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Trends in Private Sector Social Security Coverage in Iraq (2021–2024)

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Preface

As Iraq advances in its social protection reform journey, the publication of this report, Trends in Private Sector Social Security Coverage in Iraq (2021–24), marks a pivotal step towards fostering evidence-based implementation of Federal Iraq's Pension and Social Security Law for Workers, No. 18 of 2023 and the broader vision of universal social protection. This analysis, grounded in administrative records from both Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan region, provides a unique and timely window into how social security enrolment, compliance and benefit delivery are evolving across governorates, economic sectors and worker categories.

At its core, this report affirms the vital role of data transparency and monitoring in operationalizing legislative reform. While legal advances such as Law No. 18 of 2023 offer an enabling framework, their success hinges on the ability to track real outcomes. Disaggregated data – on women, migrant workers, employer behaviour and benefit recipients – not only enables targeted interventions, but is also essential for identifying gaps in access, equity and system performance.

Publishing this data is not simply a technical exercise; it is an important milestone enabling policymakers to become aware of these trends. It allows stakeholders – from government and social partners to workers and employers – to engage in informed dialogue, assess progress and collectively shape the future of Iraq's social security system. It also aligns with Iraq's ratification of the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and supports the country's aspirations for inclusive economic growth and social justice.

The ILO commends the commitment of Iraq's Social Security Administrations and the support of the European Union through the Joint United Nations Programme on Social Protection. By institutionalizing routine publication and use of administrative data, Iraq sets the foundation for smarter policymaking, stronger accountability and more resilient institutions. We hope this report serves as a practical tool for policymakers, a source of insight for researchers and a catalyst for advancing the right to social protection for all.

Maha Kattaa

ILO Country Coordinator for Iraq

The transformation of Iraq's social protection system is part of a broader regional shift from fragmented safety nets and discretionary social assistance schemes towards comprehensive, rights-based systems that are embedded in national labour markets. As countries across the Arab States seek to move beyond models where social assistance is treated as a charitable remedy for poverty, the emphasis is increasingly on building social protection systems that guarantee protection against life-cycle risks for all workers, including those in the informal economy.

In this context, the significance of this report extends beyond Iraq. The ability to systematically analyse and publish administrative data on social security enrolment, employer registration and benefit delivery is a key enabler of that transition. Publications such as this one enhance accountability and transparency but also serve as a concrete tool to assess how closely implementation is aligning with Iraq's legal commitments under Law No. 18 of 2023 and international standards such as Convention No. 102.

Moreover, the report enables a better comparative understanding of social security systems in the region. Many Arab countries – whether oil-rich or resource-constrained – face the common challenge of fragmented systems dominated by social assistance while contributory social security schemes remain underdeveloped. By documenting trends in effective coverage, gender disparities, inclusion of migrant workers and the functioning of optional and short-term benefit schemes, this type of report can offer valuable benchmarks for other countries in the region embarking on similar reforms.

From a policy perspective, the findings reaffirm that extending social protection is not only a legal obligation but also a necessary component of labour formalization, productivity and economic inclusion. The evidence presented here makes clear that increasing enrolment alone is insufficient unless accompanied by actual benefit delivery, simplified procedures and improved trust among workers and employers.

The ILO Regional Office for Arab States is proud to support this effort as part of a wider agenda to strengthen social protection systems that are inclusive, sustainable and grounded in the dignity of work. We hope this report helps inform not only national stakeholders in Iraq but also regional constituents as well as international financial institutions and all United Nations partners' striving for universal social protection anchored in decent work.

Peter Rademaker

Deputy Regional Director and Director of Decent Work Team

ILO Regional Office for Arab States

Executive Summary

This report, *Trends in Private Sector Social Security Coverage in Iraq (2021–24),* presents the first detailed analysis of social security administrative (SSA) data from Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan region of Iraq (KRI). It presents a timely review on how social security enrolment, compliance and benefit delivery are evolving during a critical reform period. Published with support from the European Union, the report aims to inform efforts to expand private social security coverage including the implementation of Federal Iraq's Pension and Social Security for Workers Law No. 18 of 2023 and accelerate progress towards universal social protection.

The analysis reveals that actual effective coverage in private social security has almost doubled in the past four years going from 6.97 per cent in 2021 to 12.65 per cent in 2024. This means that the number of workers who are enrolled compared to those who are employed in the private sector, has substantially increased over a short period. The shift reflects tangible progress and demonstrates the growing capacity and responsiveness of Iraq's (SSAs), who are now managing far higher volumes of registrations, benefit payments and enforcement tasks than in the past. The trend is especially visible in governorates such as Baghdad, Kirkuk and Najaf and is also mirrored in KRI where the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates continue to lead.

Importantly, this growth in effective coverage coincides with the initial phase of implementing Law No. 18 of 2023, which introduces significant innovations such as an optional social security scheme and improved access to long-term and short-term benefits. These legal advances are beginning to translate into real outcomes, offering more workers, including women and migrant workers, a pathway into formal protection. The enrolment of over 20,000 workers under the new voluntary scheme in 2024 – including a substantial proportion of women – further reflects the system's expanding reach and relevance.

At the same time, the report identifies areas where further efforts are needed to consolidate and sustain these gains. While the growth in enrolment is impressive, some of these newly registered workers are not yet reflected in benefit disbursement figures, particularly for old-age and disability pensions. Strengthening the link between legal coverage and actual access to benefits – through simplified procedures, digitalization and stronger enforcement – will be critical for maintaining trust among contributors and ensuring the system's credibility. Likewise, with regards to migrant workers, legal reforms and agreements with countries of origin are important to ensure that they can access their benefits.

Feedback from workers and employers confirms that the reforms enjoy broad support, but also highlight the importance of addressing administrative complexity and information gaps. Employers self-report high levels of compliance and awareness, especially in Federal Iraq, while workers emphasize the value of social security for their job security and future income. Many of the challenges they report – such as procedural hurdles and limited understanding of entitlements – can be addressed through ongoing reforms and continued investment in capacity development.

Overall, the report illustrates a promising trajectory: legal reforms are taking hold, coverage is expanding and Iraq's social security institutions are rising to meet the demands of a more inclusive and comprehensive system. By maintaining this momentum and addressing remaining barriers, Iraq is well positioned to make social protection a cornerstone of its development agenda and a driver of equitable growth.

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Abbreviations

CSO	Central Statistical Organization (Federal Iraq)
DSS	Department of Social Security
FGD	focus group discussion
IDI	individual in-depth interview
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KRI	Kurdistan region of Iraq
KRSO	Central Statistical Organization (Kurdistan region)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDS	public distribution system
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSN	Social Safety Net
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

1

Introduction

Iraq's social protection system has undergone important legal reform with the ratification of the ILO's Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) in 2023 and the adoption of Federal Iraq's Pension and Social Security for Workers Law No. 18 of 2023, which unifies retirement and social security provisions for private sector workers under a modernized framework. The law introduces expanded coverage options, improved short-term and long-term benefits and a new voluntary scheme, signaling a commitment to formalizing work and extending protections beyond the public sector. A similar draft law is yet to be passed in the KRI. In practice, despite legal provisions, social security coverage remains limited, with most private sector and informal workers still excluded from the system. As of 2024, food assistance – particularly the public distribution system (PDS) in Federal Iraq – remains the most far-reaching and accessible form of social support, covering nearly the entire population regardless of employment status. Cash transfers under the Social Safety Net (SSN) are the second most important feature of social protection. The programme is means-tested for poverty, although it faces challenges reaching poor and vulnerable populations. The dominance of social assistance reflects the reality that, while legal frameworks for contributory social protection have improved, Iraq's social protection landscape continues to be dominated by non-contributory, social and in-kind assistance, with social security playing a growing yet limited role. Bridging this divide will require not only legal reform, but also administrative modernization, strong extension efforts and a paradigm shift towards making rights-based social protection a reality, rather than charity-based.

Iraq's private sector social security system, exists alongside a significantly larger and more generous public sector pension system, regulated under separate legislation. The public scheme offers higher replacement rates, earlier retirement options and is primarily financed through the state budget, creating both horizontal inequities and fiscal pressures.[1] In contrast, the private system remains mostly contributory, actuarially less generous and covers a far smaller share of the workforce. As noted in a joint review of Iraq's pension system (IMF, ILO and World Bank 2024), Iraq's dual pension architecture has contributed to labour market distortions and disincentivized private sector employment. While Law No. 18 represents a major step towards modernizing and expanding private sector coverage, it does not resolve the underlying fragmentation and imbalance between the two systems. Any path towards social security reform in Iraq will need to address this structural duality to ensure equity, portability, accessibility and sustainability.

1 The public sector represents 37.9 per cent of total employment in Iraq which is comparatively large for the region. Public sector workers are entitled to a generous contributory pension. Social security coverage for private-sector workers remains disproportionately limited, with only 9.1 per cent of workers registered in Federal Iraq. See the ILO Social Protection Platform website at: https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowMainPage.action.

It is in this context that ILO, with the support of the European Union, implements a Joint United Nations Social Protection Programme together with UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) to support the Government of Iraq in social protection reforms. The purpose of this publication is to specifically shed light on social security coverage trends in the private sector across the country. This is particularly important since the new Law No. 18 comes with an expectation of enhancing coverage, hence the need for a more granular understanding of the coverage landscape and assessing gains over time.

This report is primarily based on analysis of administrative data collected by the private social security administrations (SSAs) of Federal Iraq and KRI. This information has been compared to data contained in the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021* (CSO, KRSO and ILO 2022), a recent social security survey among enterprises in Baghdad and Basra and qualitative interviews gathered through various ILO partners including the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and CRSM Consulting©.

Chapter 2 of this report focuses on workers' enrolment in private social security and includes a review of sex disaggregated data by governorate, performance of the recently introduced optional private social security scheme and section 2.4 on migrant workers. Chapter 3 focuses on employer registration on private social security including trends by governorate and type of organizations. Chapter 4 then reviews performance of long-term benefits over the past four years. Chapter 5 focuses on short-term benefits. Chapter 6 synthesizes some of the information reviewed in previous chapters on enrolment, comparing to estimates of affected population. The report subsequently presents a series of recommendations for possible follow-up.

Limitations of report

This report relies primarily on administrative data from the private SSAs of Federal Iraq and the KRI. While the data is rather extensive, there are data categories which are not reported. For example, administrative data broken down by age group or rural-versus-urban sub-categories were not available. While data appeared to be consistent across most categories, in some cases irregularities were found that raised questions about reliability. Whenever this occurred, such irregularities were highlighted. Moreover, while most data categories are similar across SSAs in Baghdad and Erbil, there are some cases in which they differ, making it difficult to compare and present data consistently across the report. For example, while data on disability or survivor pension beneficiaries was available for Federal Iraq, it was not available for KRI. Similarly, while data on employers referred to court, or overall disbursements and expenditures of social security were available for KRI, they were not available for Federal Iraq. In some cases, gender-disaggregated data was not available in one region while it was available in other regions.

Another limitation of this report stemmed from the need to compare time-series data linked to administrative sources available from 2021 to 2024 with one-time data sources linked to the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021*. Assumptions had to be made to estimate effective social security coverage. This is explained in detail in chapter 6.

Lastly, qualitative data to explain numerical trends was often limited. Instead of making assumptions about possible differences, this study focused on presenting the numerical trends to support stakeholder discussions and allow for identifying possible explanations at a later date. While the qualitative data presented in this report enables important insights, it is not comprehensive or necessarily representative of a wider trend.

2

Enrolment of workers in Iraq's private social security

Regarding worker enrolment, private social security includes data on overall registration of workers each year disaggregated by sex and governorate. In addition, the private SSAs register new enrolments each year and remove others who are no longer beneficiaries resulting from demographic and administrative factors explained further in this report. Since early 2024, SSAs have also began registering workers in the optional social security scheme, explained in more detail under section 2.3.

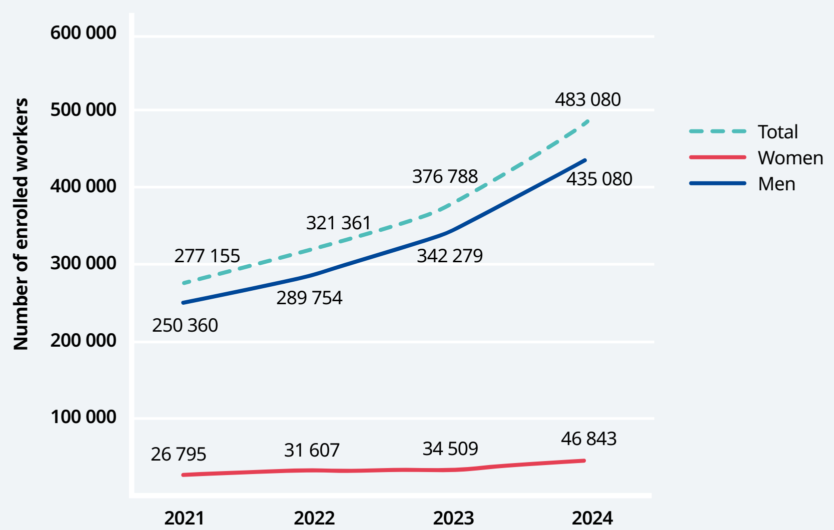
2.1 Enrolment by gender and governorate

Total enrolment in private social security for all Iraq (discounting optional private social security) amounted to 666,064 workers in 2024. This includes 483,080 enrolled in the private SSA of Federal Iraq and 182,984 workers enrolled in the KRI's SSA.

Figure 1 focuses on Federal Iraq and depicts an increase of workers' enrolment from 277,155 to 483,080 in 2021–24, representing a 74 per cent hike in four years.[2] There is a consistent 16 per cent increase per year in the number of enrolled workers in private social security from 2021 to 2023 with a slight acceleration in 2024 at 20 per cent. Men lead enrolment in private social security with women trailing far behind. In 2024, women's participation in private social security was at 9.7 per cent, slightly below the female labour force participation of 10.6 per cent (CSO, KRSO and ILO 2022), possibly explained by their higher presence in the public sector and other factors. This will be explored in more details in chapter 6.

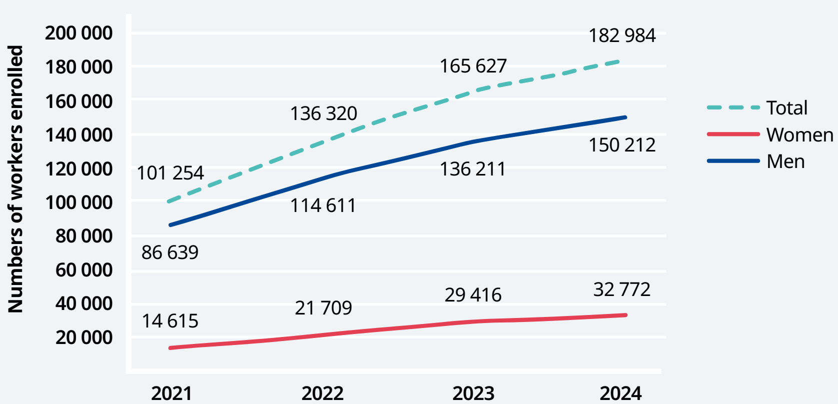
2 This figure only depicts worker enrolment in regular private social security and does not include what is referred to as "optional" or "voluntary" social security intended primarily for the informal workforce.

▶ *Figure 1: Workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by sex, 2021–24*



In the KRI, figure 2 depicts an increase of workers' enrolment from 101,254 to 182,984 during 2021-24 representing an 81 per cent hike in four years. Enrolment increases by 35 per cent in 2022 compared to the previous year and then the increase slows down to 10 per cent in 2024 compared to the previous year. Men lead enrolment in private social security with women trailing behind. Women's participation share slightly increased each year from 14.43 per cent in 2021 to 17.91 per cent in 2024, consistent with the female labour force participation of 16.5 per cent (KRSO 2023). This will be explored further in chapter 6.

▶ *Figure 2: Workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*



Regarding governorate-level breakdown for workers' enrolment, figure 3 shows workers' enrolment by governorate in Federal Iraq. It highlights an overall steady increase since 2021 with a marked further increase in 2024 underpinned by increases in 2024 in Baghdad, Kirkuk and Najaf. Baghdad led significantly in worker enrolment and shows a large jump in 2024. Basra and Kirkuk also showed steady and substantial growth. Smaller governorates like Muthanna, Maysan and Al Qadisiyah have much lower enrolment numbers but exhibit gradual increases. Although hardly discernible in the figure, Karbala has an unusual pattern: enrolment peaks in 2023 and then drops in 2024.

▶ *Figure 3: Workers enrolled in private social security in Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24*

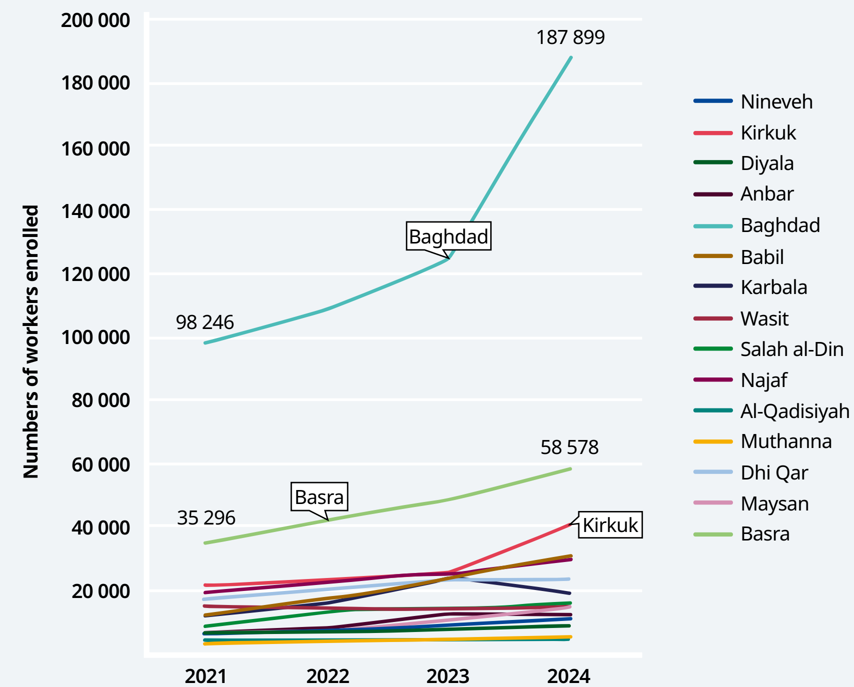


Figure 4 depicts worker enrolment in private social security in the KRI by governorate or region. The KRI SSA has not accounted separately for Halabja social security enrolment and instead this has been managed out of Sulaymaniyah, hence both are clustered under one title. Moreover, as of 2023, the SSA in the KRI began accounting for social security data from the Soran autonomous region, separately (previously under Erbil). The figure shows a steady general increase across governorates or regions, with Erbil taking the lead and surpassing Sulaymaniyah in 2022 and Duhok showing a slow annual increase in enrolment.

▶ *Figure 4: Workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by governorate/region, 2021–24*

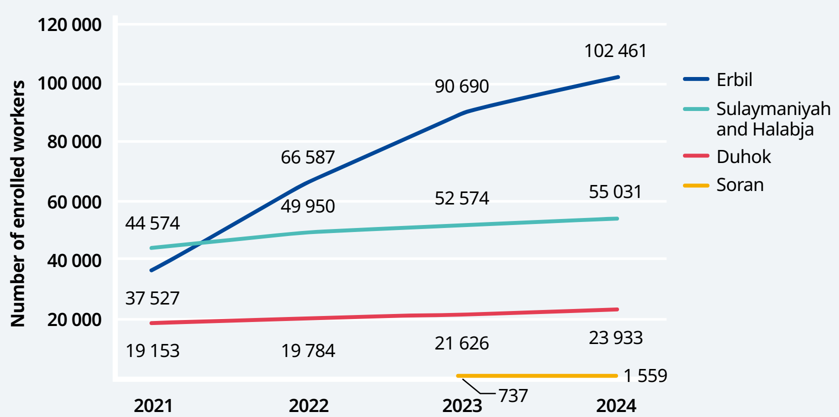


Figure 5 gives a general idea of the total number of women registered in private social security in Federal Iraq. While all governorates experienced an increase between 2021 and 2024, Baghdad stands out significantly with the overwhelming majority of all women registered in private social security reaching 32,967 in 2024.

