

## **Demographic and Sociological Transformations in Iraqi Society After 2003: Kirkuk City as a Model**

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**Abstract:** This study addresses the demographic transformations that Iraq has undergone since 2003 and their profound impact on the country's social, economic, and political structures. Following the U.S. occupation, Iraq experienced significant changes in its population structure due to migration, displacement, high population growth rates, and an increasing proportion of youth. These transformations were accompanied by various challenges, including unemployment, the spread of informal housing (slums), the deterioration of education and healthcare systems, and the weakening of family structures. Additionally, these changes contributed to the destabilization of social security and the rise of sectarian conflicts.

The research explores the concept of demographic transformation, the underlying causes of these changes in Iraq, and their impact on social values, family structures, and the labor market. It also examines key indicators of this transformation, such as population pressure, migration, unemployment, and declining fertility rates.

The study concludes that Iraq is currently undergoing a critical phase that could potentially allow it to benefit from a “demographic dividend” — provided that balanced population policies are implemented, infrastructure is improved, migration is managed effectively, and the role of demographic and social research institutions is strengthened.

**Keywords:** Transformations, Demographic, Sociological, Iraqi Society.

### **Introduction:**

To begin with, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of demographic change. It refers to the transformation from one state to another, or the transformation that occurs within a system or structure. In this sense, it is considered one of the social sciences concerned with the issues, problems, and transformations of human societies. It specifically deals with population matters, the factors influencing their growth, and their qualitative and quantitative balance. Its concepts are influenced by the economic, social, and political changes experienced by contemporary human societies. It also involves measuring certain population characteristics, such as population size and their distribution according to occupation, industry, settlement patterns, and political, religious, and ethnic affiliation.

After the 2003 occupation, Iraqi society experienced a structural and functional imbalance that the accompanying political process failed to comprehend. As a result, society became divided in its stances and reactions toward many events and situations. The rules established by the occupying authority were incapable of understanding and absorbing the nature of Iraqi society. From another perspective, some argue that the occupying forces were the main actor responsible for generating this division, which began with society's social position toward the occupation—ranging from welcoming to silent to rejecting. This was followed by the political structure established by the occupation, particularly the Governing Council, which distributed power on a vertical basis; that is, by viewing

Iraqi society as a collection of components whose political representation must reflect these components, without considering even the simplest prerequisites of building a modern state.

This approach later led to a zero-sum political dynamic among political actors, founded primarily on the concept of “components,” a misleading notion through which certain political elites managed to dominate representation by fueling sectarian and ethnic tensions. These tensions became the main driver of political polarization and a gateway to social violence, as well as the ideal cover for corruption. In Iraq, corruption evolved from a phenomenon into a solid structure—an entrenched institution whose power and influence cannot be confronted now or in the foreseeable future. Astonishingly, this institution, in its formal structure, is arguably the only entity that transcends identities, ethnicities, and sects. It has formed a coherent and interconnected network whose members support one another in a collaborative manner, making it, at face value, the only “national” institution—yet it remains the most destructive to Iraq, its society, and its wealth.

### **\*First Section**

#### **The Methodological Framework of the Study\*\***

##### **First: Importance of the Study**

The importance of this study lies in clarifying the nature of demographic change in general, and specifically the demographic transformation that occurred in Iraq during the American occupation in 2003. This occupation resulted in sectarian and ethnic demographic shifts that tore apart the social fabric of Iraqi society. The study seeks to explain these changes along with their causes and consequences.

##### **Second: Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to examine the demographic change that took place in Iraq after 2003, and to clarify the reasons and objectives behind this transformation, as well as the outcomes that resulted from it.

##### **Third: Problem of the Study**

The study addresses a major issue affecting Iraqi society, namely the demographic change represented by the significant increase in population, which has been accompanied by major consequences such as the lack of material resources to accommodate this growth. In addition to this, there has been forced demographic change based on ethnic, religious, sectarian, and regional foundations.

The core research problem can be expressed through the following question:

Is there alignment between the demographic changes that have occurred and the material capabilities available to confront these changes? And what are the outcomes of these changes?

##### **Fourth: Methodology of the Study**

The analytical method was adopted in this research, based on the information, data, and literature presented.

