure, and services. Environmental challenges such as water scarcity, desertification, and air pollution—intensify these urban strains.
- **Governance and Data Gaps:** Weak governance, corruption risks, and limited statistical capacity undermine SDG monitoring and evidence-based policymaking. The VNR highlights the need to strengthen institutions, transparency, and data systems to improve accountability and planning.

Key Lessons Learned

- **Multi-Stakeholder Participation:** Broad engagement of government, civil society, private sector, and academia strengthened SDG ownership and trust, though data gaps still limit evidence-based policymaking.
- **Strategic Infrastructure for Development:** Mega projects like the Grand Faw Port and Development Road are central to economic diversification and job creation, but their long-term benefits require complementary private sector reforms.
- **Localisation of Development:** Targeted, region-specific interventions are essential to reduce poverty and inequality, especially in southern governorates where poverty exceeds 30%.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Integrating climate adaptation and resource management into all development planning is vital to address water scarcity, desertification, and climate shocks.
- **Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Governance Reform:** Sustainable recovery requires linking physical reconstruction with governance, justice, and institutional reforms to ensure long-term peace and stability.

Notable Contribution

- **2025:** Presentation of Iraq's Third VNR, demonstrating commitment to SDG monitoring and transparency.
- **2025:** Development of a partial domestic pharmaceutical industry, producing about 10% of national needs.
- **2024:** Completion of a national population census, providing updated demographic and urbanisation data (46.118 million people; 70.2% urban).
- **2024:** Life expectancy rose to approximately 74.9 years, showing major progress in health outcomes.
- **2024:** Adoption of the National Strategy for Environmental Protection and Improvement (2024–2030) to strengthen environmental governance.
- **2023:** National poverty rate reduced to 17.5% from 20.05% in 2018.
- **2023/2024:** Expansion of literacy initiatives with 74,180 adult learners enrolled.
- **2021–2023:** Gradual increase in health expenditure (from 2.0% to 2.2% of GDP) and continued support for education.
- **2015–2018:** Violent crimes declined by 33.1%, reflecting improved security conditions.
- **2030 Goal:** Iraq targets 80 years' life expectancy, aligning national objectives with SDG milestones.

Recommendations

- **Strengthen Economic Diversification and Private Sector Development:** Reducing dependence on oil is crucial for sustainable growth. By expanding sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and renewable energy, and supporting SMEs and youth-led enterprises with regulatory reforms and improved access to finance, the economy can become more resilient. Vocational and technical training aligned with market needs will further enhance workforce employability, while public–private partnerships can drive strategic infrastructure and industrial development.
- **Address Regional and Rural Inequalities:** Targeted strategies are needed to reduce poverty and regional disparities. By focusing on underdeveloped southern and rural governorates, investing in infrastructure, and strengthening social protection systems, vulnerable populations including women, children, displaced persons, and people with disabilities can access improved opportunities. Localised development planning ensures that interventions are tailored to the unique needs of each region.
- **Advance Human Development through Health, Education, and Gender Equality:** Investing in health and education is essential for inclusive development. Modernising curricula, expanding digital learning, and promoting equitable distribution of services reduce dropout rates and improve quality. Women's economic empowerment can be strengthened through inclusive employment policies and entrepreneurship support, while domestic healthcare production and supply chain resilience enhance access to essential medicines.
- **Enhance Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience:** Sustainable growth requires strong environmental stewardship. Implementing the National Environmental Protection Strategy, integrating renewable energy, and developing climate adaptation plans address challenges such as droughts, desertification, and water scarcity. Strengthened water management and waste control systems promote sustainable consumption and resource preservation.

- **Strengthen Governance, Institutional Reform, and Anti-Corruption Measures:** Effective governance is central to long-term stability. Deepening judicial and administrative reforms, expanding e-governance, and empowering local governments improve accountability and service delivery. Participatory decision-making ensures inclusive policy planning and strengthens citizen trust.
- **Build Robust Data and Monitoring Systems:** Reliable data underpins informed policymaking. Enhancing national statistical capacity, investing in digital infrastructure, and collaborating with international partners improves data quality and analytical capacity. Regular SDG progress reporting ensures transparency and evidence-based decision-making.
- **Mobilise Sustainable Financing and Partnerships:** Sustainable financing is key to achieving development goals. Diversifying funding sources, promoting responsible investment, and leveraging strategic partnerships support innovation, capacity-building, and job creation. A national SDG financing framework ensures coordinated spending and effective resource allocation.
- Strengthen national statistical systems to systematically measure, monitor, and report progress across all **17 SDGs** and 234 performance indicators. Iraq should provide transparent evidence detailing which of the indicators have been achieved, alongside data-supported analyses of those still in progress. This will ensure greater accountability, facilitate peer learning, and guide policy adjustments towards the **2030 Agenda**.

Conclusion

Iraq's 2025 VNR reaffirms the nation's strong commitment to the **2030 Agenda**, demonstrating resilience amid post-conflict recovery and economic shocks. Grounded in "*Responsible Investment*" and a focus on reconstruction and justice, Iraq has achieved notable progress, including reducing poverty from 20.05% in 2018 to 17.5% in 2023 and increasing life expectancy from 58 years in 2010 to 74.9 years in 2024. Yet, the report candidly recognises major challenges, persistent regional inequalities, limited economic diversification, rapid population growth, and severe environmental pressures. Looking ahead, Iraq aims to strengthen data systems, governance, and institutional capacity while enhancing partnerships and financing. With continued reform and inclusive participation, Iraq can consolidate its progress, but without urgent action on diversification, governance, and climate adaptation, it risks falling short of its 2030 goals.

Reference

- United Nations (2025a): Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development 2025. Available at: <https://hlpf.un.org/2025>
- United Nations (2025b): *Iraq Voluntary National Reviews 2025*. High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Available at: <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/iraq/voluntary-national-reviews-2025>

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The SDG Tracker (SDGT) is a global research initiative, developed under the auspices of the World Association for Sustainable Development (WASD), designed to systematically analyse and score the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by United Nations member states. The SDGT aims to enhance global accountability, promote transparency, provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, and facilitate cross-country comparison and benchmarking, with all its comprehensive findings made publicly available on the dedicated SDGs Tracker Platform. For more information about this report and/or any other activities of the initiative, please visit: www.sdgstracker.org and contact us: director@sdgstracker.org.



WASD COLLABORATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS

WASD is delighted to be working very closely with various United Nations Agencies, most specifically with the UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). Both JIU and WASD are inspired by the conviction that the UN **Agenda 2030** for Sustainable Development (SD) and the **17** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the momentum for renewed UN engagement with the public and private sectors.

In **2018**, WASD collaborated with JIU on the UN project **Strengthening policy research uptake in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, aimed at reviewing the policy research uptake in service of the **2030 Agenda** for SD. For the first time in its **52** year history, the UN (aided by WASD) officially consulted academics and researchers from all over the world on the policy research uptake in the UN.

In **2019**, WASD also worked very closely with the UN JIU to undertake a UN system-wide review of policies, programmes, and platforms to support learning and enhancing the adequacy of training policies in the UN. The report **Policies and platforms in support of learning: towards more coherence, coordination, and convergence** was launched officially on **28** October 2020 at the opening of WASD's Online Learning Conference.

These various initiatives and events with the UN JIU have encouraged WASD to launch its **Sustainable Development Goals Tracker (SDGT)**.



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