▶ *Figure 5: Women enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24*

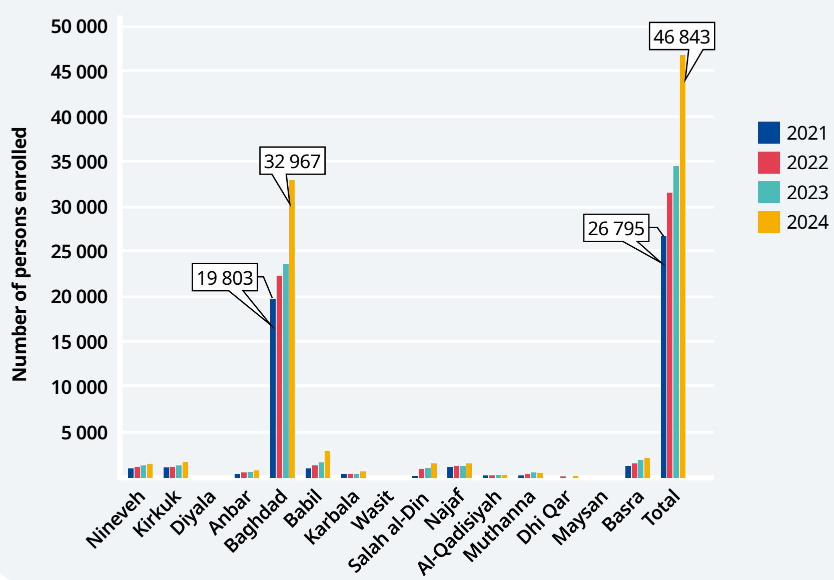
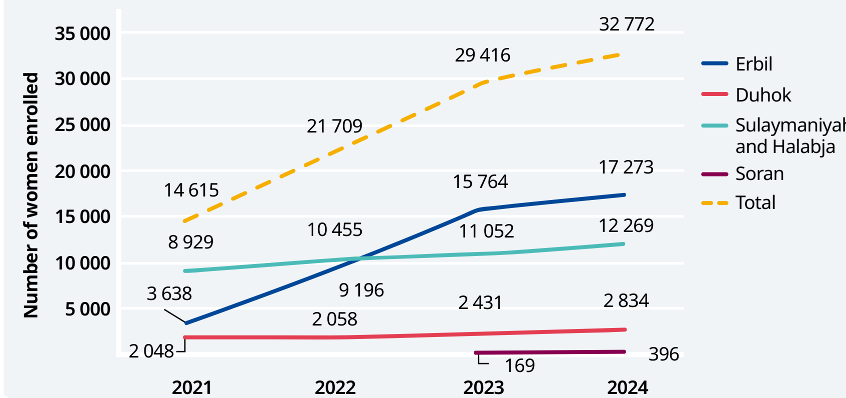


Figure 6 depicts a similar overall increase of women enrolled in private social security during 2021–24, with Erbil taking the lead as of 2023, surpassing Sulaymaniyah and reaching 17,273 registered women in 2024. To better understand the proportion of women in private social security sector enrolment, two figures are presented for each region: figure 7 depicts the proportion of women in Federal Iraq by governorate and figure 8 presents the proportion of women in the KRI by governorate.

▶ *Figure 6: Women enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by governorate, 2021–24*



▶ *Figure 7: Women enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)*

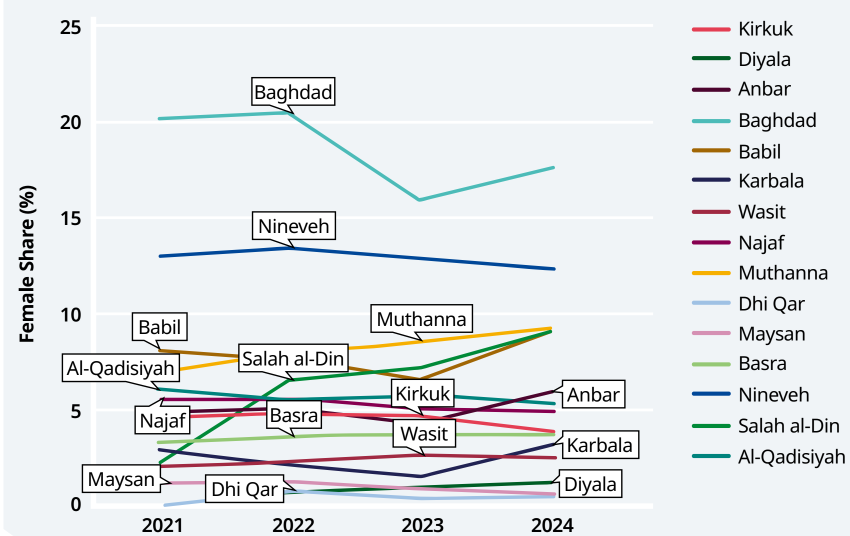


Figure 7 depicts the proportion of women enrolled in private social security compared to all worker enrolments, both male and female, in private social security. Baghdad consistently leads with over 15 to 20 per cent female enrolment, though it dips in 2023 before recovering in 2024. Nineveh also follows a similar pattern, although with slightly lower share of female participation between 11 to 13 per cent. Muthanna, Babil and Salah al-Din show female participation rates reaching 9 per cent in 2024 with some marked increases in Salah al-Din and Muthana. Most governorates still have less than 6 per cent women in the total share of enrolment, pointing to structural or societal barriers in employment and or registration.

As can be observed in figure 8, the proportion of women enrolled in private social security in the KRI increases in almost all governorates. Sulaymaniyah registers an overall higher proportion of women with 22 per cent of all enrolled. Soran (an autonomous region) also begins registering high proportions of women as of 2023 with between 22 and 25 per cent. Erbil registers an increase from 2021–23 and then a small decline reaching 11.84 per cent, while Duhok seems to plateau at 11 per cent.

▶ *Figure 8: Women enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)*

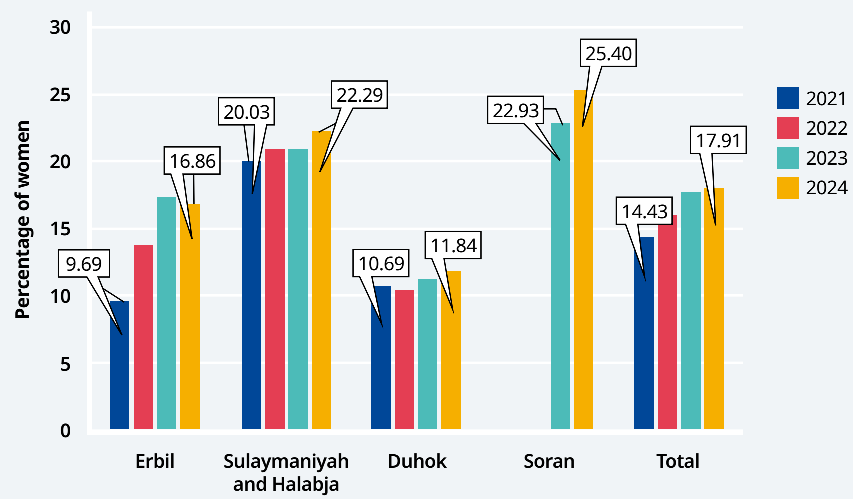


Figure 9 depicts the share of women among all those enrolled in private social security per year. While there is a slight dip in 2023, overall the proportion of women enrolled in social security remains slightly below the female labour force participation rates documented in the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021* of 9.6 per cent.

▶ *Figure 9: Women's share of all workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24 (percentage)*

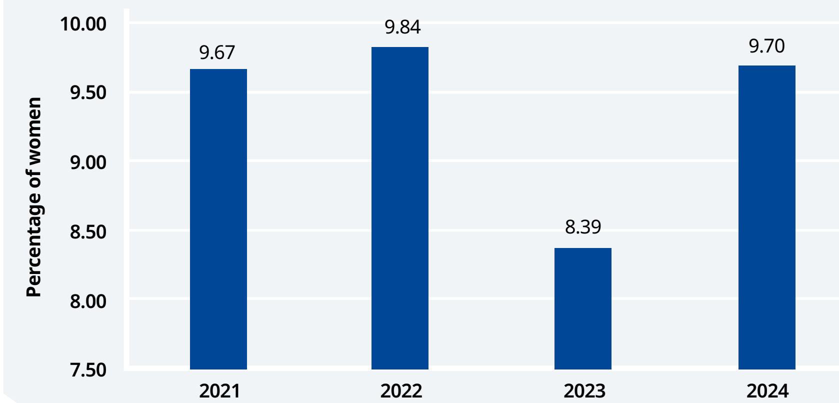
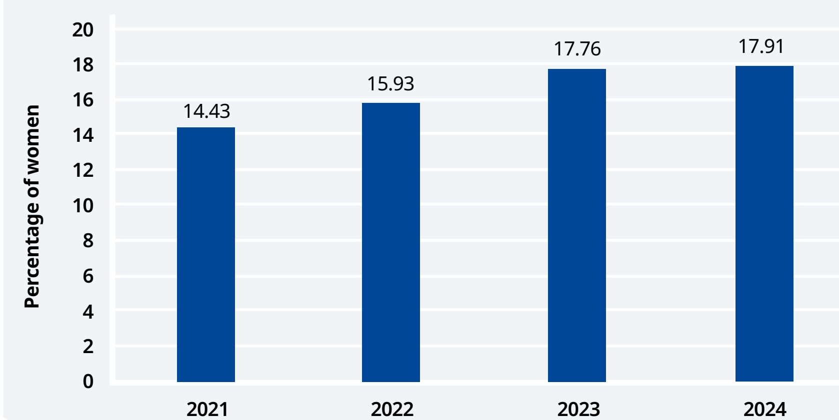


Figure 10 highlights the gradual increase in women's share of those enrolled in private social security in the KRI, rising from 14.43 per cent in 2021 to 17.76 per cent in 2023, before plateauing at 17.91 per cent in 2024.

▶ *Figure 10: Share of women enrolled in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24 (percentage)*



2.2 New inclusions and exclusions of workers each year in private social security

Each year, the Private SSAs of the Ministry of Labour and Social Assistance in both Federal Iraq and KRI register new workers as active contributors and exclude others from active contributor status. Reasons for inclusion may be related to workers finding new formal employment in the private sector, being reinstated as an active contributor after a former exclusion, employer registrations leading to new worker registrations, administrative corrections or judicial or regulatory orders. Reasons for exclusion include end of employment or contract, employer closure or deregistration, voluntary withdrawal in order to re-register in the Optional Private Social Security scheme described below, retirement, disability or death, emigration, administrative corrections or duplicates, non-compliance or other irregularities.

Other motives for exclusion included cashing of end-of-term benefits until November 2023 after which Law No. 18 stopped allowing workers to access a lump-sum payment upon separation. It now only allows access to monthly pensions upon retirement. However, the KRI operates under the old Federal Iraq Law No. 30, and subsequently amended under the KRI's Law No. 4 in 2012. This now allows workers to access a lump sum amounting to two weeks' wages per year of service if leaving before pension eligibility. The number of workers receiving such end-of-service benefits in the KRI will be reviewed further in section 4.5.

Figure 11 shows that Salahudin, Baghdad and Kirkuk led in enrolment of new workers, increasing their shares each year reaching an all-time high of 63,265 new workers in Salah al-Din in 2024, 37,954 new workers in Kirkuk in 2024 and 48,915 workers in Baghdad in 2023. Curiously, Baghdad registers a sharp decline in new workers and this does not correlate with data in figure 3 showing a significant increase in registrations in 2024. This needs to be explored in future research. Ninawa and Basra registered between 16,000 and 27,000 new workers each year, also increasing their annual share. New registrations in other governorates were low and showed declines, such as in Maysan, Diwaniya and Muthanna.

▶ *Figure 11: Newly enrolled workers in private social security in Federal Iraq by governorate, 2021–24*

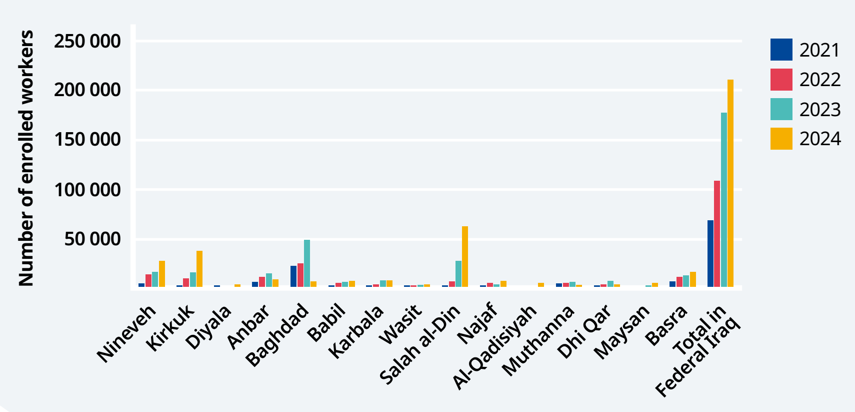


Figure 12 depicts Duhok and Sulaymaniyah and Halabja leading in new enrolments in 2021 with 8,440 and 5,984 respectively and Erbil trailing behind with only 3,712 new enrolments. However, Erbil rapidly surpasses Duhok and then Sulaymaniyah and Halabja in 2023 reaching a peak of 27,266 new enrolments in 2023 and then declining in 2024 setting the four-year trend for KRI.

▶ *Figure 12: Newly enrolled workers in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*

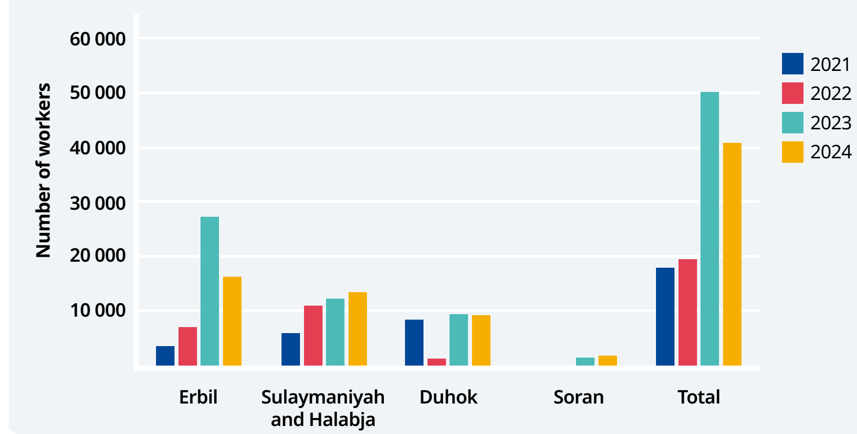


Figure 13 shows that exclusion of workers from active contributor status increased across Iraq during 2021–24. New exclusions were highest in Salahudin and Baghdad, although, in Baghdad they declined in 2024. Several governorates such as Maysan and Babil registered almost zero exclusions, suggesting possible challenges in updating records.

▶ *Figure 13: Newly excluded workers from private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24*

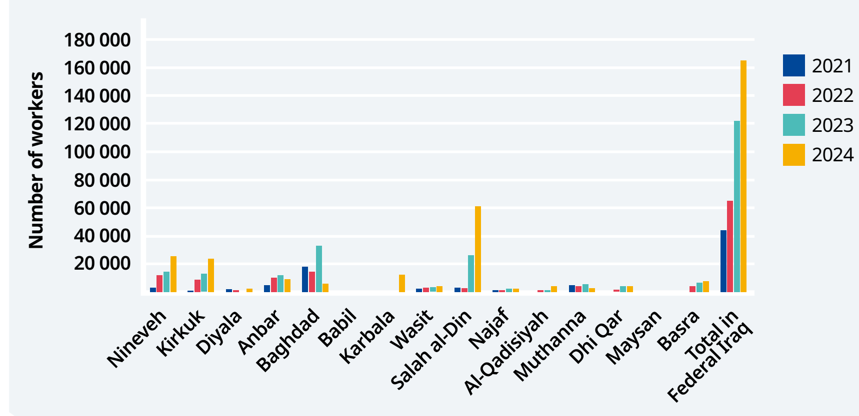


Figure 14 highlights the newly excluded workers each year from private social security in the KRI. Duhok leads in new exclusions in 2021 with 3,654 excluded workers and Sulaymaniyah and Halabja trailing closely behind with 3,255 excluded workers. Over the following years, Sulaymaniyah and Halabja incrementally take the lead in exclusions of workers reaching 10,802 excluded workers in 2024. Duhok follows an irregular pattern of worker exclusions with only 492 workers excluded in 2022, an increase in 2023 to 7,568 in 2023 and a subsequent decline in 2024 to 6,937 excluded workers in 2024. Erbil registers limited but gradually incrementing numbers of worker exclusions.

▶ *Figure 14: Newly excluded workers in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*

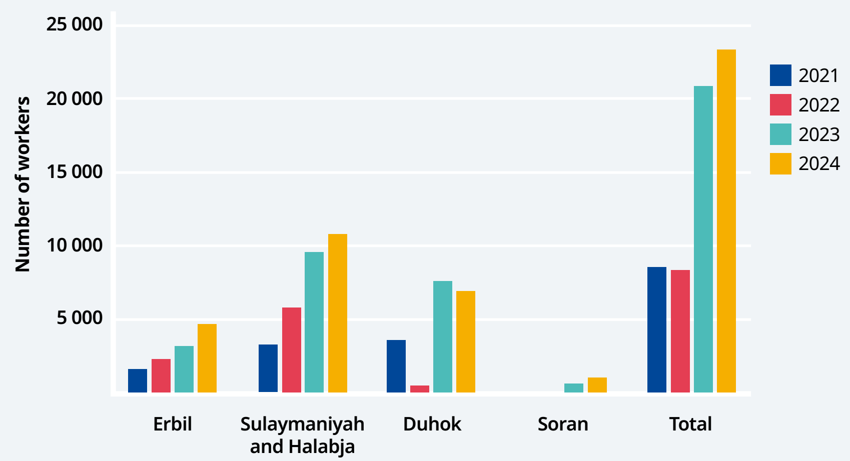


Figure 15 depicts net annual changes in inclusions and exclusions from active contributory status. It shows that while there was an overall increase in net changes across the country during 2021–24, they plateaued in 2023 at 55,427 and declined slightly in 2024 to 45,247. While Basra had the highest number of net changes in 2021 with 6,295 workers, Baghdad took the lead in 2022-23 and then plummeted in 2024. Babil highlights a slow incremental pattern in net changes reaching 8,064 in 2024, while Kirkuk registered a sudden jump in net increase in enrolment in 2024, taking the lead over all other governorates in 2024 with 14,792 workers. This increase was most likely linked to the establishment and performance of a tripartite committee that effectively teamed up to enroll workers. Karbala shows an average performance compared to other governorates with small increments during 2021-23 and then a sudden net loss of 4,550 workers in 2024.

▶ *Figure 15: Net change in inclusions and exclusions of workers in private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24*

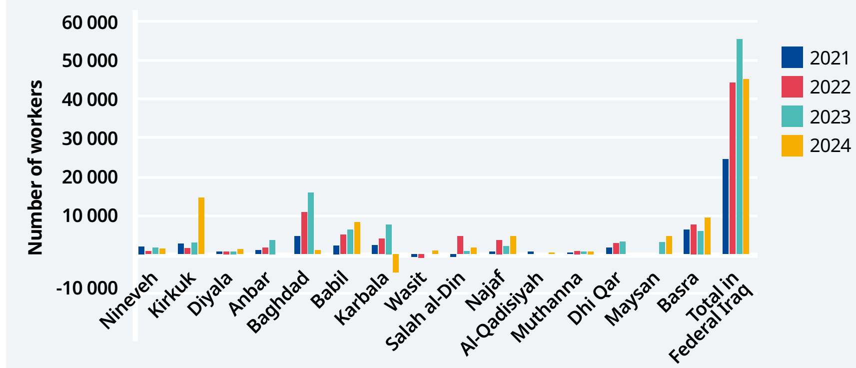
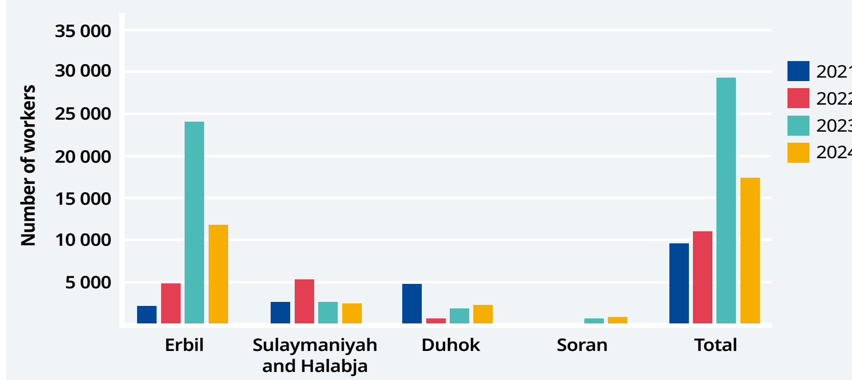


Figure 16 depicts the net annual changes in inclusions and exclusions of workers in the KRI, showing an overall upward trend from 9,634 workers in 2021 to 29,307 in 2023, followed by a decline to 17,357 in 2024.