##### **Fifth: Structure of the Study**

This study is divided into two main sections. The first section presents the methodological framework, which includes the research methodology, key concepts, terminology, and previous studies. The second section represents the theoretical framework, while the third section includes the field aspect of the study along with conclusions and recommendations.

##### **Sixth: Previous Studies**

Study titled: Demographic Transition and Social Variables in Iraq

Researcher: Professor Dr. Adnan Yassin Mustafa

This study focused on issues related to demographic transition in Iraq and the implications of this transition on social stability and the progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly those related to health, nutrition, education, and equality. It also examined the relationship

between demographic transition and the expansion of decent work opportunities, poverty alleviation, and addressing environmental challenges.

The paper further analyzed manifestations of development gaps and inequalities in access to social and economic rights, especially disparities at the geographical and gender levels, including the right to health, education, and social protection—rights guaranteed by Iraq's new constitution.

The findings highlighted the necessity of bridging the gap between reality and the aspirations of the population, as well as the state's objectives in ensuring a dignified standard of living. The data emphasized the importance of awareness and monitoring of reproductive indicators, as they are key variables linked to fertility and mortality levels. A sound understanding of these indicators contributes to designing effective employment, health, and social policies.

In addition to demographic conditions, the study attempted to shed light on various social challenges such as unemployment, poverty, inequality, marginalization of certain population groups, and the lack of special attention to youth—arguing that these issues reflect the absence of a sound and coherent population policy.

## **2. Study Titled: The Theory of Demographic Transition**

Researcher: Fadwa Imad Al-Din Abdel-Azim

This study examined the relationship between the theory of demographic transition and the variables of birth rates, death rates, and migration. It explains that the populations of the world, in their demographic transition, can be divided into three groups:

First Group: Countries whose population growth rate has declined to a very low level, leading to a decrease in population. This group includes European countries and the United States.

Second Group: Countries where birth and death rates have begun to decline, but the decline in birth rates is much slower than that of death rates. This situation resembles that of the first group around fifty years ago and includes countries such as Italy, Spain, and the Soviet population in Central Europe.

Third Group: Countries characterized by high birth and death rates, with no demographic change occurring. These represent the remaining countries of the world and contain approximately 70–75% of the global population.

The theory of demographic transition provides a reasonable explanation for the relationship between population problems and issues of economic and social development. There is a link between rising birth rates, natural population increase, and population growth, all of which affect social and economic development programs. The conditions, dynamics, and drivers of social and economic development vary significantly from one country to another. Consequently, the reality, stages, and speed of demographic transition will also vary accordingly.

Currently, there is a widespread belief that developing countries have entered a stage of demographic transition, as fertility rates have declined rapidly due to the success of development programs in these countries. This can be observed in the newly industrialized nations.

### **Concepts and Terminology**

#### **First: The Concept of Transformations**

Ibn Khaldun presented a perspective on transformation that relates to the changes experienced by the societies of his time—specifically, the transition from nomadic life to urbanization, state formation, the dominance of ruling families, and the behavior of subjects toward their rulers. He also addressed the shift from tribal solidarity ('asabiyya) to the solidarity of ruling dynasties, as well as the transformation of social and cultural aspects of life in each stage of a state's development. Accordingly, the priorities of the state change at each stage in line with the goals it seeks to achieve.

Transformation also occurs as a result of differences concerning acceptable modes of life. These differences may emerge due to changes in geographical conditions, cultural capabilities, population composition, ideology, or through diffusion and innovation within the group.

The concept of social transformation goes beyond mere change in its quantitative and qualitative aspects; it represents a qualitative state that reflects profound shifts in the fundamental relationships among the components and levels of the social structure within human societies, as well as the relationships between these societies. Transformation is characterized by relative comprehensiveness and speed. Social transformation differs from the slow and intermittent changes that marked earlier eras; it is a rapid form of change that occurs frequently or continuously. Thus, transformation is linked to change depending on the degree of diffusion—if a change becomes widespread, its outcomes will appear broadly as well. However, transformation is neither temporary nor necessarily linked to crises; rather, it consists of intertwined and complex changes that occur sequentially, usually followed by relatively calm periods. Its effects do not cease completely but are marked by regional and global extension. (Abdulhadi, 1983)

## **Second: The Concept of Demography**

The term demography originates from Greek and is composed of two words:

demos meaning “people” or “population,” and

graphein meaning “to record, write, or describe.”