▶ *Figure 16: Net change in inclusions and exclusions of workers in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*



2.3 Worker enrolment in optional private social security

Article 68 of Federal Iraq's Law No. 18 includes a voluntary retirement social security option. This optional scheme is open to Iraqi citizens, resident self-employed individuals or employers who are i) are not already in organized employment and who elect to join social security voluntarily; ii) individuals up to age 50 who are medically fit and who agree to contribute; and iii) individuals who already have at least three years of covered public or private sector service may also opt in after age 50 under board-approved rules. This optional scheme does not provide unemployment benefit, but does provide for coverage for work-injury or sickness, occupational disease benefits, maternity benefits or health insurance. The Department of Social Security began enrolling workers in the optional social security in 2024. In the KRI, Law No. 4 of 2012 includes an optional private social security scheme. However, the scheme was never implemented in practice and details of coverage are yet to be specified.

▶ *Figure 17: Total workers registered in optional scheme of private social security, by sex, 2024*

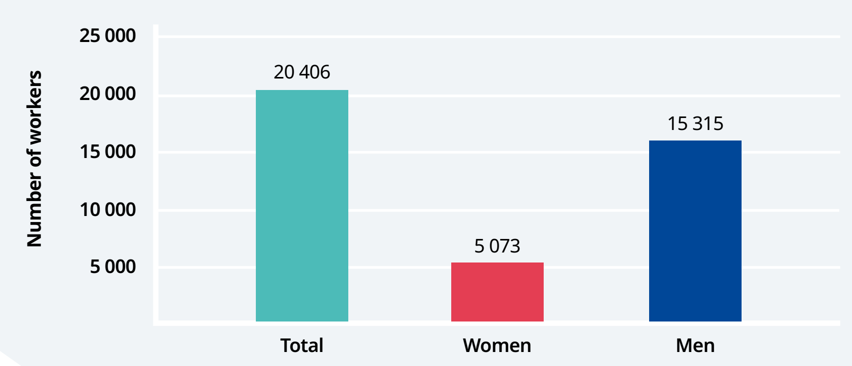


Figure 17 highlights the total number of workers registered in the optional private social security scheme that was introduced in early 2024. A total of 20,406 workers registered by end of December 2024. Women represented one fourth of the total registered and men three fourths. It is notable that women's average participation represents one fourth of all registrations in the optional scheme, a high proportion compared to those enrolled in private social security highlighted in figure 1 and compared to the female labour force participation rates highlighted in the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021*.

▶ *Figure 18: Registrations in the optional scheme of private social security, all Iraqis, by governorate or location, 2024*

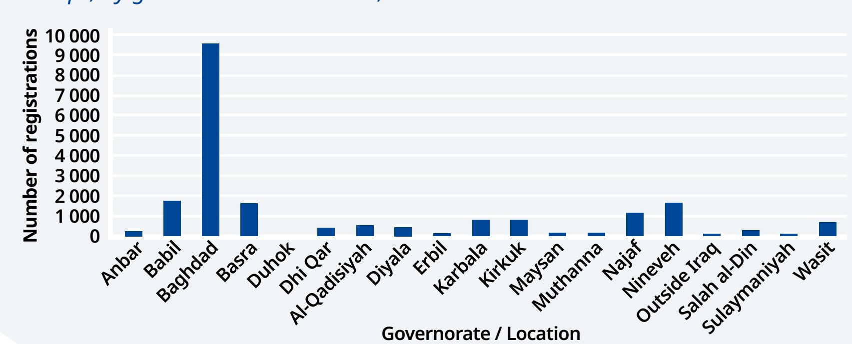


Figure 18 depicts the enrolment of workers in the private social security scheme by governorate. Baghdad leads by far with over 9,000 registrations, while Babil, Nineveh, Basra and Najaf have between one and two thousand workers enrolled. Enrolments in all other governorates are below one thousand workers. It is interesting to highlight that the SSA also accounted for enrolments of workers in the KRI and Iraqi workers outside of Iraq.

▶ *Figure 19: Women registered in the optional scheme of private social security, by governorate, 2024*

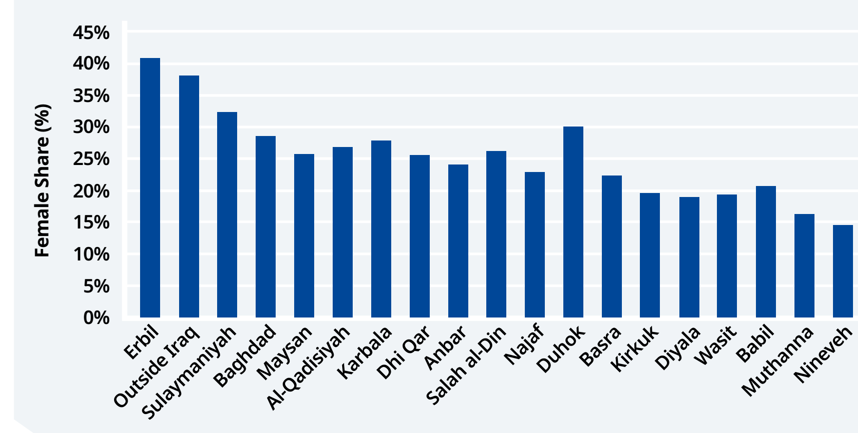


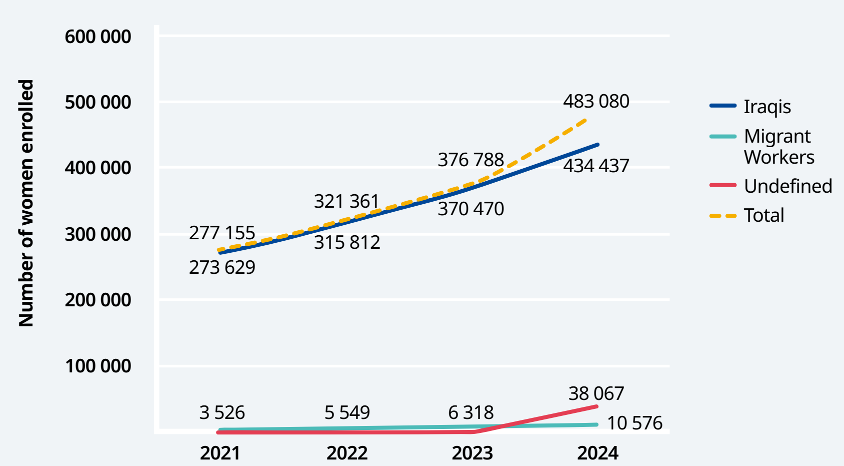
Figure 19 shows the proportions of women registered in the optional scheme for each governorate. Overall, women's participation in the optional private social security scheme is generally higher than the proportions of female labour force participation. Although, overall numbers of enrolled workers in the optional private social security scheme are low in the KRI, the proportion of women participating in the KRI is generally the highest, together with that of Iraqi women abroad. Five governorates, Baghdad, Salah al-Din, Al Qasadiyah, Dhi Qar and Maysan, have between 25 to 30 per cent female participation, while in other governorates rates fall below 25 per cent with the lowest being in Muthana and Nineveh.

2.4 Migrant workers in Iraq's private social security

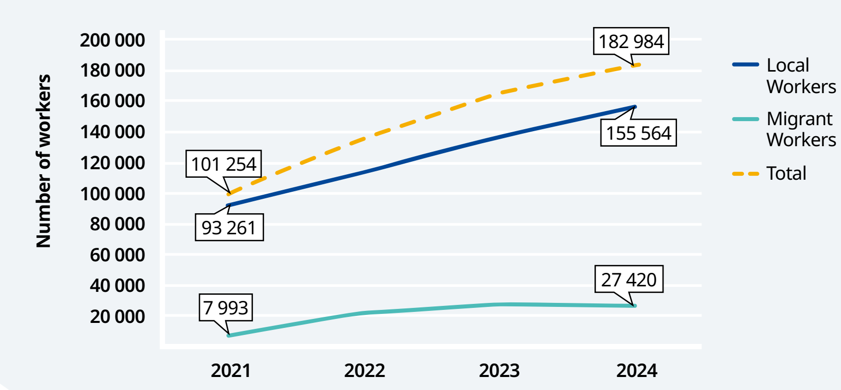
Iraq's Law No. 18 allows migrant workers to enroll in private social security. However, according to the new law, migrant workers in Federal Iraq can neither retrieve their contributions upon leaving the country, nor access long-term social security benefits unless they stay in Iraq upon retirement, which is highly unlikely. In practice, SSA in Baghdad does allow migrant workers to receive end-of term benefits in an ad hoc manner. In KRI, since Law No. 18 is not implemented, and the old law No. 30 still applies, migrant workers can legally receive their end-of term benefits. Furthermore, Iraq has not signed any Memorandums of Understanding or bilateral agreements with countries of origin on the portability of social security benefits. Finally, since short-term social security benefits are still not fully implemented, the effectiveness and fairness of requiring migrant workers to contribute to Iraq's social security system is questionable, even if they can receive end-of term benefits. That said, migrant worker contributions provide financial inflows to Iraq's underfunded social security fund without creating much long-term liability.

Figure 20 highlights migrant worker enrolment in private social security in comparison with Iraqi workers. The Federal Iraq SSA distinguishes "foreigners" from non-Iraqi "Arabs" who constitute a small minority. For the purpose of this report, migrant workers comprise those who are both Arab and non-Arab. The distinction has no practical legal difference in terms of access to social security at the current moment. The overall number of migrant workers registered in private social security increased incrementally from 3,526 in 2021 to 10,576 in 2024. In other words, the proportion of migrant workers enrolled in private social security compared to all workers increased from 1.7 per cent in 2023 to 2.2 per cent in 2024 in Federal Iraq. For more information, section 6.1 includes a comparison of this data to the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021*. Generally, the gradual increase in migrant worker coverage over the past year underscores the need to improve practical accessibility of social security funds for migrant workers through regulatory and procedural reforms. It is also noteworthy that in 2024, the Department of Social Security reported workers whose origin was not registered, suggesting gaps in the documentation of worker enrolment processes.

▶ *Figure 20: Workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by origin, 2021–24*



▶ *Figure 21: Workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by origin, 2021–24*



The SSA in the KRI does keep track of the number of "local" and "foreign" workers which are referred to as migrant workers in this report. Figure 17 shows a similar increase in the numbers of both local and migrant workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, however the number of migrant workers in the KRI in both absolute and proportional terms is much higher – indicating the more significant presence of migrant workers in the KRI's labour force compared to the rest of Iraq.

Figure 22 depicts the numbers of migrant workers enrolled in private social security by governorate between 2021 and 2024. Baghdad leads by far each year with a significant boost in 2024 reaching 6,933 migrant workers. Karbala and Basra come in next with 1,095 and 901 migrant workers respectively in 2024. In other governorates, less than 400 migrant workers enrolled in 2024.

▶ *Figure 22: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24*

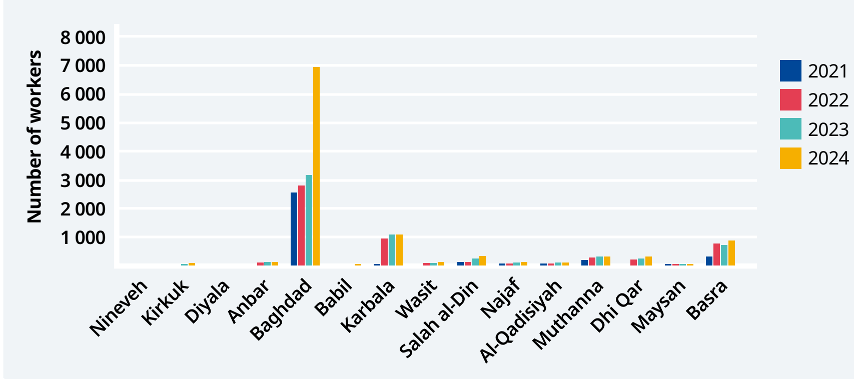


Figure 23 focuses on the number of migrant workers enrolled in private social security by region in the KRI for the same period. Erbil leads the trend by far with 4,287 migrant workers in 2021 and 24,651 migrant workers in 2024 – significantly more than even Baghdad, referring to figure 22. All other regions in the KRI, including Sulaymaniyah, Halabja and Duhok and Soran, indicate rather lower numbers of enrolled migrant workers.

▶ *Figure 23: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by region, 2021–24*

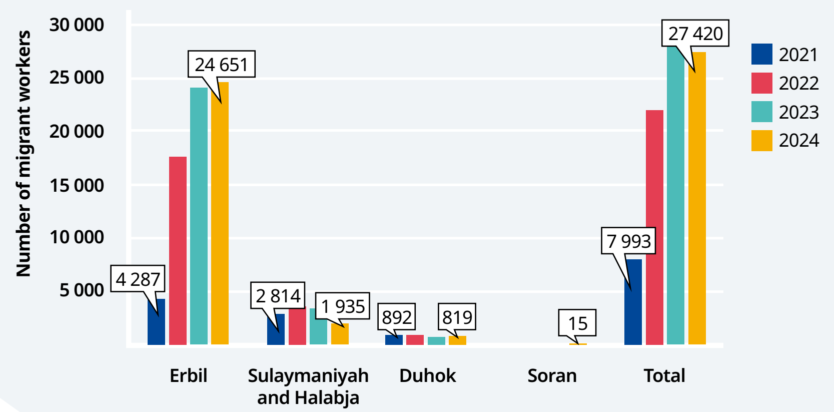
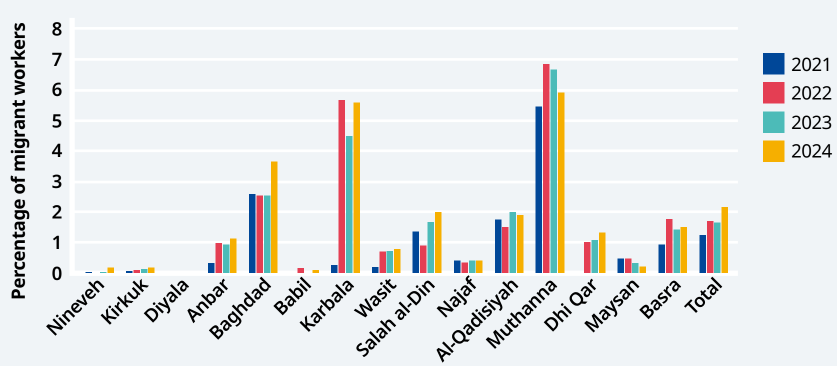


Figure 24 illustrates the share of migrant workers from 2021–24 in different governorates. These shares are variable across years in different governorates, however, interestingly, the governorates with the highest shares of migrant workers are Muthanna with proportions of between 5.49 per cent in 2021 and 6.87 per cent in 2022, Karbala with a high proportion of 5.69 per cent in 2022 and 5.60 per cent in 2024, followed by Baghdad with proportions of migrant workers varying between 2.61 per cent in 2021 and 3.69 per cent in 2024.

▶ *Figure 24: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)*



Women's share of migrant workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq amounts to 32 per cent. However, there are some particularities: with the exception of Baghdad, the numbers of women migrant workers enrolled in social security fell below one hundred women (the exception being Basra in 2024 with 111 registered migrant women workers). Baghdad experienced a gradual annual increment of migrant women with 1,797 in 2021 and 2,810 in 2024. That said, registries in 2024 also highlighted that the gender or origin of 4,327 registered workers was unknown, hence it is possible that they registered more women migrant workers.

Turning to the KRI, figure 25 illustrates the proportion of migrant worker enrolment relative to total enrolment. In 2024, migrant workers accounted for nearly 15 per cent of all enrolments — more than double the highest proportions observed in the governorates of Federal Iraq. Erbil leads with 11.42 percent in 2021, peaking at 26.58 percent in 2023, followed by a slight decline to 24.06 percent in 2024. Other regions show lower proportions.

▶ *Figure 25: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24 (percentage)*

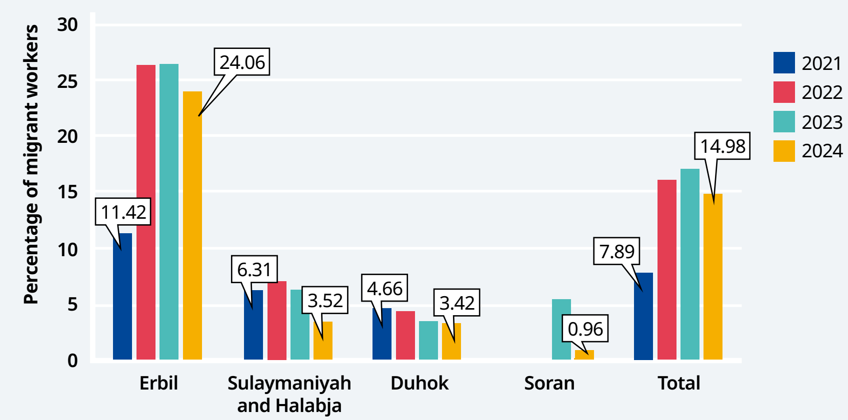
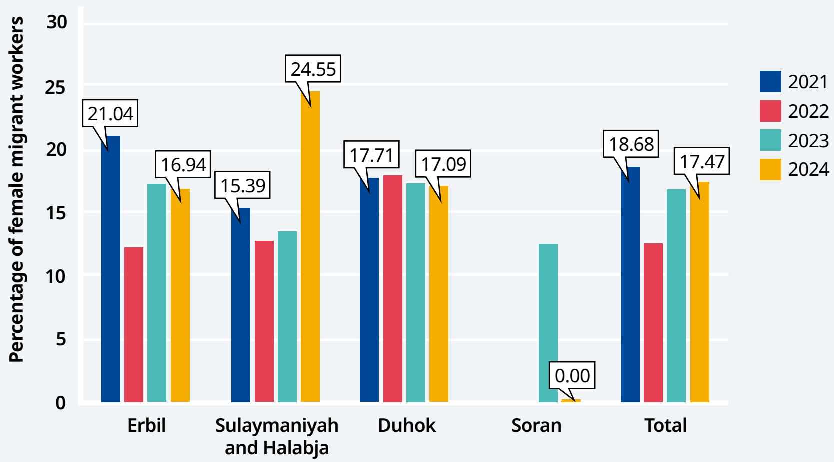


Figure 26 depicts the female share of migrant workers enrolled in the KRI. Sulaymaniyah and Halabja show the highest proportion of female migrant workers in 2024 reaching 24.55 per cent while the share for all KRI in 2024 amounted to 17.47 per cent. In general, the absolute numbers of both male and female migrant workers have been consistently higher in the KRI compared to Federal Iraq, especially in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. However, the proportions of the few registered female migrant workers in Federal Iraq have been higher, possibly signifying that enrolment efforts there have prioritized migrant domestic workers.

▶ *Figure 26: Women migrant workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24 (percentage)*



2.5 Worker perceptions on enrolment in private social security

Worker perceptions of social security have not been systematically surveyed. The ILO, however, has obtained some information through interactions with trade unions and the Overseas Development Institute. Two surveys were conducted to understand workers' perceptions, one focusing on Baghdad and Basra, and another one focusing more specifically on sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Key informant interviews were conducted among construction, agriculture and manufacturing workers with the support of ODI (ILO and ODI a, b and c, Forthcoming).[3] In addition, a social security survey was conducted by the ILO in 2024–25 among 300 formal sector employees in Baghdad and Basra collected by CRSM Consulting (ILO and CRSM Consulting, Forthcoming). These perceptions are based on qualitative studies and are not meant to be representative of all workers. However, they do provide important insights that can help the reader better interpret and qualify the findings derived from administrative data.

Social Security Survey in Baghdad and Basra

Understanding and perception of Law No. 18: Only 17 per cent of respondents reported being fully informed about Law No. 18, while 19 per cent said they had partial knowledge. Among those with any awareness, 92 per cent had a favourable opinion of the reforms. Awareness levels were somewhat higher in Baghdad – 18 per cent fully informed and 24 per cent partially informed – compared to Basra, where only 15 per cent were fully aware and 12 per cent somewhat aware. Notably, positive perceptions were more prevalent in Baghdad (97 per cent) than in Basra (79 per cent).

Awareness and satisfaction with social security benefits: A large majority of workers (85 per cent) either agreed or strongly agreed that social security coverage positively influences their job security and performance, while 14 per cent expressed no opinion. Awareness of specific entitlements was highest for old-age pensions (50 per cent), followed by health insurance (15 per cent) and unemployment benefits (12 per cent). Satisfaction levels with these services were generally high, with 76 per cent reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied and 19 per cent remaining neutral. Additionally, 60 per cent expressed satisfaction with the government's efforts to enforce employer compliance with social security obligations.

Barriers and obstacles: Key challenges identified by respondents included complicated administrative procedures (33 per cent), insufficient information (16 per cent) and employer non-compliance (7 per cent). Women and persons with disabilities reported additional difficulties, such as social norms that restrict their formal workforce participation, and limited access to information. In rural areas, traditional practices often required male approval for women to register for social security and employers were frequently unaware of or neglected gender-specific benefits.

Suggestions for improvement: When workers were asked how the system could be enhanced, 20 per cent recommended streamlining the registration process, 17 per cent called for more robust public awareness campaigns and 12 per cent proposed tighter enforcement measures for employers.

▶ Box 1. Case studies of construction, agriculture and manufacturing workers

- *"I work for a limited income. I cannot risk paying from my monthly income for several years. Who will guarantee that I will be able to recover my money?"* (IDI-6, Manufacturing wage worker, Basra).
- *"In fact, I do not know how, where, and when I should register, how much I should pay, and what is the method for registering, so how will I register?"* (IDI-4, Manufacturing wage worker, Baghdad).

3 More information is available on the ILO Social Platform website on extending social security to agricultural workers, construction workers and informal workers.

- *"Individuals encounter significant bureaucratic hurdles, such as spending entire days dealing with paperwork at social security departments, which often involves navigating multiple offices for simple processes."* (IDI-1, Manufacturing self-employed worker, Erbil).
- *"I tried to register myself in Al-Swairah (a district located 55 kilometres south of Baghdad city, and part of the Baghdad governorate), but then an officer removed my name from the list, as he asked me to pay him money for registering me. [I didn't pay], then he removed my name."* (IDI-3, Construction worker, male 21 years, with no education, Al-Latifiya, Baghdad).
- *"Someone here was insured and paid contributions for three months. All of a sudden, the employer decided to cut it. He tried to find out the reason, but they did not listen to him, and he did not know what to do."* (FGD-1, Construction worker, Erbil).
- *"The income of the agricultural sector is very low and we don't make any profit to earn enough to be able to pay a portion from it for our social security subscription."* (FGD with Farmers, Baghdad).
- *"How we can be sure that if we pay the contribution now, we will get the benefits in the future, when we are entitled?"* (FGD, Baghdad).
- *"It is important to first understand the mechanisms of the system, including how contributions work, the belief in its effectiveness, the reasonable percentage for contributions and the scope of benefits such as pensions, sick leave, and disability benefits. These are still unclear."* (IDI with Own-account family worker in agriculture, Erbil).

3

Employers registered in Iraq's private social security

For workers to enroll in the mandatory private social security coverage, employers should be first registered. Hence, employer registration is an important parameter to assess private social security coverage. In the context of Iraq's private sector social security system, the term "project" is used for employer registration. It refers to the economic unit or place of employment that is subject to registration under Law No. 18 of 2023 and the old Iraq Law No. 39 of 1971, including Law No. 4 of 2012 of the KRI. Although the law primarily refers to "employers", the SSA uses the term "project" in its administrative and operational procedures to denote any entity – whether a company, workshop, farm, clinic, or individual household – that employs one or more workers and is thereby obliged to register and remit social security contributions. This terminology ensures clarity in enforcement, particularly where the legal identity of the employer may differ from the operational unit of employment. The use of "project" also aligns with labour inspection and compliance frameworks used by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The ILO, in such contexts, generally uses terms such as "establishment," "enterprise," or "economic unit." The underlying principle is the same: to ensure that all entities employing workers – regardless of legal form – are registered, monitored and compliant with social security obligations. This approach is consistent with the objectives of Convention No. 102 and the ILO's Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), which encourage Member States to adopt inclusive and flexible administrative practices that facilitate the extension of social protection coverage, especially in contexts with high levels of informality.

3.1 Registration of employers by type of organization, governorate and gender

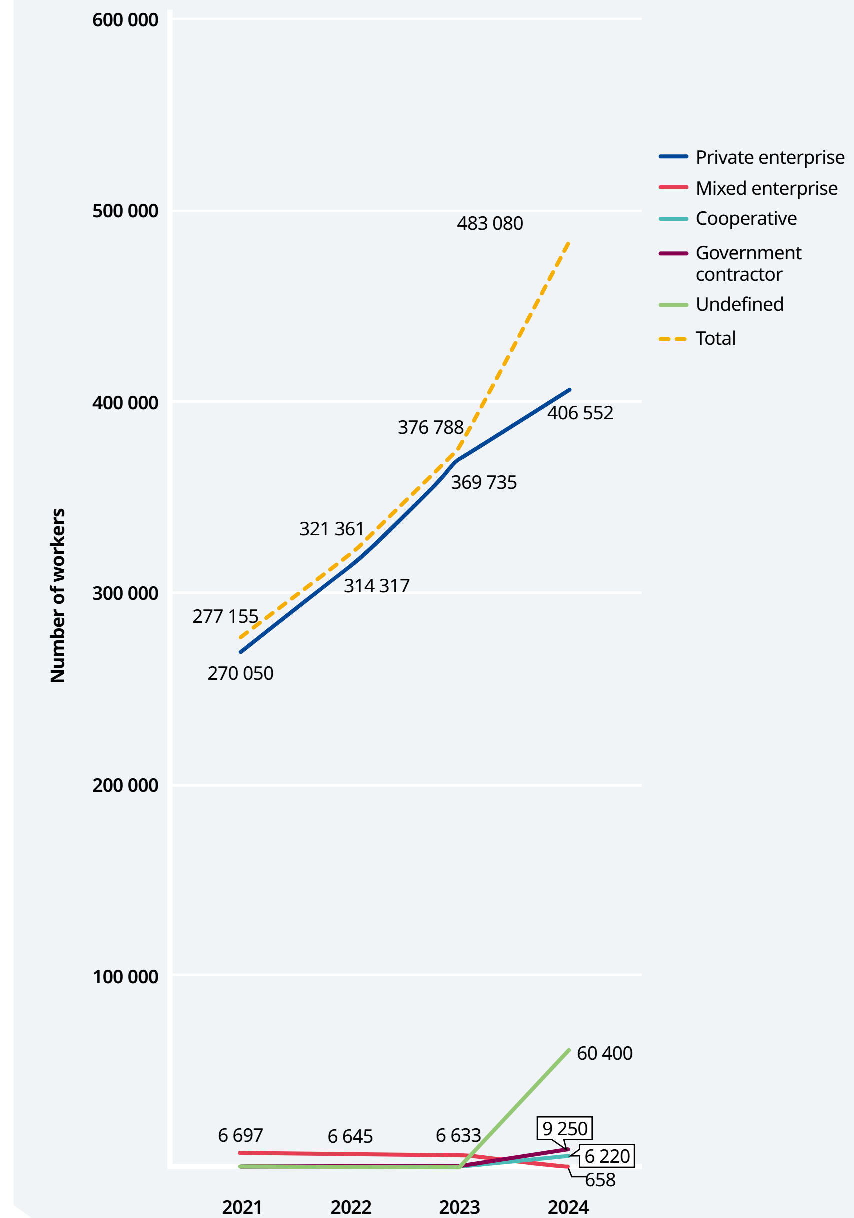
The private SSA in Federal Iraq documents employers by type of organization, which includes "private enterprises", "mixed enterprises", "cooperatives", "government projects"[4] and "unidentified projects".

Figure 27 shows worker enrolment per type of organization. Private enterprises constitute 84 per cent, followed by "unidentified projects" in 2024, government projects, cooperatives and mixed enterprises.

Figure 28 shows that employer registration in private social security in Federal Iraq has increased from 78,161 employers in 2021 to 92,963 employers in 2024. While Baghdad leads by far in employer registration, it is the only governorate to witness a notable fall in registrations in 2024, albeit remaining largely ahead compared to all other governorates. Basra, Kirkuk and Najaf registered between five and ten thousand employers in 2024, while all other governorates registered less than five thousand employers in 2024.

4 This refers to government-associated units not covered by the public social security system.

▶ *Figure 27: Workers enrolled in private social security by type of organization, 2021–24*



▶ *Figure 28: Employers registered in private sector social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24*

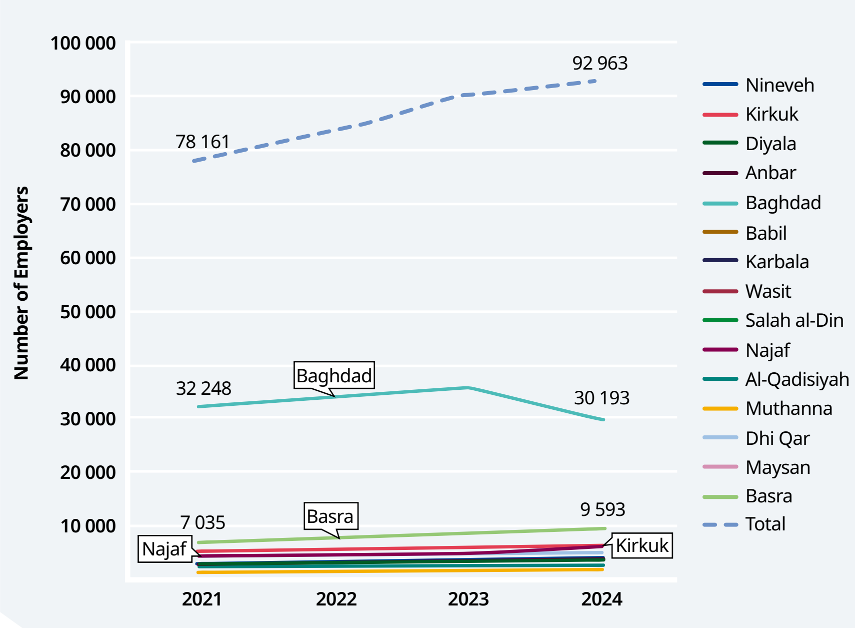
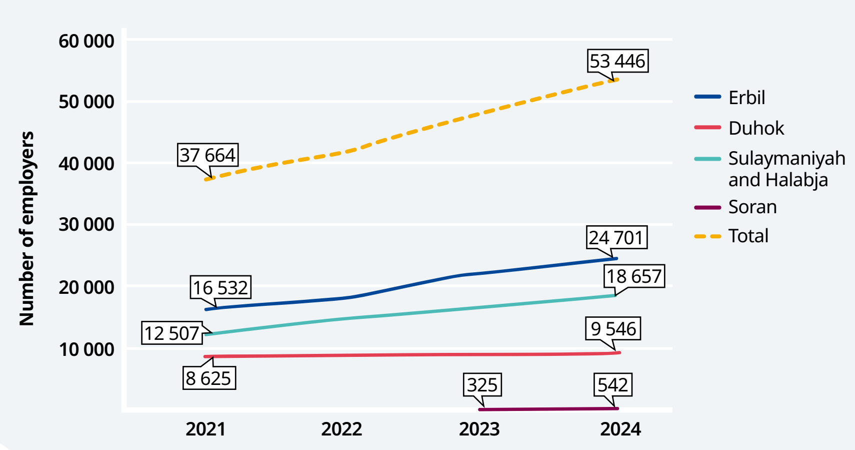


Figure 29 highlights that employer registration in private social security in the KRI has gradually and consistently increased from 37,664 employers in 2021 to 53,446 employers in 2024. Erbil leads the trend followed by Sulaymaniyah (including Halabja) and Soran.

▶ *Figure 29: Employers registered in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*



3.2 New inclusions and exclusions of employers in private social security by year

Figure 30 depicts employers newly registered each year in private social security. It highlights that Baghdad leads by far in new employer registrations each year reaching 4,416 in 2024. All governorates except Salah al-Din and Al Qadisiyah show incremental increases in new employer registrations, however Salah al-Din manages to come in second after Baghdad in 2024 with 1,752 new employer registrations. Several other governorates, including Basra, Najaf, Kirkuk, Diyala and Al Qadisiyah, managed to register at least one thousand new employers in 2024. Muthana, Wasit and Maysan registered the least new employers in 2024.

▶ *Figure 30: New employers registered in private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24*

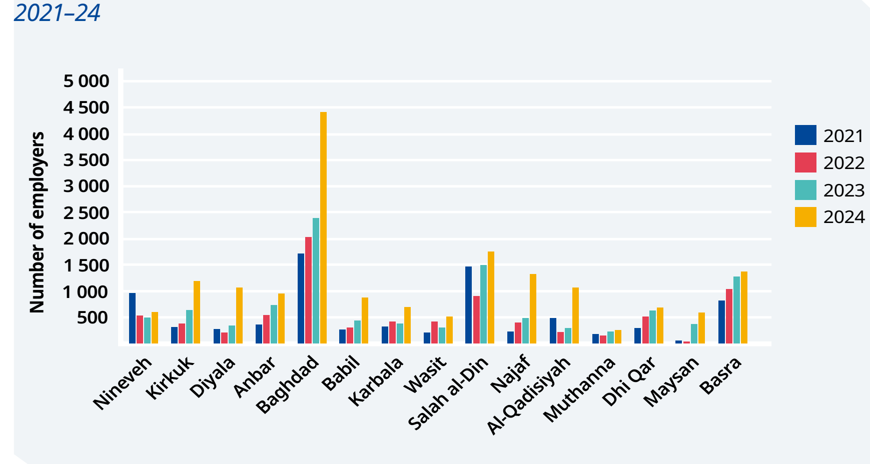


Figure 31 highlights employers newly registered each year in the KRI for the same period. Erbil leads in new employer registrations in 2021–24 with 3,015, 3,992 and 2,332 respectively, illustrating a decline in 2022 and 2024. Sulaymaniyah (including Halabja) had higher new registrations in 2022 with 2,500 employers and experienced a gradual decline in 2023 and 2024 trailing closely behind Erbil.

▶ *Figure 31: New employers registered in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*

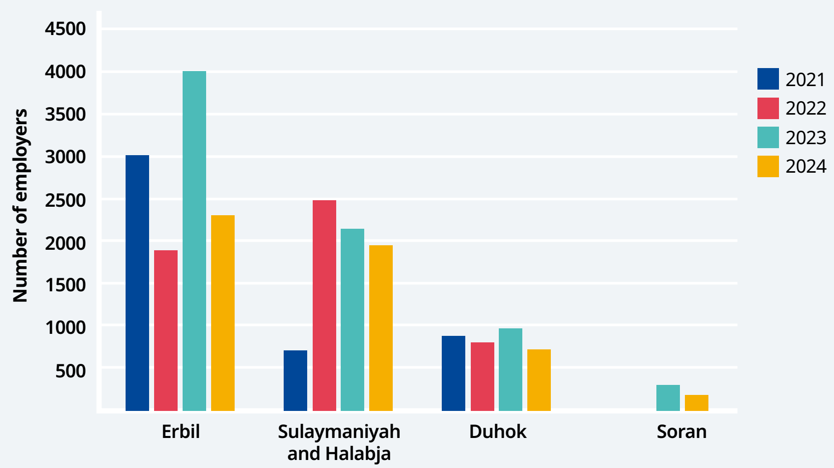
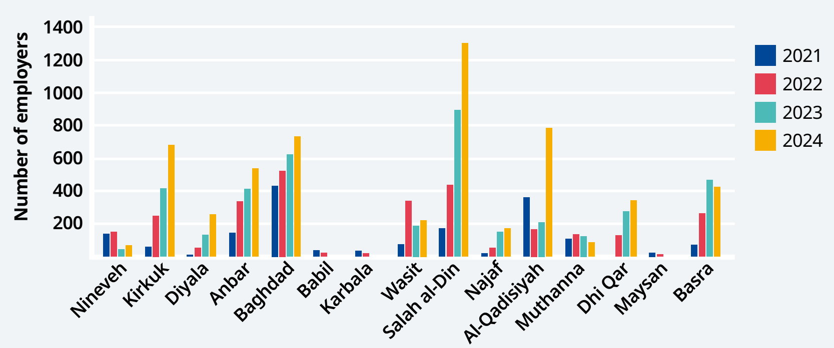


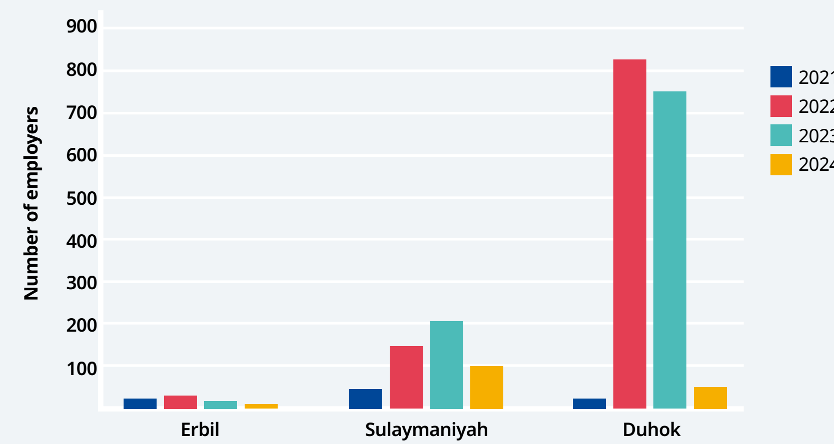
Figure 32 shows that Salah al-Din led in new exclusions of employers in 2023–24, with 1,308 employers excluded in 2024, followed by Al Qadisiyah and Baghdad with exclusions reaching respectively 782 and 732 in 2024. Some governorates such as Babil and Karbala did not exclude employers in 2023–24.

▶ *Figure 32: Employers excluded from private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24*



Focusing on KRI, figure 33 shows that in the KRI, Duhok led exclusion of employers from private social security with 826 employers excluded in 2022 and 751 excluded in 2023. Sulaymaniyah led in 2024 with 101 exclusions.

▶ *Figure 33: Newly excluded employers from private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*



▶ *Figure 34: Net change in employers (new or excluded) in private social security in Federal Iraq, 2021–24*

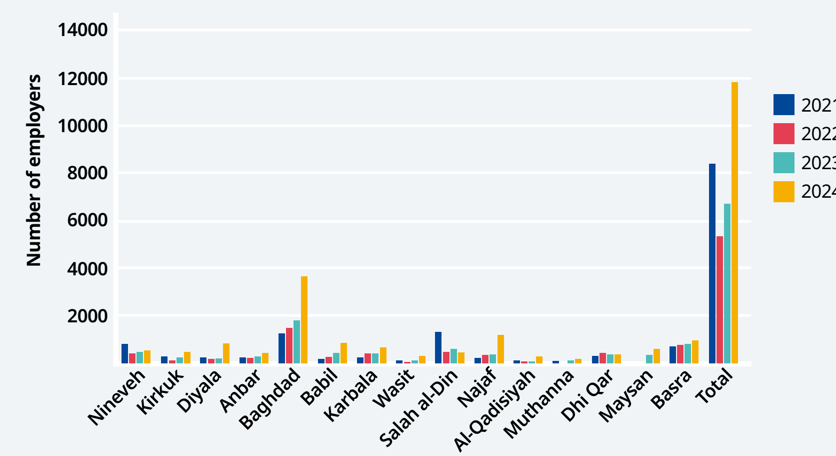
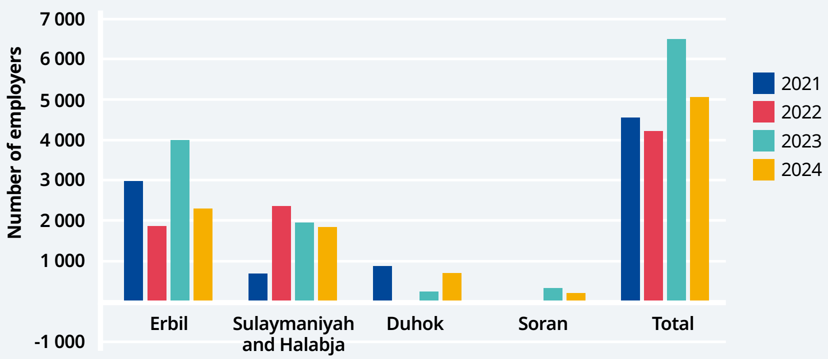


Figure 34 depicts the net changes in newly registered and excluded employers each year. It highlights that Baghdad led with incremental net gains each year reaching 3,684 employers in 2024 followed by Najaf reaching 1,171 employers in 2024. All other governorates register less than one thousand net gains in number of new employers during 2021–24.

Figure 35 shows the net annual change of employer inclusions and exclusions in the KRI. Overall, most net gains were registered in 2023 with 6,485 employers, with the trend clearly led by Erbil, while Sulaymaniyah (including Halabja) trailing shortly behind.