Thus, the literal meaning of the term is “description of the population” or the descriptive study of populations. The credit for coining the term demography goes to the French botanist Achille Guillard (1799–1876), who defined demography in 1855 in his book *Elements of Human Statistics or Comparative Demography* as “the natural and social history of the human race, or the mathematical knowledge of populations, their general movements, natural conditions, civil status, and intellectual and moral characteristics.” (Saleh al-Din Naqeeb)

## **Third: The Concept of Variables**

The term “variables” is derived from the word “change,” which refers to new conditions that arise within social life and its systems. Variables in the social environment refer to all effects resulting from human actions—whether psychological, material, or cultural—which motivate society to preserve its systems by regulating individuals’ behavior (Saad Abdel Qader, 2017).

Variables also represent a set of interrelated and diverse factors connected to individual formation, referring to influences affecting a person’s life and environment. These include age, education, occupation, marital status, number of children, and the socio-economic level of the family. They also encompass individuals’ level of awareness regarding social variables and their impact on participation within society and the environment. (Atif Ghaith, 1980).

## **Section Two**

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Study**

#### **(Demographic Transformations – Sociological Variables – Transformations in Family Structure – Indicators of Demographic Change – The Case of Kirkuk City)**

To begin with, it is necessary to understand the meaning of demographic change, which refers to the transformation from one state to another, specifically the transformation that affects the structure or organization of society. Demography is one of the social sciences concerned with the issues, challenges, and transformations of human societies. It deals with population matters, the factors influencing their growth, and their quantitative and spatial distribution. Its concepts are shaped by economic, social, and political transformations and are used to measure specific population characteristics, such as population size and distribution according to occupation, industry, settlement, and political, cultural, and ethnic affiliation.

The ongoing demographic transformation—particularly in Arab countries, including Iraq—is characterized by high growth rates among the working-age population, accompanied by a relative decline in dependent age groups (children and the elderly). This demographic dynamic is pushing Iraq toward a complex phase of demographic transitions.

## **1. Demographic Transformations**

No study addressing the stability, recovery, and development of Iraq fails to emphasize the cultural heritage and diverse societal structure of the country. One of the most urgent and critical challenges Iraq must address is finding effective and practical solutions to competing interests in order to achieve social stability.

Over the past four decades, Iraq has experienced a series of crises involving violence and tension. These crises have led to large-scale population movements and actual segregation in certain areas, resulting in a demographic restructuring of several regions of the country. Smaller minority groups, in particular, have suffered significant challenges, with estimates indicating that a large portion of these minorities has been forced to leave Iraq since 2003. This reality also applies to some of the larger minority groups. (Adnan Yassin, 2022)

Regarding the challenges Iraq faces in terms of stability, security, reconciliation, and development, the World Bank's Systematic Country Diagnostic differs somewhat in its figures but summarizes the current impact of ethnic and sectarian pressures as follows:

“There are no reliable demographic statistics in Iraq. No complete national census has been conducted since 1987, and the 1997 census did not include the three Kurdish governorates. According to government statistics from 2010, however, of Iraq's 35 million inhabitants, 97% are Muslims, and Kurds constitute between 15–20% of the total population.”

There are several challenges that significantly affect Iraq's demographic landscape, including:

### **1 – Population Pressure**

Iraq is characterized by its vast geographic areas, with an annual population growth rate estimated at approximately 2.5%. The demographic structure, population pressure, and the resulting changes in the social and economic fabric form the basis of numerous challenges facing the country. Moreover, the age structure is predominantly young, with individuals under the age of 30 constituting a very large proportion of the population.

Population pressure affects Iraq's demographic structure in several ways, including:

#### **a. Population Distribution and Urban Expansion**

Major cities such as Baghdad and Basra receive large numbers of migrants, particularly from rural areas, in search of employment or housing. This expansion or movement has numerous negative consequences, including the spread of informal settlements, cultural incompatibility, rising crime rates, and severe population congestion.