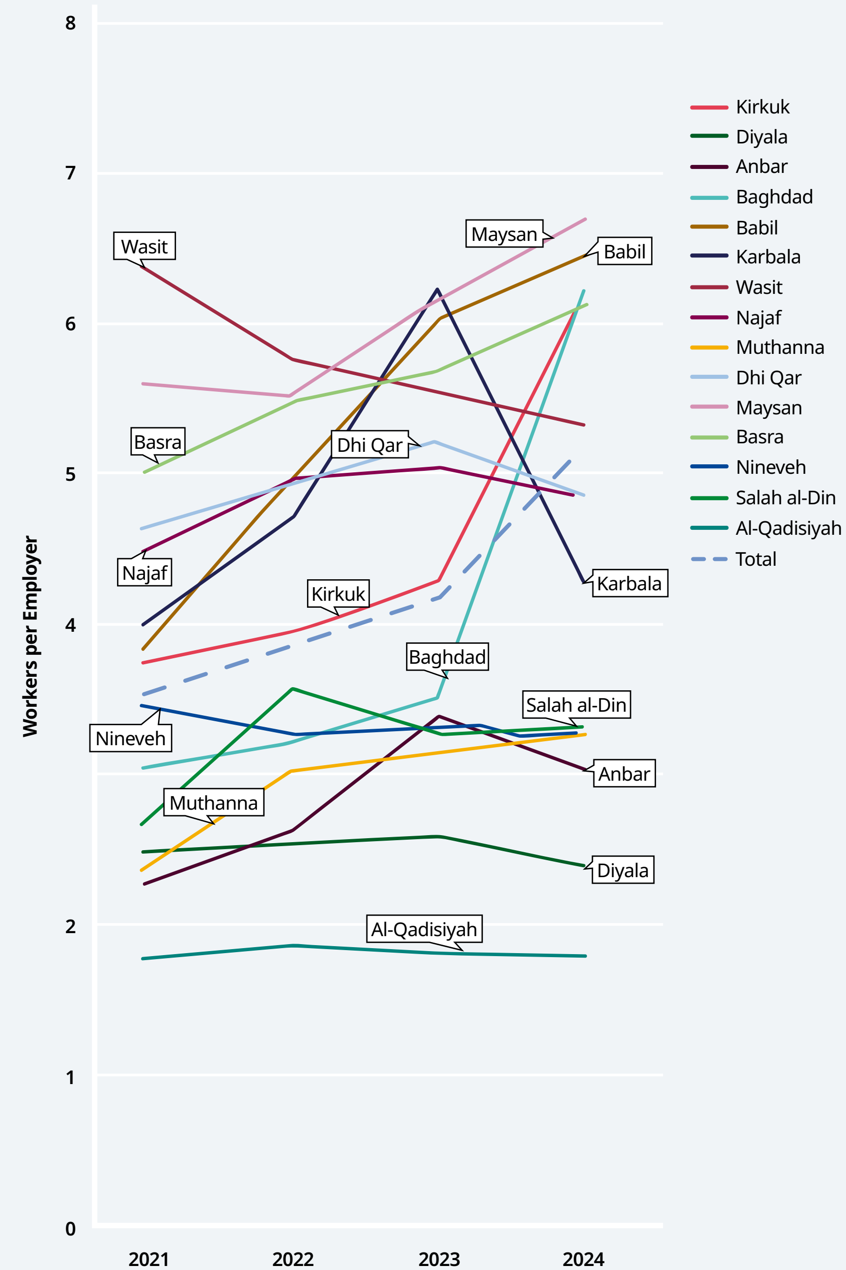
▶ *Figure 35: Net change in employers (new or excluded) in private social security in KRI, 2021–24*



3.3 Number of workers per employer registered in private social security

Figure 36 illustrates the trend in the average number of workers per registered employer in private social security. Overall, there was an average increase of 5.2 workers per employer in 2024. Maysan, Babil, Baghdad, Kirkuk and Basra register the highest proportions between six to seven workers per employer and a significant increase in those proportions. Other governorates like Dhi Qar, Najaf and Karbala register an increase in the number or workers per employers until 2023 reaching between five and six workers per employer in 2023 with a subsequent fall in 2024 to four to five workers per employer. All other governorates show relatively low proportions of workers per employers, below 3.3.

▶ *Figure 36: Average number of registered workers per registered employers in private social security by governorate, 2021–24*



▶ *Figure 37: Average number of workers per registered employer in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24*

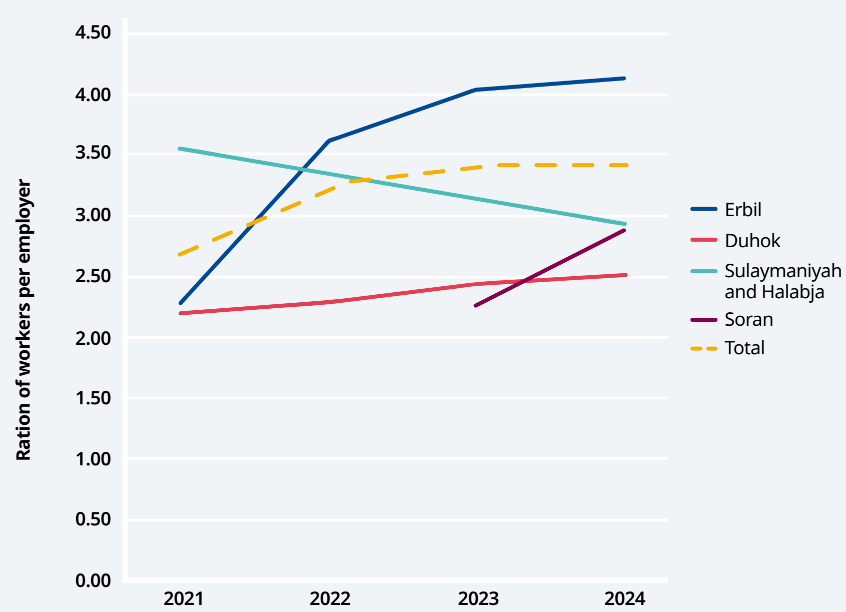


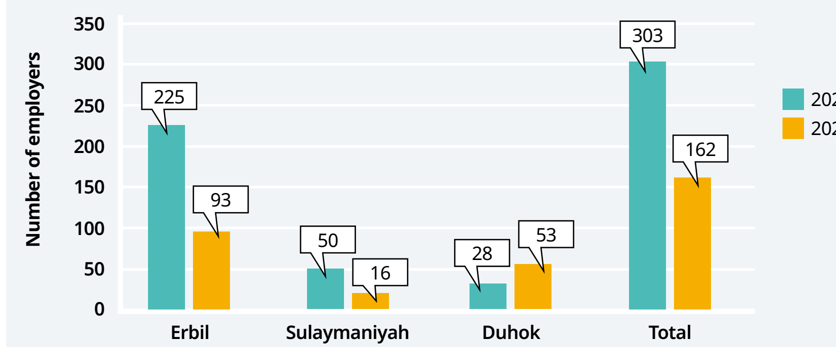
Figure 37 highlights the number of workers per registered employer in private social security in the KRI. It is interesting to see that Erbil starts with 2.27 workers per employer in 2021 and increases to 4.15 workers per employer in 2024. Conversely, Sulaymaniyah (including Halabja) see a gradual decline from 3.56 workers per employer in 2021 to 2.95 in 2024. On the other hand, Duhok sees a minor incremental increase each year reaching 2.51 workers per employer in 2024.

Overall, the number of enrolled workers per enrolled employer remains quite low averaging four to five workers in Federal Iraq and three to four workers in the KRI. For comparison purposes, the World Bank's Enterprise Survey Report (World Bank 2022b) indicated that the majority of formal enterprises included five to 19 workers with 714 such firms classified as small, followed by enterprises with 20 to 99 workers with 277 such firms classified as medium and large enterprises with more than 100 workers limited to 28 such firms (World Bank 2022a). It is therefore possible to conclude that most formal enterprises have only enrolled a fraction of their workforce with private social security.

3.4 Employers referred to court in relation to private social security

Figure 38 highlights the number of employers referred to court over the past two years. More cases were referred to court in 2023 compared to 2024 with Erbil, as the capital, predictably taking the lead. Cases referred have tended in the past to remain between 150 and 300 in total.

▶ *Figure 38: Employers referred to court in relation to private social security in the KRI, 2023–24*



3.5 Employer perceptions on enrolment in private social security

Employer perceptions were gathered in the context of three studies: 1) an enterprise study on social security conducted with CSRM in 2024 and 2025 in Baghdad and Basra among 121 companies; a study undertaken with ODI on construction, agriculture and manufacturing sector workers in relation to social security; and 3) a collection of case studies in a consultancy ILO commissioned in the KRI.

Main findings of enterprise survey in Baghdad and Basra

Awareness and perception of Law No. 18: Employers demonstrated a moderate level of awareness of the new law, with 32 per cent reporting they were fully aware and 7 per cent somewhat aware. Among those familiar with the law, perceptions were largely positive, with 72 per cent viewing the changes favourably. Awareness and positive perceptions were slightly higher in Baghdad (33 per cent fully aware, 8 per cent somewhat aware, 81 per cent positive) than in Basra (31 per cent fully aware, 4 per cent somewhat aware, 56 per cent positive).

Registration of workers in social security: Almost all surveyed employers reported that they had registered their workers with the social security system, with a reported compliance rate of 98 per cent. Only 2 per cent admitted to not registering their workers, reflecting a generally high level of adherence to Law No. 18.

Perceived benefits of registration: Employers primarily identified legal compliance (37 per cent) and improved employee satisfaction (31 per cent) as the main advantages of registering their workers for social security.

Self-assessment of compliance: A majority of employers rated their own performance in fulfilling social security responsibilities positively. Fifty-nine per cent rated their performance as "very good," while 29 per cent described it as "good."

Main challenges and concerns: While 44 per cent of employers reported having no concerns and being fully compliant and 49 per cent reported no difficulties in understanding their obligations under the law, several challenges were still identified. These included complex administrative procedures (30 per cent), time-consuming processes (26 per cent), high contribution costs (21 per cent) and insufficient access to information (7 per cent).

Preferred improvements: When asked about measures to facilitate compliance, 30 per cent of employers suggested simplifying the registration process. An additional 20 per cent favoured making contribution payments easier. Other proposed improvements included better access to information, reduced costs and financial incentives, though these were mentioned less frequently.

Enrolment of new workers and views on implementation: A large majority (86 per cent) stated that they had enrolled all new employees in social security since the enactment of Law No. 18. Fifty-one per cent believed that the enrolment process had improved under the new legal framework, while 48 per cent observed improvements in the contribution payment process. All employers surveyed reported knowing how to enroll workers and 96 per cent stated that they understood the procedures for making contributions.

Information gaps and needs: Most employers indicated that they did not require additional information about the law or the social security system. Among those who did express information needs, the most common requests were for more accessible online platforms or websites and simplified procedures for registration and payment.

▶ Box 2. Case studies documented in the KRI in 2024

- **A lawyer, who represented a few companies in Erbil stated that:** *"At the beginning, when you come to DSS and want to open a file, you should bring all your documents from the companies registry (all should be authenticated), such as your licenses, minutes of business establishment, or any documents related to changes in the name of the company and its activities, along with other required documents. The director will check these papers, write comments on them, then sign and stamp them in the incoming registration room. They will then be forwarded to the inspection room. In the inspection room, inspectors are distributed based on the neighbourhoods in Erbil. An inspector will take your file and visit your company. Once there, they will enroll the names, salaries and birth dates of all workers, make a report and give it to the head of the department. The report is then sent to the director again and other rooms. After all these procedures, the employer is registered."*

- **A Salon owner, who recently registered his Salon in DSS in Erbil, addressed his experiences with the inspection process and said:** *"I finished all the procedures till I reached the inspector's room. I left the file in the inspection room with my number and address of the Salon. This is to make sure the inspector(s) can easily find the location. if not, they would give me a call and ask for help to find the location… the inspector's committee visited the Salon without informing us beforehand and met all the employees there.…"*

Cases documented in 2024 in the manufacturing sector

- *"I also cannot register myself; it's too much for me. Sometimes, we have no clients. This business experiences high sales mainly before national celebrations and religious events."* (IDI-5, Manufacturing employer, Duhok).

- *"In my experience, SMEs often import raw materials, leading to higher expenses. This financial strain, compounded by the need to cover social security contributions and deal with customs fees, makes it more difficult for SMEs to adhere to social security policies."* (IDI-2, Manufacturing employer, Erbil).

- *"I closed two lines of my business because there were no customers. Previously, I had 13 people working for me, but now, I only have two. Imagine, how can I pay such a big amount to the social security scheme!"* (IDI-6, Manufacturing employer, Duhok).

4

Long-term benefits in Iraq's private social security

Long-term beneficiaries of private social security include old-age retirees, persons with disabilities and survivors.

4.1 Old-age retirees of private social security

Federal Iraq's Law No. 18 establishes the statutory retirement age at 60 for men and 55 for women, with a minimum of 20 years of contributions required for eligibility. Alternatively, retirement is permitted at age 63 for men or 58 for women with at least 15 years of contributions. The law also provides for early retirement at age 50, provided the individual has contributed for 30 years for men or 25 years for women. Up to five years of contributions may be purchased to meet eligibility thresholds. These provisions reflect an effort to modernize retirement rules while maintaining actuarial balance and expanding flexibility for insured workers.

Figure 39 illustrates old-age retiree private pension beneficiaries by gender and year. It shows that the total number of old-age pensioners slowly increased from 8,327 retirees in 2021 to 9,170 retirees in 2023 and then slightly decreased in 2024 to 9,154 retirees. This decrease, even if minor, is concerning because the overall number of enrolled workers has increased by 74 per cent in the last four years, as seen in section 2.1. This means that the increase in enrolment may not necessarily be translating into an increase in actual disbursements of benefits. This may be explained by the fact that workers preferred to take end-of-term benefits until Law No.18 was passed in 2023, after which this option was discontinued. Nevertheless, the proportion of old-age workers does remain rather low. This is concerning, as old-age pensions have been the most consistently and tangibly implemented benefit provided by the Private Social Security Administration since 1971. This issue will be examined in greater detail in section 6.2, where actual disbursements for old-age pensions are compared with estimated retirement figures from the private sector. An analysis of figure 39 also shows that the proportion of women in Federal Iraq among old-age retirees in the private social security has remained between 18 per cent in 2021 and 17 per cent in subsequent years.

Figure 39: Total old-age retirees in private social security in Federal Iraq, by gender and year, 2021–24

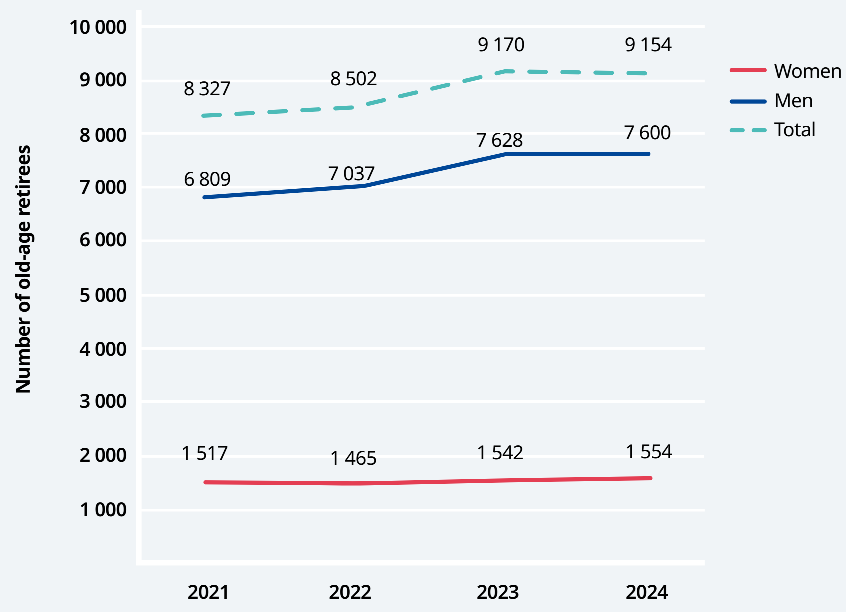


Figure 40 highlights the trends of old-age retirees by governorate and year. As in the previous figure, Baghdad leads in numbers of old-age retirees. The number of pensioners increased from 5,799 pensioners in 2021 to 6,220 pensioners in 2023, but 2024 registered a fall to 6,127 pensioners. Nineveh, Basra, Kirkuk and Wasit came in next, respectively, with between 750 to 1,250 pensioners. Among these, Basra is the only governorate registering a notable increase of pensioners each year, even though numbers remain in the three digits only. All other governorates had less than 250 old-age pensioners in 2024.

Figure 40: Old-age retirees in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate and year, 2021–24

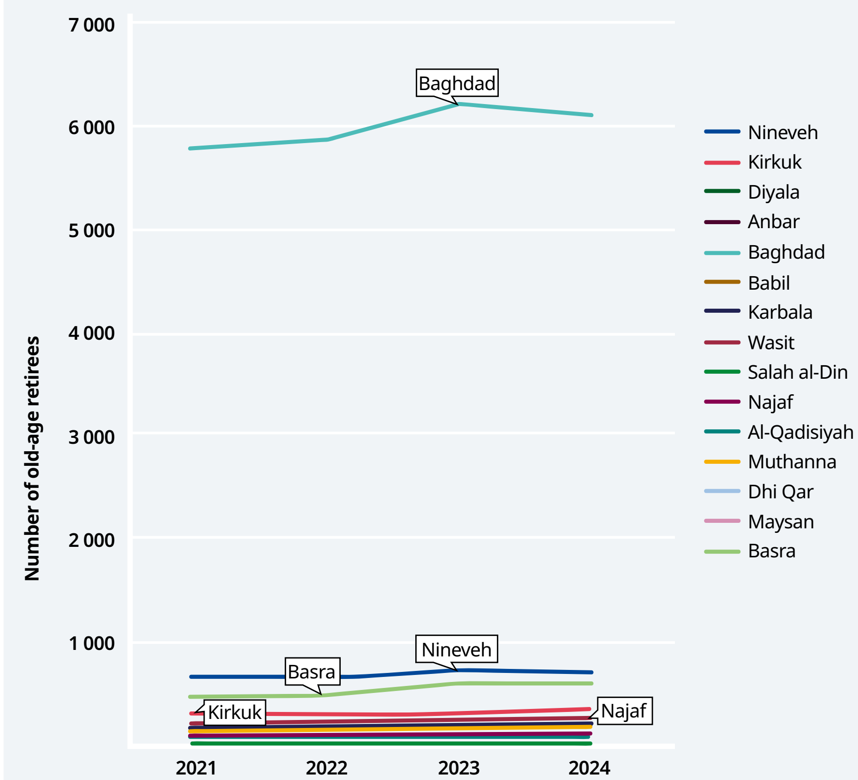
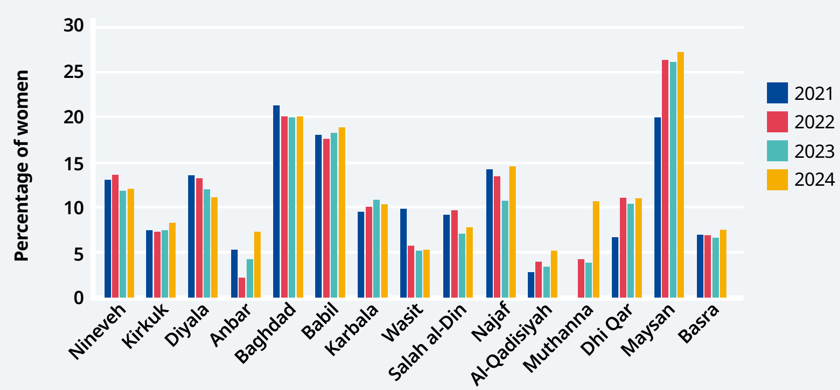


Figure 41 depicts women's share of old-age retirees by governorate and year. Interestingly, Maysan shows a proportion of women slightly above 25 per cent of all old-age retirees. However, this is not particularly significant, as the total number of old-age pensioners in Maysan only reached 23 women in 2023. The proportion of women is more significant in Baghdad since its share of women does account for 20 to 21 per cent of all old-age pensioners and the total number of old-age pension beneficiaries is more significant as seen in figure 39 with figures above 6,000 pensioners. Nonetheless a proportion of 20 to 21 per cent is significant compared to low national female labour force participation rates (CSO, KRSO and ILO 2022). Babil comes in third with women's share of old-age pensions reaching between 17 and 18 per cent, although – as with Maysan – the total numbers of old-age pensioners are limited.

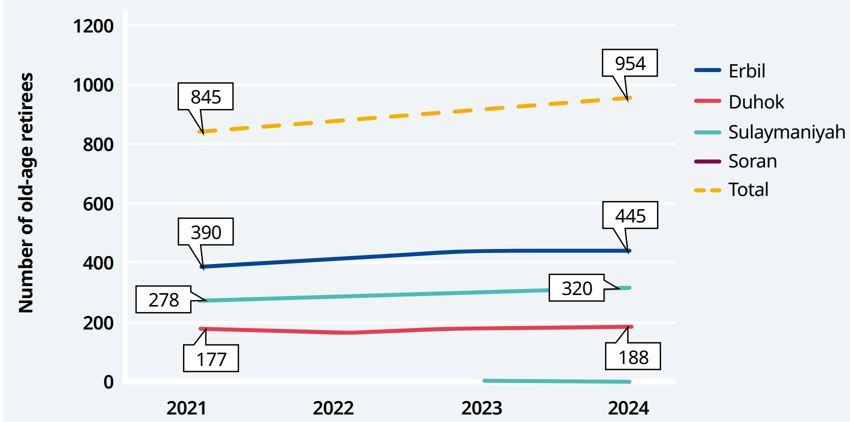
▶ *Figure 41: Women's share of total old-age retirees in private social security, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)*



In the KRI, private sector workers are entitled to old-age pension benefits under the amended Law No. 4 of 2012, which revises the Workers' Pension and Social Security Law No. 39 of 1971. According to this legal framework, insured workers are eligible for an old-age pension upon reaching the retirement age of 60 for men and 55 for women, provided they have completed at least 20 years of service with contributions. The pension amount is calculated based on the average wage of the final years of service and the number of contribution years. The law also allows for early retirement under certain conditions and provides lump-sum end-of-service benefits in cases where pension eligibility criteria are not met.

Figure 42 highlights the number of old-age retirees in the KRI over the past four years. Sex disaggregated data was not available to the ILO. These figures highlight very low overall numbers of private sector old-age pensioners reaching 954 in 2024, with Erbil taking the lead with 445 pensioners, followed by Sulaymaniyah with 320 pensioners and Duhok with 188 pensioners. The number of pensioners seems to be hardly increasing each year. Comparing that to the significant increases in enrolment, the particularly low number of pensioners in the KRI raises questions about their accessibility and actual disbursements. This is only partly explained by the ability to cash in end-of-term benefits.

▶ *Figure 42: Old-age retirees in private social security in the KRI, by region and year 2021–24*



4.2 Disability pensioners of private social security

Under Iraq's Law No. 18, insured private sector workers are entitled to a disability pension if they become permanently and totally incapacitated for work, regardless of age, provided they have contributed for at least one full year prior to the onset of disability. In cases of work-related injuries or occupational diseases, the pension is granted without a minimum contribution period, in accordance with medical assessment and employer reporting. The pension amount is calculated based on the degree of disability and the insured person's average reference wage, with a guaranteed minimum benefit level. The law also permits continued contributions for those with partial disabilities who remain in the workforce, reflecting a shift towards a more inclusive and rights-based approach to social protection.

Figure 43 shows the numbers of disability pension beneficiaries in private social security by gender and year. Overall, the number of disability pensioners increased from 1,707 beneficiaries in 2021 to 1,911 beneficiaries in 2023 and then slightly decreased to 1,897 beneficiaries in 2024. The low number of beneficiaries and the decrease in 2024 is concerning. This slight decline will need to be monitored in the following years to ensure that increases in enrolments do translate into actual disbursement of benefits. The trend follows a similar pattern to old-age pensioners and points to possible systemic barriers in accessibility. This problem will be assessed in more detail in section 6.2 when actual disbursements for disability pensioners are compared with estimates of persons with disabilities in the private sector.

Figure 43: Disability pension beneficiaries in private social security, Federal Iraq, by gender, year, 2021–24

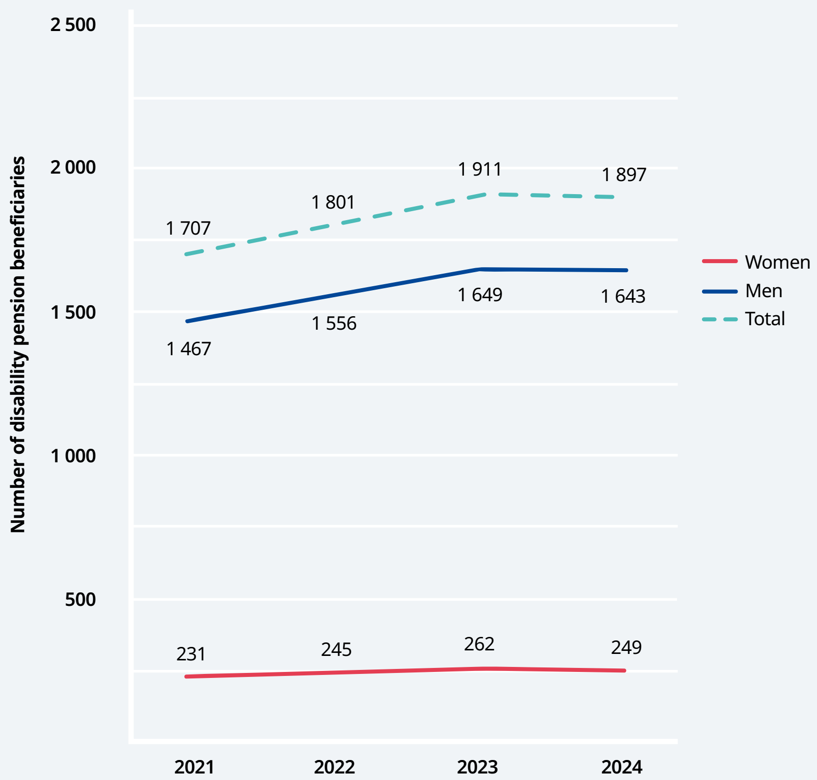


Figure 44 depicts the disability pension beneficiaries in private social security by governorate and year. Baghdad has the highest numbers of disability pensioners although the numbers are decreasing each year going from 700 disability pensioners in 2021 to 622 in 2024. This contrasts with Al Qadisiyah and Najaf, which saw an annual increase in the number of disability beneficiaries from 200 to 366 and 266 respectively in 2024. Nineveh and Basra come in next with 123 and 113 disability pensioners in 2024, while all other governorates have less than 100 disability pensioners each.

Figure 44: Disability pension beneficiaries in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24

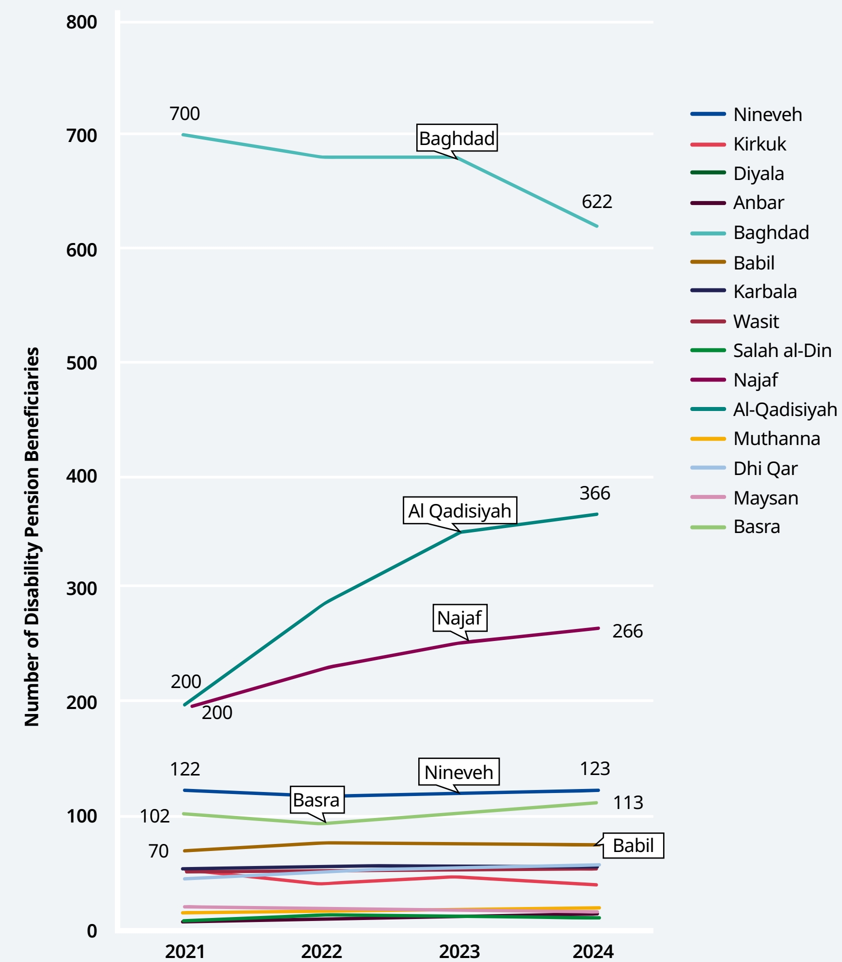
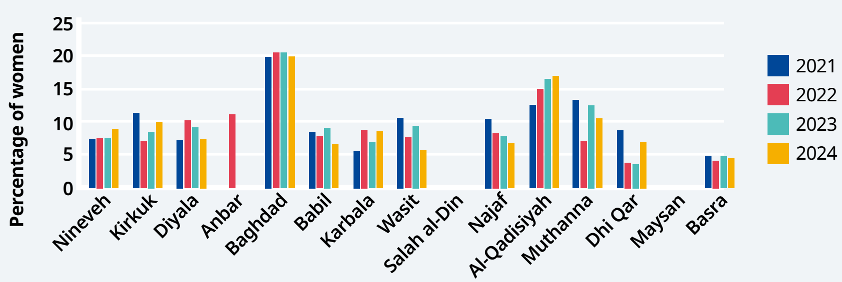


Figure 45 shows the women's share of total disability pension beneficiaries in private social security by governorate. Baghdad and Al Qadisiyah come in highest with proportions of 15 and 20 per cent, respectively. Muthanna and Kirkuk follow managing to maintain proportions just above 10 per cent for at least one year, while all other governorates show proportions below 10 per cent.

▶ *Figure 45: Women's share of total disability pension beneficiaries in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)*



In the KRI, private sector workers are entitled to disability pensions under the amended Workers' Pension and Social Security Law No. 39 of 1971, as revised by Law No. 4 of 2012. This legislation provides financial support to insured workers who become permanently or partially disabled due to work-related or non-occupational causes. Eligibility for a disability pension requires the worker to have a medically certified disability and to have made a minimum number of contributions to the social security system. The pension amount is calculated based on a percentage of the worker's average wage, with adjustments made according to the degree of disability. Recent reforms have lowered the threshold for partial disability pensions from 35 per cent to 30 per cent and workers with disabilities below this threshold may receive a compensatory bonus. These provisions aim to enhance social protection for workers facing health-related challenges. Unfortunately, gender administrative data on disability pensions in the KRI were not available.

4.3 Survivor pensioners of private social security

Iraq's Law No. 18 of 2023 provides for survivor pensions for the eligible dependents of a deceased insured person or pensioner. Benefits are payable to widows or widowers, children, parents and dependent siblings, subject to conditions related to age, disability, marital status and dependency. If the deceased was insured and had completed at least one year of contributions, their survivors are entitled to a pension. In cases where death is due to a work-related injury or occupational disease, survivor benefits are granted regardless of contribution history. The pension is calculated based on the insured person's accrued rights and is divided among eligible beneficiaries in accordance with the law. These provisions are designed to ensure income continuity for dependents and reflect Iraq's commitment to family-based social protection.

Figure 46 shows pension survivor beneficiaries in private social security by gender and year. According to the documented figures, the overall number of survivors plateaued between 9,324 in 2022 and 9,462 in 2024. In general, almost all survivors are women.

▶ *Figure 46: Pension survivor beneficiaries in private social security in Federal Iraq, by gender and year, 2022–24*

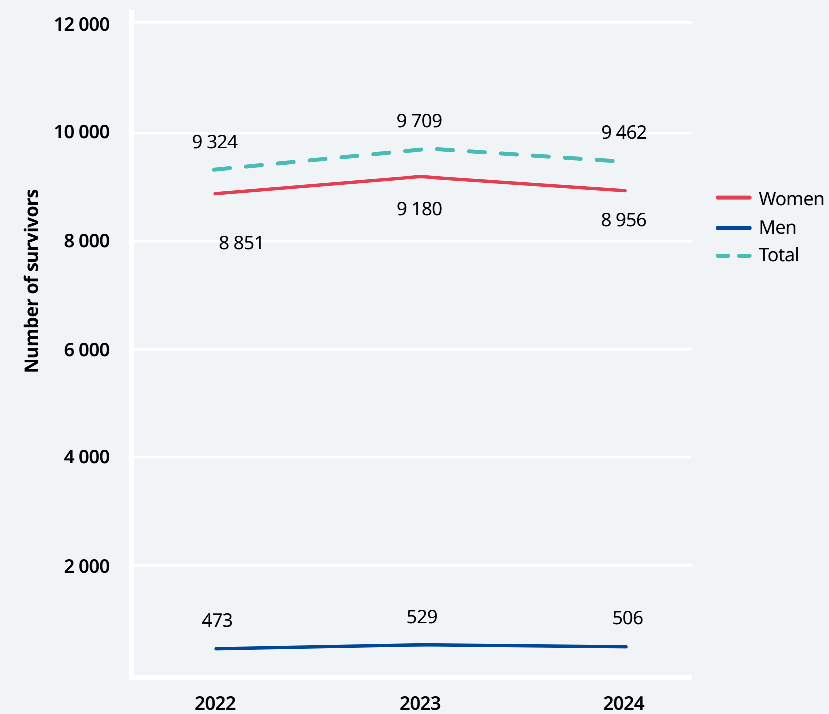


Figure 47 shows pension survivor beneficiaries in private social security by governorate and year. It highlights that Baghdad leads by far with some 4,537 survivors in 2021 increasing to 5,374 in 2023 and then dropping slightly to 5,166 survivors in 2024. Baghdad is followed by Nineveh and Basra with 700 and 800 average survivor beneficiaries also registering a small drop in 2024.

Figure 47: Pension survivor beneficiaries in private social security, by governorate, 2021–24

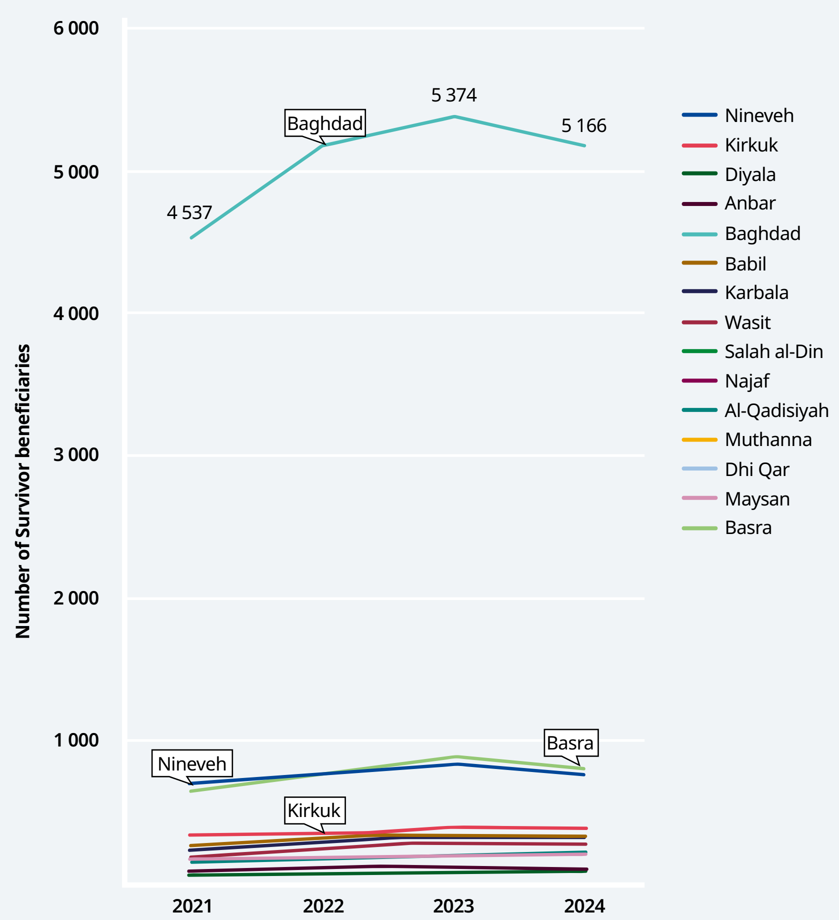
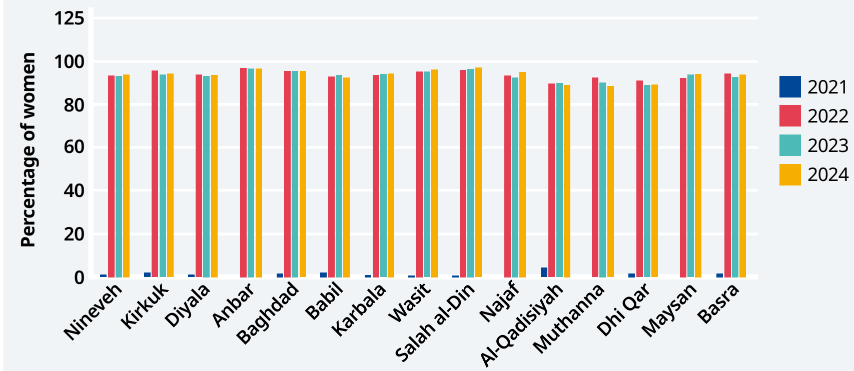


Figure 48 depicts women's share of all survivor beneficiaries in private social security by governorate and year. Interestingly, 90 per cent of survivors are women across governorates with not much variance, except in 2021 which may be attributed to documentation errors as mentioned earlier.

Figure 48: Women's share of survivor beneficiaries in private social security, by governorate, 2021–24 (percentage)



In KRI private sector workers are entitled to survivor benefits under the amended Workers' Pension and Social Security Law No. 39 of 1971, as revised by Law No. 4 of 2012. These benefits provide financial support to the dependents of deceased insured workers. Eligible survivors typically include the spouse, children, and, in some cases, other dependents who were financially reliant on the deceased worker. The amount and duration of the survivor pension are determined based on the deceased worker's contribution history and average wage. These provisions aim to ensure the financial stability of families following the loss of their primary wage earner.

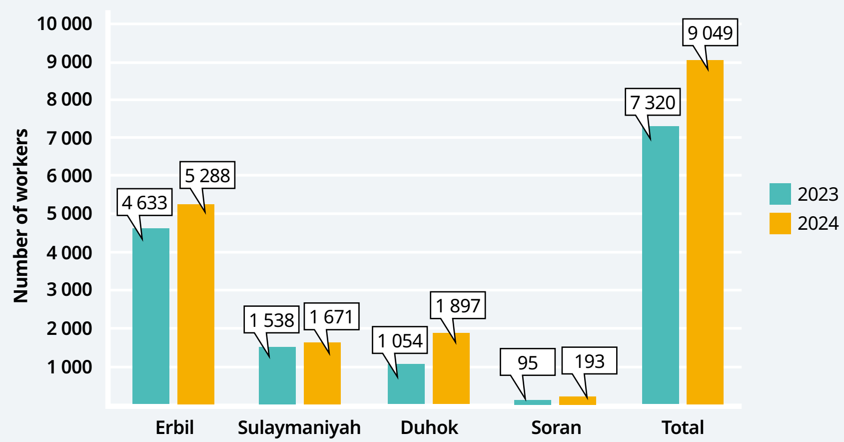
4.4 Received private social security withdrawal benefits in the KRI

Under the KRI's Law No. 4 of 2012, which amended the social security framework based on the Workers' Pension and Social Security Law No. 39 of 1971, workers may now access a lump-sum end-of-service payment even before retirement age, depending on contribution years and the reason for exit.[5] In the case of Federal Iraq, workers now accrue pension rights and early withdrawal in the form of an end-of-term lump sum is no longer a possibility with a few exemptions for non-qualifying or short-term contributions. The administrative data presented below was collected in the KRI.

5 This does not apply in Federal Iraq since the previous end-of-service gratuity option that was allowed under the repealed Law No. 39 of 1971 was removed in the new Law No. 18 of 2023.

Figure 49 highlights workers receiving end-of-term benefits in the KRI. In 2024, 9,049 workers received end-of-term benefits with most of them being from Erbil, followed by Duhok and Sulaymaniyah.

▶ *Figure 49: Workers receiving end-of-term benefits under private social security in the KRI, 2023–24*



Among those receiving end-of-term benefits are migrant workers. Figure 50 illustrates that 2,079 migrant workers received end-of-term benefits in the KRI in 2024.

▶ *Figure 50: Migrant workers receiving end-of-term benefits under private social security in the KRI, 2023–24*

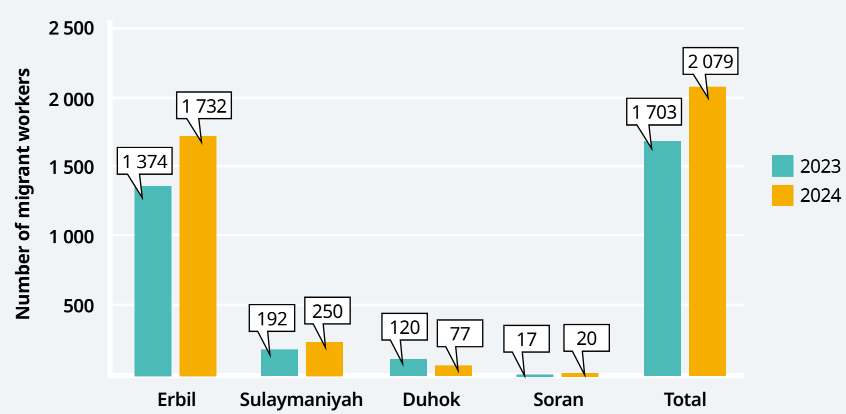
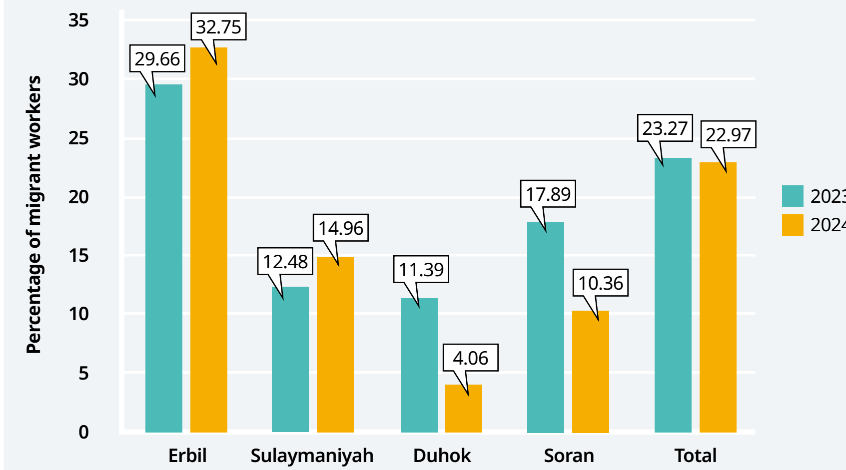


Figure 51 highlights the proportions of migrant workers receiving end-of-term private social security benefits, reaching 23 per cent in both 2023 and 2024. Erbil has the highest proportion of migrant workers receiving end-of-term benefits with 33 per cent in 2024.