On the other hand, the out-migrating areas—mainly rural regions—are also impacted by this migration. Most rural inhabitants work in agriculture, and the departure of the majority of the rural population affects agricultural labor availability. The importance of agriculture for societal well-being and economic vitality is well recognized.

#### **b. Pressure on Services and Infrastructure**

Population increases in areas that attract migrants lead to strain on essential services such as education, healthcare, water, and electricity. (Ministry of Planning, 2017).

#### **c. Unemployment and Economic Challenges**

The increase in the labor force places additional pressure on the job market, which may lead to a rise in unemployment levels. Furthermore, population growth contributes to higher living costs due to increases in housing prices and the prices of consumer food products.



#### d. Security and Public Health Problems

The expansion of the population is often accompanied by security challenges and health-related issues, including environmental pollution and the spread of informal settlements that frequently serve as havens for crimes, criminals, drug addicts, and traffickers.

Additionally, out-migrating rural areas suffer from declining agricultural activity, which reduces vegetation cover and contributes to desertification—ultimately resulting in environmental pollution. (Ministry of Planning, 2017).

### **2– Employment and Unemployment**

The Iraqi labor market continues to suffer from high unemployment rates despite ongoing efforts, particularly among youth and females in the age group (15–29). These rates vary across governorates and are notably higher among university graduates. Accurate statistics on employment and unemployment remain limited, especially within the informal labor sector. (Mahmoud Badr, 2012)

Although the government has provided many jobs in state-owned industries and institutions, many Iraqis have been forced to seek employment that offers only minimal income, with extremely low net productivity. This has resulted in rising levels of disguised unemployment. Notably, youth unemployment averages around 30%. However, as is the case in many developing countries, employment is no longer a reliable indicator of public satisfaction, productivity, or even economic security, as a portion of the population may have access to work that offers little real benefit.

It is clear that Iraq's age distribution not only creates a constant and significant need for new employment opportunities but also yields a dependency ratio exceeding 78%. Supporting those who are not economically active places a substantial burden on the current workforce. Moreover, rapid social change has pushed many Iraqis to alter their occupations and geographic locations. Population pressures, in combination with the forces of war, have driven various ethnic and sectarian groups into new alliances and vastly different social and economic conditions. (Adnan Yassin, 2018).

In November 2016, ESCWA published a study titled “Survey of Economic and Social Developments in the Arab Region 2015–2016.” The study highlighted the broader economic and social costs of conflict and unrest in the Middle East and North Africa. The transformations that began in Arab countries in 2011—known collectively as the Arab Spring—resulted in instability and, in some cases, war. The negative effects were felt not only in countries directly affected by armed violence, such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, but also in neighboring countries.

The study concluded that compared with pre-2011 projections, conflicts in the region resulted in economic losses amounting to \$613.8 billion, and a fiscal deficit of \$243.1 billion. These conflicts further deteriorated other economic and social indicators such as unemployment, corruption, education, and poverty. The displacement and refugee crises imposed heavy burdens on communities whose residents.

### **3 – Migration**

After 2003, Iraq witnessed a severe escalation of internal displacement and forced migration as a result of sectarian violence and armed conflict, especially between 2006 and 2008. Reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicate that more than 2.7 million Iraqis were displaced internally. (UNHCR, 2008)

Migration affects the size, distribution, and demographic structure of populations. Areas that attract migrants experience population increases, while areas from which migrants depart experience population decline.

The impact of migration on population structure is clearly reflected in the population pyramid, which shows variations in age and sex composition in both receiving and sending areas. Since most migrants are males in middle age groups, receiving areas experience an unusual increase in the number of males in these age categories, resulting in abnormally high sex ratios. The opposite is found in sending areas.

Iraq, since the early 1950s, has experienced successive waves of internal migration driven by rural push factors and urban pull factors, most of which have had negative consequences. These waves have had noticeable effects on all aspects of life—demographic, social, economic, and cultural.

Beginning in the early 1980s, with the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War, migration from border areas increased significantly. This was followed by further internal and external migration due to the Second Gulf War in 1990, the economic sanctions, and subsequent military operations. After the 2003 occupation, Iraq experienced widespread forced displacement following the bombing of the al-Askari Shrine in Samarra in 2006, affecting many regions, especially the capital, Baghdad. There were also waves of international migration, particularly to neighboring countries such as Syria and Jordan.