▶ *Figure 51: Migrant workers receiving end-of-term social security benefits in the KRI, 2023–24 (percentage)*



4.5 Disbursements of long-term benefits of private social security

ILO only had access to data on disbursements of long-term benefits for years 2022–24 in Federal Iraq. The data was not available for KRI. Overall, such disbursements increased each year going from 113 billion Iraq dinars (IQDs) in 2022, to IQD123 billion in 2023 and IQD145 billion in 2025.

Figure 52: Private social security long-term benefit disbursements, by governorate and year, 2022–24 (in Iraq dinar)

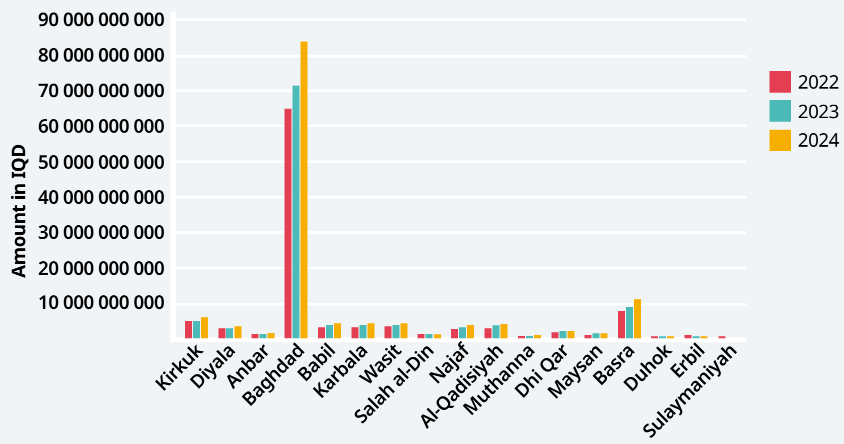
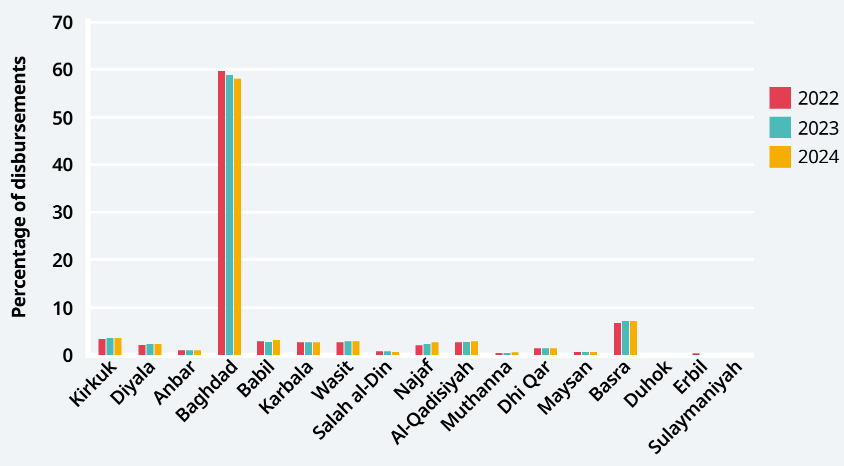


Figure 52 depicts the sum of disbursements in Iraq dinars disbursed by governorate, while figure 53 shows the percentage share of disbursements by governorate. In both figures, it is clear that Baghdad leads by far with IQD84 billion disbursed in 2024 representing 58 per cent of all disbursements, with Basra trailing far behind with IQD11 billion representing 7 per cent of all disbursements in 2024.

Figure 53: Governorate share of private social security long-term benefit disbursements, 2022–24 (percentage)



5

Short-term benefits in Iraq’s private social security

Federal Iraq's Law No. 18 of 2023 provides a comprehensive package of short-term benefits for insured private sector workers, including sickness, maternity, employment injury and, for the first time, unemployment insurance. Sickness benefits are payable for up to 180 days per year, provided the worker has contributed for at least three continuous months or six non-continuous months within the previous year. Maternity benefits cover 100 per cent of the insured woman's wage for a period of 14 weeks, with a minimum contribution requirement of six continuous months. In the case of employment-related injuries or occupational diseases, the law guarantees both medical care and wage compensation during recovery, with no minimum contribution period required. Regarding unemployment benefits, these apply for workers who have lost their jobs involuntarily and have contributed for at least 12 months, including six continuous months prior to unemployment. This benefit is payable for a period of up to six months and is calculated as a proportion of the insured wage. These provisions mark a significant step forward in extending income protection and aligning Iraq's system with international social security standards, particularly ILO's Convention No. 102, ratified by Iraq in 2023.

In practice, implementation of these provisions remains limited. Sickness and maternity benefits are rarely accessed due to low awareness among workers, administrative bottlenecks and the reluctance of employers to report such claims. Employment injury compensation has been reported in some sectors, however, challenges persist in reporting, documentation and timely medical assessment. The newly introduced unemployment insurance mechanism has yet to be operationalized, as institutional procedures, funding arrangements and verification systems are still under development. In addition to these challenges, the extent of informal employment, combined with limited enforcement capacity, means that a large proportion of eligible workers do not claim or receive these benefits. As such, despite progressive legal provisions, effective access to short-term benefits remains weak, underscoring the need for administrative reforms, better registration and outreach to both employers and workers. Finally, given the low implementation of these benefits, consolidated data is yet unavailable.

6

Effective private social security coverage in Iraq

This chapter compares the report's findings related to enrolment and long-term benefits with estimates of affected populations. Most of the data presented here are based on documented assumptions and estimates and as such cannot be taken for definite measures of coverage.

6.1 Overall effective private social security coverage by governorate, year, sex and origin

To calculate effective social security coverage, the most recently available disaggregated data on private sector employment by sex and governorate was extracted from the Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021. The data is then compared to enrolment of workers in private social security in Federal Iraq and the KRI, including data from the optional social security scheme.

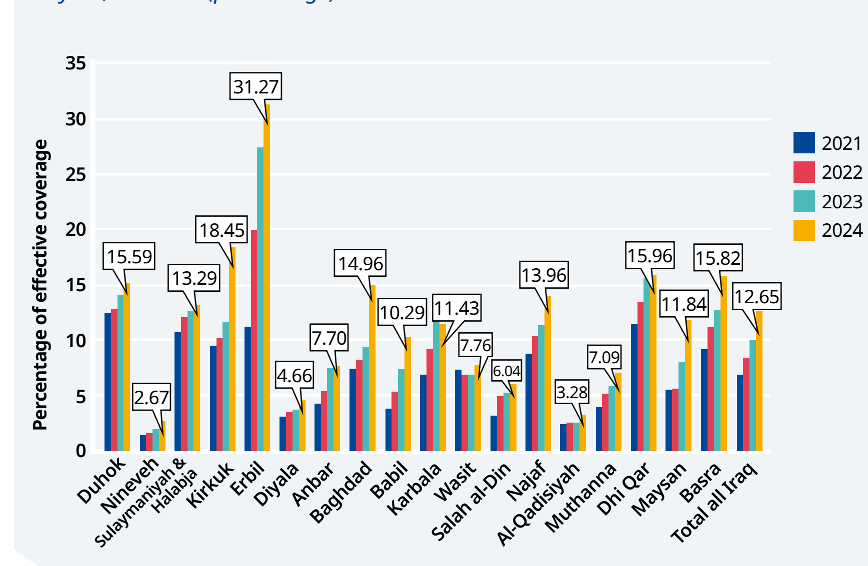
$$\text{Effective coverage rate (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of workers enrolled in private social security (mandatory + optional)}}{\text{Estimated number of private sector workers}} \times 100$$

The number of private sector workers by governorate and gender is based on weighted estimates from the Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021 microdata. These are not actual headcounts but statistically representative projections using the survey's sample weights (ilo wgt). In contrast, the figures for workers enrolled in social security are based on administrative data from the SSA and reflect actual registered individuals. The effective coverage rates presented here indicate the proportion of the estimated eligible private sector workforce that is actively enrolled in the private social security system. Minor discrepancies between estimated totals and published national figures may occur due to differences in classification, weighting, or data cleaning methodologies.

Figure 54 illustrates that effective coverage has increased across Federal Iraq, almost doubling from 6.97 per cent of all workers in 2021 to 12.65 per cent of all workers by the end of 2024. This data is based on the Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021 baseline of the private sector workforce. This increase is significant, although it will have to be confirmed when new disaggregated private employment data is published in 2026 in the next labour force survey. Indeed, preliminary results of the Iraq Household Social Economic Survey III (World Bank 2022b) show an overall increase in employment, albeit disaggregated data is not yet available. If this trend were to be confirmed, and employment in the private sector did indeed increase significantly, then effective social security coverage would have to be lowered in a readjusted estimate. For now, this is the best estimate that can be used. It is noteworthy that Erbil takes the lead with 31.27 per cent in 2024 followed by Kirkuk with 18.45 per cent, Dhi Qar with 15.96 per cent, Basra with 15.82 per cent and Duhok with 15.59 per cent. Baghdad, Najaf, Sulaymaniyah and including Halabja, Maysan, Karbala and Babil

are mid-level performers with effective coverage reaching between 10 to 15 per cent. All other governorates have an effective coverage below 10 per cent with Nineveh, Al Qadisiyah and Diyala being the lowest performers.

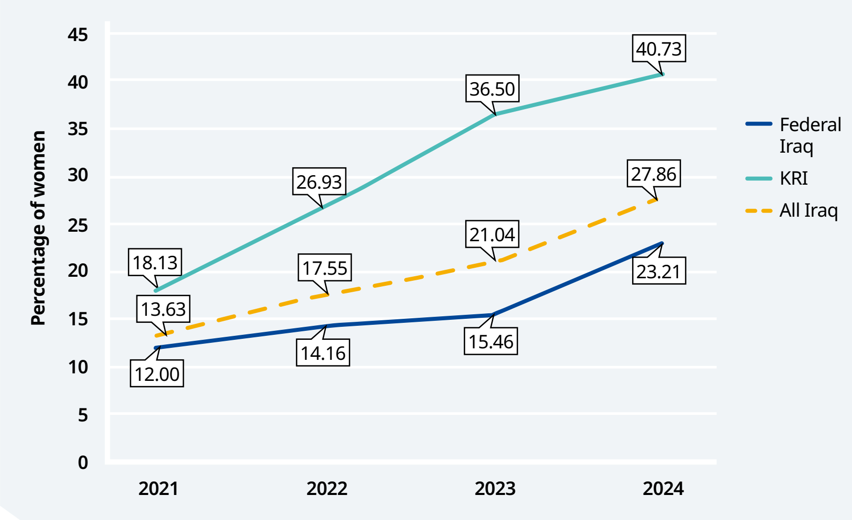
▶ *Figure 54: Effective private social security coverage in all Iraq, by governorate and year, 2021–24 (percentage)*



While some gender-disaggregated data on both private sector employment and social security enrolment does exist, proportions of women in the private sector are too small to make comparisons related to effective coverage for all governorates. Instead, effective female coverage in private social security is included below by regions.

Figure 55 reveals that effective enrolment of women in private social security, including optional insurance, has been increasing in all of Iraq (13.63 per cent in 2021 to 27.86 per cent in 2024. Higher performance is evident in KRI (40.73 per cent in 2024) compared to Federal Iraq (reaching only 23.21 per cent in 2024).

Figure 55: Effective enrolment of women in private social security, by region, 2021–24 (percentage)



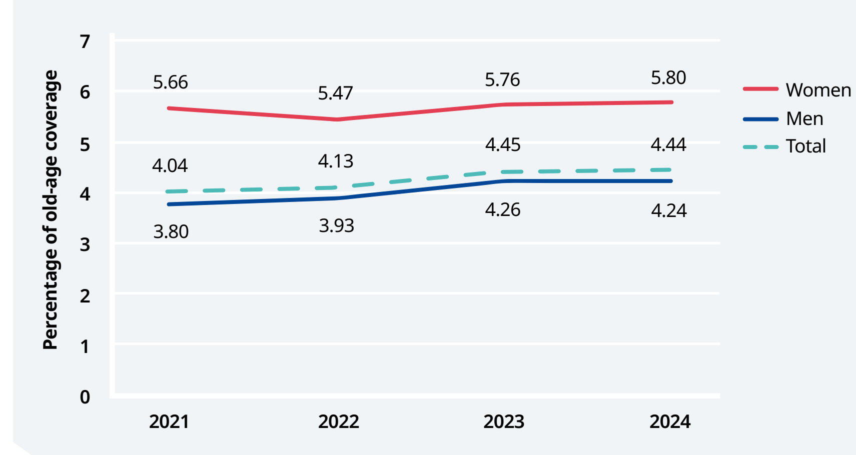
To estimate effective coverage of migrant workers, a similar approach might be applied, however, the total number of estimated migrant workers recorded by the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021* is too low to be meaningfully compared with administrative records of migrant workers. Administrative estimations of migrant workers tends to be much higher, especially in the KRI, therefore this exercise could not be undertaken for migrant workers.

6.2 Effective coverage of long-term old-age and disability benefits

The effective coverage of old-age pensions under Iraq's private sector social security system was estimated by comparing the number of individuals receiving old-age pensions in 2021-24 to the number of private sector workers reaching retirement age in those same years. Estimates of retirement-age workers were derived from the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021* (CSO, KRSO and ILO 2022) microdata, using the official sampling weights. Workers were considered retirement-eligible if they were employed in the private sector and aged 60–64 for men and 55–59 for women, in accordance with the eligibility thresholds set by Law No. 18 of 2023. The resulting number of pension beneficiaries was then divided by the estimated number of retirement-age private sector workers to calculate an estimate of the effective coverage rate. This approach provides a more realistic picture of pension access among the population who are both age- and sector-eligible for benefits under the private social security scheme.

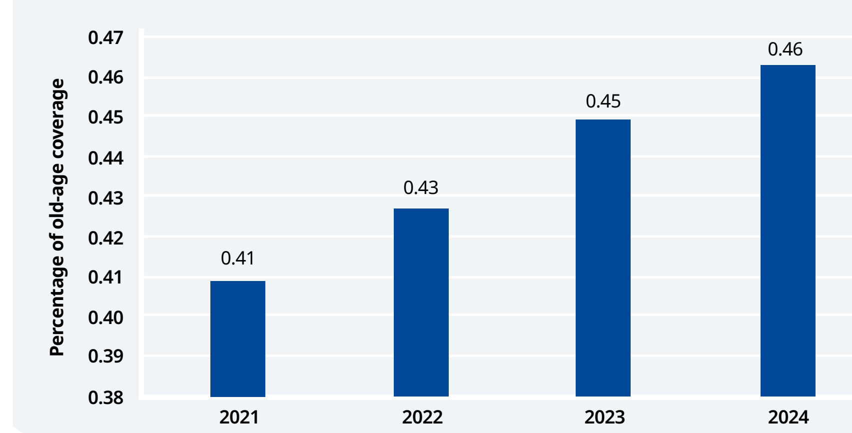
Figure 56 highlights the estimated effective coverage of old-age retirees in private social security. Coverage was 4.04 per cent in 2021 and 4.44 per cent in 2024. Effective coverage in private old-age pensions was generally higher for women than men. For example, in 2024 it was 5.8 per cent for women and only 4.24 per cent for men. The low proportion and number of old-age retirees is concerning. It may indicate difficulties in delivering old-age pensions.

Figure 56: Estimated effective old-age coverage in private social security in Federal Iraq, by sex, 2021–24 (percentage)



Gender-disaggregated administrative data on old-age pensions in the KRI was not available. Therefore only, a general estimate was undertaken.

Figure 57: Estimated effective old-age coverage in private social security in the KRI, 2021–24 (percentage)



The values of estimated effective coverage appear to be below one per cent, signalling very low effective old-age private pension coverage in the KRI, despite an increase over the past four years.

To estimate the effective coverage of disability pensions among private sector workers in Iraq, the number of individuals receiving disability pensions in 2021 and 2024 would need to be compared to an estimated number of private sector workers with disabilities. Unfortunately, the *Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021* was not able to establish reliable disability data, hence effective coverage of disability benefits could not be extracted. Nevertheless, existing administrative data reviewed in section 4.2 highlights a very low number of disability pension beneficiaries, therefore one can infer that effective coverage is also low. In the case of the KRI, even administrative data was not available, so this exercise was not undertaken.

6.3 Workers' perceptions of accessing benefits and employer support

Social security survey in Baghdad and Basra

The social security survey conducted by CRSM Consulting for ILO in 2024–2025 reached 300 formal sector workers in Baghdad and Basra.[6] The survey provided important insights into workers' experiences with benefit access and employer support.

Experience in accessing benefits: Despite being formally employed, only three per cent of respondents had attempted to access their social security benefits. Among these, 67 per cent encountered difficulties and 11 per cent reported that accessing their entitlements was impossible. The main obstacles cited included lengthy and complex procedures (reported by 33 per cent) and a lack of clear information on how to claim benefits (reported by 16 per cent).

Perceived employer support: Workers' perceptions of employer support in facilitating social security enrolment were moderately positive. Thirty-six per cent of respondents described their employers as very supportive and 33 per cent as somewhat supportive. Notably, 22 per cent indicated that they faced no difficulties when accessing benefits, suggesting variability in employer engagement and administrative practices.

Enrolment status and coverage duration: The survey found that 62 per cent of workers confirmed employers were contributing to social security on their behalf, while 23 per cent were unsure. In terms of coverage, 52 per cent reported that their enrolment period was consistent with their total duration of employment, indicating full alignment between contribution records and actual work history. However, 33 per cent expressed uncertainty about this. Among those reporting gaps in coverage, 98 per cent had worked between one and five years without any social security contributions.

Knowledge and monitoring of contributions: Only seven per cent of respondents knew how to verify their social security contributions and entitlements, while 84 per cent reported that they did not know how to track this information – highlighting a major information gap.

Suggested improvements: To enhance participation and benefit access, 18 per cent of workers recommended greater transparency in how contribution records are managed and made accessible, particularly through tools that allow individuals to verify their enrolment and monitor their entitlements.

6 The CRSM report is an internal ILO document. Some case studies from the survey are abstracted at the end of this chapter.

▶ Box 3. Selected case stories from KRI

- **A female claimant from Erbil, approached the Department of Social Security (DSS) on 29 April 2024** to claim the death benefit pension of her son as he died during his work service. She talked about her experiences and said: *"…The first time we visited the DSS, we couldn't do anything as we didn't know what they needed…we visited the DSS a few times, but the first time they only told us the documents that we should bring, the second time we took the documents, especially the death certificate, the ID cards, photos of me, the legal distribution of inheritance and those documents…Once we gave them all the documents, they said wait until we call you to come back…It has been almost a month we are waiting…once we get the salary it is for me and my granddaughter…."*
- **A female worker, 64 years old and who worked for 24 years in Duhok, shared her old-age pension claim and said:** *"Before I went to the DSS to file my case, my colleagues at work had explained the entire process to me. When I visited the DSS, they asked for my documents and took me to a few rooms…I don't remember from which rooms we started, but I gave them photos, my ID, and other documents… We visited other institutions. The employees were very respectful and helped me a lot… After one or two months, they finished my file, last time my son visited them, that is how we knew they finished my file… Now I receive my salary, and I thank God they did it for me."*

- **A male worker, 48 years old, who worked in a tile factory in Erbil, talked about the procedures he went through when he applied for disability pension benefit, and stated:** *"… I visited many doctors, the results of all the tests showed that I should not work anymore… I filed my case last year and it took a while, I saw the medical committees, it is their committee I think, …after 7 months, they completed my file…but they told me that I have to see the medical committee every six months, if I do not die till that time … I have not gotten my salary yet, but they said it will be around IQD150,000, I am still waiting, hope it doesn't take another seven months…."*
- **A 39-year-old man from Duhok, who worked for a bank, talked about his end-of-service claim and said:** *"I applied for the end-of-service benefit because I established my own business, which is a washing machine repair shop, and I needed funds for it. It took me a few hours to complete the application process as I had to go to my bank to sign a form and then take it back to the DSS. I don't remember exactly how many rooms I visited that day, but I do recall visiting a few rooms more than once…Once I applied, they told me at DSS that they had my phone number and would call me in about a month, a month has passed, and I still have not received a call!…I plan to visit them again in the coming days to check if they have completed my file…."*

7

Fund status of private social security in Iraq

This chapter reviews the status of funds available for private social security administration. Figure 58 presents reported expenditures of private social security administrations in the KRI.