One of the most severe population movements occurred after terrorist organizations seized more than one-third of Iraq's territory in 2014, displacing over five million people, affecting all population groups—especially youth and vulnerable groups—and resulting in significant negative impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Demographic indicators show the increasing and persistent effects of this displacement on all aspects of life, particularly in conflict-affected areas. (Nadia Sabah, 2011).

## **2- Sociological Variables**

The demographic changes that have occurred in Iraqi society have profoundly affected family structure and the social fabric, generating a range of social problems, including:

### **1. Family Disintegration and Weakening of Family Structure**

Due to migration and displacement, families have been separated or geographically fragmented, leading to the weakening of family cohesion. Furthermore, the transition of households from rural to urban environments has contributed to changes in traditional family values and norms.

### **2. Transformation in Social Values**

This is evident in the decline of solidarity, intermarriage networks, and tribal cohesion. Population movements have produced a social phenomenon characterized by a lack of trust and diminished respect toward displaced families, given that Iraqi society is inherently tribal. Individuals derive identity and social standing from their tribal affiliation, and marriage typically occurs within the tribe or among neighboring tribes with strong social presence. Displaced families, having been uprooted from their tribal environments, often lack communal support, making them more vulnerable socially. Moreover, individuals have adopted new individualistic values influenced by urbanization and globalization.

### **3. Education and Academic Attainment**

Demographic shifts have affected school enrollment rates, particularly in areas receiving displaced populations. These shifts have also influenced the quality of education and student behavior.

### **5. Public Health and Health Behaviors**

Population increases and migration have placed pressure on healthcare services. New patterns of health behavior and diseases have emerged, often linked to the new environments in which displaced populations reside.

### **6. Community Conflicts and Identity-Based Divisions**

In contexts of sectarian or ethnic displacement, demographic shifts may foster sectarian or racial conflict, contributing to social fragmentation. Changes in population composition may elevate social tensions or conflicts.

### **7. Changing Roles of Women and Youth**

These transformations have increased women's participation in the labor market and in supporting their households. Youth have also assumed more prominent roles in social and political change.

## 8. Shifts in Consumption Patterns and Daily Behavior

Population movements to new environments with different cultural habits, combined with economic and technological pressures associated with migration and displacement, have reshaped daily consumption and behavioral patterns.

(Adnan Yassin, 2022).

## 3- Transformations in Family Structure

### 1. Decline of the Extended Family and Rise of the Nuclear Family

Due to displacement and migration, the prominence of the extended family has diminished, while the nuclear family has become more central. The roles of specific social groups—such as women and the elderly—have weakened in public life.

(Al-Aani, 2015)

### 2. Social Fragmentation and Rising Conflicts

Sectarian conflict and political divisions have fractured the social fabric, leading to the emergence of hate speech and violence.

Source: Iraqi Center for Strategic Studies, Report on Social Conflicts, 2012

### 3. Value and Cultural Transformations

Iraqi society has witnessed a shift in its value system, characterized by rising individualism and the decline of traditional values, alongside the spread of consumerist values and the growing influence of media and social networks.

### Third: The Impact of These Transformations on Social Security

Demographic and social transformations have contributed to creating a socially and economically fragile environment, marked by rising poverty, unemployment, crime rates, and negative social behaviors in certain areas.

(UNDP, 2014).

## 4- Indicators of Demographic Transformation

### 1. Rapid Population Growth

Iraq's population increased from about 26 million in 2003 to over 43 million in 2024. The population growth rate has remained high due to elevated fertility rates, despite economic and security challenges.

### 2. Internal and External Migration and Displacement

After 2003—especially during the sectarian conflict (2006–2008) and following the emergence of ISIS in 2014—millions of Iraqis were internally displaced. Hundreds of thousands also migrated abroad (to Europe, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon). These movements disrupted population distribution, concentrating people in more secure regions such as the Kurdistan Region.