▶ *Figure 58: Annual expenditures of private social security administration in the KRI, 2018–24 (in Iraq dinar)*

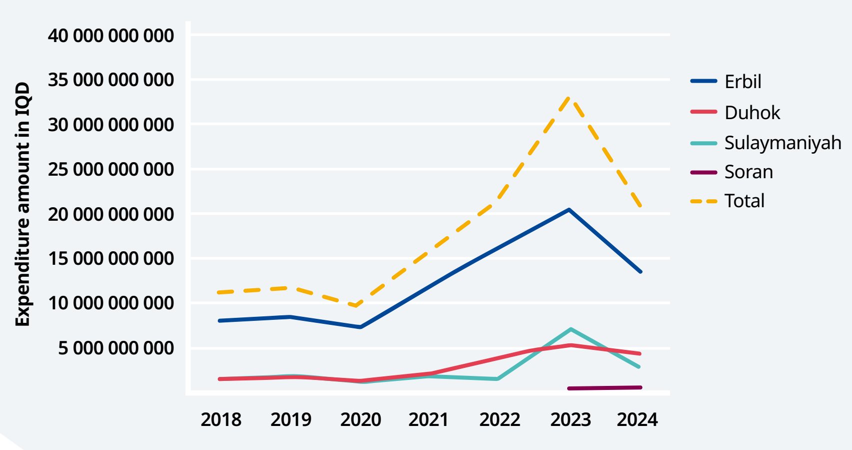
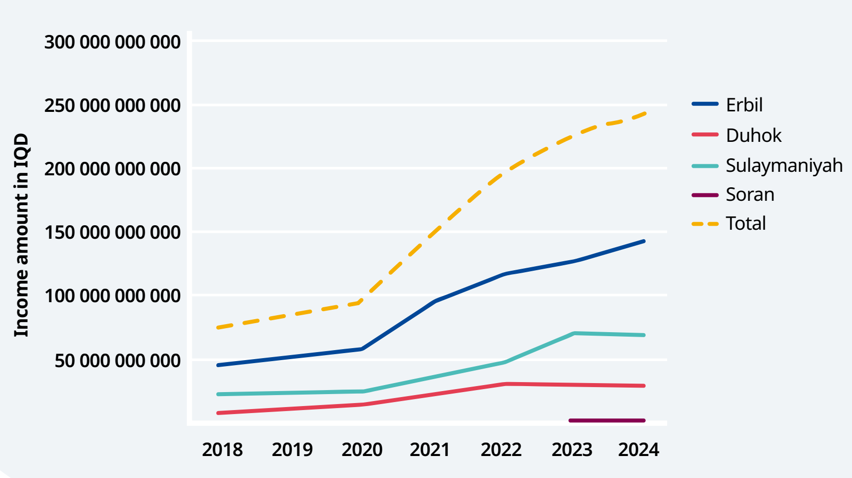


Figure 58 highlights an average IQD10–11 million expenditures between 2018–2020, a marked increase until 2023 reaching over IQD33 million. This was, followed by a moderate decline in 2024 reaching IQD21 million. In terms of governorates, Erbil predictably takes the lead following a similar pattern.

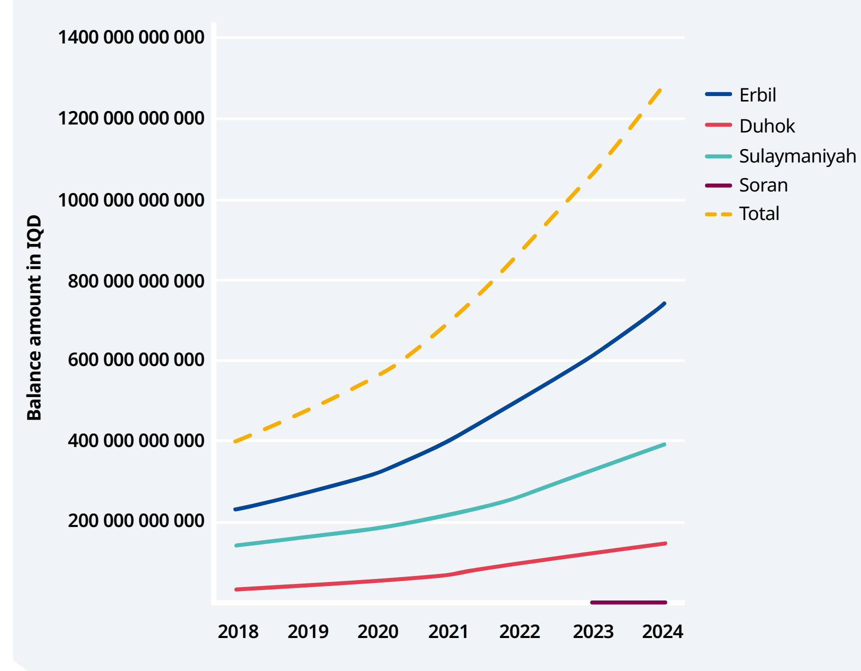
▶ *Figure 59: Annual income of private social security administration in the KRI, 2018–24 (in Iraq dinar)*



As figure 59 shows, the income of the private SSA in the KRI has been increasing starting from IQD75 million in 2018, reaching IQD94 million in 2020, followed by a sharper increase until 2023 reaching IQD226 million and then increasing moderately to IQD241 million in 2024. The growth in income is led by Erbil and followed by the other governorates.

Figure 60 shows that the net balance has also been gradually increasing and accelerating, going from IQD402 million in 2018 and reaching IQD1.28 billion in 2024.

▶ *Figure 60: Balance of private social security administration in the KRI, by year, 2018–24 (in Iraq dinar)*



8

Recommendations

Recommendations are divided into two sections — those related to policy and procedural reforms and those related to data, monitoring and documentation.

8.1 Policy and administrative recommendations

1. **Expand effective coverage:** While coverage of private social security has doubled over the past four years, 12 per cent effective coverage remains quite low. Significant efforts to increase coverage need to be pursued. This report recommends the following possible measures:

    a. Adopt a sectoral and region-specific approach to extending social security coverage in cooperation with labour departments, trade unions and employers through tripartite committees. The experience of the Kirkuk tripartite committee clearly helped boost coverage. Expanding such committees to other governorates could boost broader efforts.

    b. Expand enrolment. As discussed in section 3.3, the number of workers per employer remains quite low, averaging four to five workers in Federal Iraq and three to four workers in the KRI, and yet the actual average, based on the World Bank's 2022 *Iraq Enterprise Survey*, is considerably higher (World Bank 2022). There is therefore scope to enroll workers who haven't been enrolled yet, despite having formal employment. It would be important therefore to conduct, in collaboration with employers' organizations, outreach to formal enterprises to boost enrolment, in addition to conducting outreach to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, informal businesses and self-employed workers to increase employer and worker registration in both the mandatory and optional schemes.

    c. Strengthen inspection and enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with Law No. 18, particularly in underperforming governorates. Workers' organizations should strengthen their outreach to workers in relation to social security and employers' organizations should actively collaborate to expand enrolment efforts. Establishing task forces within workers' organizations to monitor and follow-up social security non-compliance complaints is needed. Employers' organizations need social security committees to monitor and ensure compliance. Finally tripartite committees, such as the one established in Kirkuk, could help in ensuring a dynamic of increasing enrolment and disbursements of benefits.

Short term:	Replicate the Kirkuk tripartite committee model in other governorates.
	Conduct outreach to formal enterprises to identify and register unregistered workers.
Medium term:	Strengthen inspection and enforcement mechanisms and promote monitoring task forces.

2. **Address gender gaps:** Women's enrolment in private social security is slightly below the already very low female labour participation rate in Federal Iraq while it is consistent with the female labour force participation rate in the KRI. This report recommends the following possible measures:

   a. Promote tailored incentives and awareness campaigns to encourage women's enrolment in private social security, including in the optional scheme.

   b. Integrate social protection with active labour market programmes to support women's participation in the workforce.

Short term:	Launch tailored awareness campaigns for women's enrolment.
Medium term:	Integrate social protection with active labour market programmes for women.

3. **Improve long-term benefit accessibility:** A major observation of this report is the very low effective access to long-term private social security benefits, including access to disability and old-age pensions and survivor benefits. This report recommends the following possible measures:

   a. Review eligibility and delivery bottlenecks for old-age and disability pensions in light of rising enrolment but stagnant or declining benefit disbursements.

   b. Establish fast-track administrative pathways for disability assessments, especially outside Baghdad and Erbil.

Short term:	Establish fast-track administrative pathways for disability assessments outside Baghdad/Erbil.
Medium term:	Review eligibility and delivery bottlenecks for old-age and disability pensions.

   c. The very low number of old-age pensioners in the private sector in all Iraq highlights an important vulnerability of elderly people. The Government could consider an old-age universal social pension to address this gap.

4. **Operationalize short-term benefits:** Another major observation of this report is the limited accessibility of short-term benefits. This report recommends the following possible measures:

   a. Fast track the implementation of sickness, maternity and unemployment benefits through regulatory by-laws and institutional capacity building.

   b. Pilot a short-term benefit delivery system in selected governorates to test reporting, verification and disbursement workflows.

Short term:	Pilot short-term benefit delivery systems in selected governorates.
Medium term:	Finalize regulatory by-laws and build capacity for delivering sickness, maternity and unemployment benefits.

5. **Strengthen coverage and portability for migrant workers:** Findings in section 2.4, and to a limited degree section 4.5, show that migrant workers contribute significant amounts to social security funds, but in the case of Federal Iraq cannot re-claim such benefits unless they retire in Iraq. This represents a structural form of discrimination that should be removed. This report recommends the following possible measures:

   a. Develop a legal and administrative framework for social security portability, particularly through bilateral agreements or Memorandums of Understanding with relevant countries of origin.

   b. Ensure contributions of migrant workers lead to meaningful social protection, or reconsider contribution requirements if no benefit is accessible. This may imply policy changes.

   c. Ensure that private social security coverage is further extended if portability of benefits can be arranged with countries of origin.

Medium term:	Review contribution-benefit mismatch and develop equitable policy options for migrant workers.
	Ensure benefit accessibility or reconsider contribution requirements for migrant workers.
Long term:	Develop bilateral agreements or Memorandums of Understanding for portability of benefits with countries of origin.

6. **Promote integration with the public sector system:** While public social security is reviewed elsewhere (IMF, ILO and World Bank 2024), private sector enrolment in social security is significantly lower than enrolment in the public sector. Entitlement gaps and differences continue to create disincentives for private sector employment. This report therefore recommends to:

   a. Establish coordination mechanisms to address fragmentation between public and private sector schemes, including efforts towards long-term harmonization of entitlements and portability.

Long term:	Establish coordination mechanisms between public/private systems and harmonize entitlements.

7. **Institutional strengthening:** Both the Federal and KRI private SSAs need to continue reforming in order to enable access and quality to social security services. The following measures are recommended:

   a. Invest in digitalization and automation of the registration, contribution and claims systems within the SSAs to provide greater accountability to insured workers.

   b. Strengthen the client interface (online or mobile phone) for contributors to access records, submit claims and receive updates.

Short term:	Strengthen client-facing digital interfaces for contributors.
Medium term:	Automate registration, contribution tracking and claims management.

8.2 Data, monitoring and documentation recommendations

1. **Strengthen data collection and availability**

   a. Regularly publish administrative data disaggregated by sex, governorate, age, nationality and benefit type for transparency and analysis.

   b. Begin systematic tracking and publication of data on short-term benefits (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment).

   c. Ensure that data on disbursement, expenditures and net balance of SSAs is timely, regularly published and available to the public. Include figures on administrative expenses of social security, distinguishing them from benefit disbursements.

   d. Data on KRI disability pensions should be documented, timely, made publicly available and regularly published.

   e. Data on employers referred to court in Federal Iraq should be made available.

   f. Explore other possible existing data that could be regularly documented and analysed.

2. **Improve data quality and validation**

   a. Standardize enrolment and exclusion records, especially to minimize unclassified or "unknown" data entries (e.g., missing nationality, sex).

   b. Introduce cross-verification checks between employer and worker records to ensure consistency.

3. **Institutionalize labour force survey integration**

   a. Collaborate with the central statistical organizations (CSOs) in Federal Iraq and KRI to include robust social security data modules for the upcoming Iraq Labour Force Survey in 2026.

   b. Ensure that the Iraq Labour Force Survey 2026 includes disaggregated data on disability, informal employment, sector of employment and social security enrolment.

4. **Develop a unified monitoring system**

   a. Create a dashboard to track progress on effective coverage indicators by sex, nationality, governorate, benefit type and scheme (mandatory and optional).

5. **Archive and publish analytical work**

   a. Produce analytical reports that are made publicly available and systematically archived to track reform progress over time.

   b. Document and share lessons learned from pilot programmes or governorate-specific interventions.

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Annex

Table 1: Enrolment of workers in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate (2021–24)

YEAR	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nineveh	7 179	8 076	9 801	11 326
Kirkuk	21 664	23 231	26 223	41 015
Diyala	6 775	7 322	8 034	9 409
Anbar	7 237	8 929	12 590	12 564
Baghdad	98 246	109 149	125 058	187 899
Babil	12 554	17 642	23 938	31 372
Karbala	12 266	16 390	24 089	19 539
Wasit	15 213	14 270	14 471	15 421
Salah al-Din	9 061	13 712	14 658	16 308
Najaf	19 564	23 353	25 444	30 111
Al Qadisiyah	4 168	4 450	4 531	5 023
Muthanna	3 208	4 179	4 749	5 496
Dhi Qar	17 342	20 340	23 516	23 567
Maysan	7 382	7 442	10 638	15 452
Basra	35 296	42 876	49 048	58 578
TOTAL	**277 155**	**321 361**	**376 788**	**483 080**

Table 2: Enrolment of workers in private social security in the KRI, by region (2018–24)

YEAR	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Erbil*	29 837	31 138	32 679	37 527	66 587	90 690	102 461
Sulaymaniyah and Halabja	38 145	40 366	41 845	44 574	49 950	52 574	55 031
Duhok	16 484	11 133	14 367	19 153	19 784	21 626	23 933
Soran*						737	1 559

▶ *Table 3: Workers registered in optional social security in 2024*

LOCATION	REGISTERED
Anbar	241
Babil	1 751
Baghdad	9 520
Basra	1 610
Duhok	20
Dhi Qar	419
Al Qadisiyah	514
Diyala	447
Erbil	66
Karbala	798
Kirkuk	783
Maysan	138
Muthanna	185
Najaf	1 162
Nineveh	1 644
Outside Iraq	97
Salah al-Din	263
Sulaymaniyah	65
Wasit	665
TOTAL	**20 388**

▶ *Table 4: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in Federal Iraq, by governorate (2021–24)*

GOVERNORATE	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nineveh	4	4	7	22
Kirkuk	21	27	41	83
Diyala	0	0	0	0
Anbar	25	91	119	144
Baghdad	2 567	2 781	3 185	6 933
Babil	0	31	0	37
Karbala	37	933	1 089	1 095
Wasit	32	103	108	126
Salah al-Din	126	126	248	330
Najaf	88	88	108	128
Al Qadisiyah	74	68	91	97
Muthanna	176	287	317	325
Dhi Qar	0	210	255	317
Maysan	36	36	37	38
Basra	340	764	713	901
TOTAL	**3 526**	**5 549**	**6 318**	**10 576**

▶ *Table 5: Migrant workers enrolled in private social security in the KRI, by region (2018–24)*

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Erbil *	3 179	3 433	3 780	4 287	17 634	24 109	24 651
Sulaymaniyah and Halabja	2 433	2 728	2 676	2 814	3 528	3 349	1 935
Duhok	9 070	694	930	892	882	749	819
Soran *						40	15
TOTAL	**14 682**	**6 855**	**7 386**	**7 993**	**22 044**	**28 247**	**27 420**

▶ *Table 6: Employers registered in private social security in Federal Iraq (2021–24)*

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nineveh	2 073	2 462	2 939	3 477
Kirkuk	5 746	5 876	6 097	6 606
Diyala	2 735	2 896	3 110	3 938
Anbar	3 165	3 383	3 711	4 123
Baghdad	32 248	33 765	35 544	30 193
Babil	3 258	3 543	3 978	4 860
Karbala	3 053	3 476	3 868	4 557
Wasit	2 384	2 469	2 593	2 888
Salah al-Din	3 381	3 856	4 459	4 903
Najaf	4 347	4 695	5 034	6 195
Al Qadisiyah	2 329	2 392	2 493	2 791
Muthanna	1 349	1 378	1 499	1 678
Dhi Qar	3 743	4 135	4 502	4 853
Maysan	1 315	1 346	1 725	2 308
Basra	7 035	7 822	8 642	9 593
TOTAL	**78 161**	**83 494**	**90 194**	**92 963**

▶ *Table 7: Employers registered in private social security in the KRI, by region (2018–24)*

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Erbil*	10 681	11 508	13 542	16 532	18 405	22 380	24 701
Sulaymaniyah	10 806	11 399	11 810	12 507	14 858	16 806	18 657
Duhok	6 738	7107	7 746	8 625	8 624	8 861	9 546
Soran*						325	542
Total	**28 225**	**30 014**	**33 098**	**37 664**	**41 887**	**48 372**	**53 446**

▶ *Table 8: Old-age pensioners in Federal Iraq's Social Security Administration (2021–24)*

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nineveh	667	651	728	699
Kirkuk	305	296	331	359
Diyala	155	173	199	197
Anbar	37	42	46	54
Baghdad	5 799	5 884	6 220	6 127
Babil	193	210	241	250
Karbala	198	207	221	230
Wasit	222	240	262	276
Salah al-Din	43	41	42	38
Najaf	84	89	121	130
Al Qadisiyah	35	49	56	56
Muthanna	15	23	25	28
Dhi Qar	44	45	57	63
Maysan	20	19	23	22
Basra	465	493	578	598
Dahuk	20	20	16	17
Erbil	21	16	2	8
Sulaymaniyah	4	4	2	2

▶ *Table 9: Old-age pensioners in the KRI's Social Security Administration (2018–24)*

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Erbil*	332	346	350	390	419	439	445
Sulaymaniyah	243	248	250	278	291	307	320
Duhok	154	173	170	177	171	179	188
Soran*						1	1
Total	**729**	**767**	**770**	**845**	**881**	**926**	**954**

▶ *Table 10: Disability pensioners under Federal Iraq's Social Security Administration (2021–24)*

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Nineveh	122	118	120	123
Kirkuk	52	42	47	40
Diyala	51	49	55	54
Anbar	8	9	13	13
Baghdad	700	683	678	622
Babil	70	76	77	75
Karbala	54	57	57	58
Wasit	47	52	53	53
Salah al-Din	10	14	12	12
Najaf	200	230	253	266
Al Qadisiyah	200	286	350	366
Muthanna	15	14	16	19
Dhi Qar	46	52	55	57
Maysan	21	18	18	17
Basra	102	95	104	113
Dohuk	3	1	0	0
Erbil	3	3	1	2
Sulaymaniyah	3	2	2	2

▶ *Table 11: Effective coverage in private social security, 2021–24 (percentage)*

Governorate	2021	2022	2023	2024
Duhok	12.46	12.87	14.07	15.59
Nineveh	1.48	1.66	2.02	2.67
Sulaymaniyah and Halabja	10.76	12.05	12.69	13.29
Kirkuk	9.56	10.25	11.57	18.45
Erbil	11.27	20.00	27.47	31.27
Diyala	3.20	3.46	3.80	4.66
Anbar	4.35	5.37	7.57	7.70
Baghdad	7.45	8.27	9.48	14.96
Babil	3.90	5.48	7.44	10.29
Karbala	6.89	9.21	13.54	11.43
Wasit	7.34	6.89	6.98	7.76
Salah al-Din	3.30	5.00	5.35	6.04
Najaf	8.73	10.42	11.36	13.96
Al Qadisiyah	2.47	2.63	2.68	3.28
Muthanna	4.00	5.21	5.92	7.09
Dhi Qar	11.54	13.53	15.65	15.96
Maysan	5.61	5.65	8.08	11.84
Basra	9.28	11.27	12.89	15.82
Total all Iraq	6.97	8.43	9.99	12.65

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