### 3. Demographic Imbalances in Some Governorates

Population composition shifted markedly in governorates such as Baghdad, Diyala, and Nineveh due to sectarian and ethnic displacement.

### 4. Gradual Decline in Fertility Rates

Although fertility remains relatively high, it has begun to decline with improved education and increased female labor-force participation.

In Iraq, total fertility declined from 5.7 births in 1997 to 4.3 births in 2006.



Despite this decline, fertility levels remain higher than those of countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco, and exceed the global average by approximately 65%. Iraq is still considered a high-fertility country, although the rate has shown a downward trend between 1997 and 2006.

#### 5. High Proportion of Youth

Over 60% of Iraq's population is under the age of 25, which presents a demographic opportunity but also poses challenges related to employment and education.

#### 6. Changes in Housing Patterns and Urbanization

Urban expansion has intensified, largely in the form of informal settlements due to rural-to-urban migration. Baghdad and Basra have seen a significant increase in informal housing areas.

#### 7. Feminization of Poverty and Rising Numbers of Widows and Orphans

Wars and terrorism have significantly increased the numbers of widows and orphans. As a result, the proportion of female-headed households has risen, particularly in conflict-affected areas.

#### 8. Shifts in Ethnic and Religious Composition

The forced displacement of minorities such as Yazidis and Christians—particularly after ISIS's control of their areas—has reduced demographic diversity in historical regions such as the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar.

#### 9. Increased Educational Attainment and Declining Illiteracy

Despite persistent challenges, literacy rates have improved and school enrollment has increased, especially among females.

#### 10. Changes in Social Roles

Economic and political crises have reshaped family and social roles, contributing to delayed marriage, rising divorce rates, and the weakening of the extended family system. (Yasmeen Khudhur, 2022).

### **Case Study: The City of Kirkuk**

#### **First: Demographic Impacts**

##### **1. Population Redistribution**

Following the fall of the former regime, waves of return migration occurred among Kurds who had been displaced during earlier Arabization policies.

Conversely, some Arab and Turkmen families migrated or were displaced due to political and security tensions.

These dynamics reshaped the demographic balance of the city and revived debates concerning “majority–minority” configurations within Kirkuk.

##### **2. Internal Displacement and Influx of Migrants**

The security conditions between 2005 and 2017 resulted in major demographic transformations across Iraq, including Kirkuk.

The city received large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from governorates affected by terrorist operations until 2017.

This influx disrupted the city's public order, led to the spread of informal settlements and encroachments on state-owned land, and produced unregulated population growth that significantly increased pressure on infrastructure and public services.

##### **3. Age-Structure Transformations**

Conflicts and the intensification of identity politics—where various groups sought to assert dominance through demographic majority—altered the city's age composition.

Kirkuk's population became increasingly youthful due to high fertility rates among certain groups. This shift contributed to rising youth unemployment and created conditions conducive to social unrest.

## **Second: Sociological Impacts**

### **1. Ethnic Diversity and Identity Politics**

Kirkuk is a mosaic city inhabited by Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, and Assyrians.

After 2003, identity politics intensified, replacing a unified national identity with competing ethnopolitical claims.

This heightened polarization led to conflicts over land ownership, administrative positions, and the distribution of oil wealth.

### **2. Transformations in Social Structures**

These demographic and political dynamics weakened traditional social networks—such as tribal structures, neighborhood ties, and occupational solidarity—due to persistent political conflicts.

Parallel to this, new networks emerged based on partisan or sectarian affiliation rather than traditional community bonds.

### **3. Socioeconomic Transformations**

Unemployment and poverty increased as a result of instability and the state's limited capacity to manage and equitably distribute Kirkuk's oil resources.

These economic pressures were reflected socially through rising crime rates, increased emigration, and the expansion of the informal economy.

### **4. Social Security and Community Cohesion**

Intergroup tensions undermined community security, making “fear of the other” a defining feature of everyday life.

Mutual trust between social groups declined, and tendencies toward ethnic and sectarian isolation intensified.

### **5. Culture and Collective Consciousness**

Ethnic and sectarian divisions led to the rise of nationalist and ethnocentric discourse at the expense of civic and national narratives.

Core civic values—such as coexistence and citizenship—were weakened, while narrow identity-based loyalties and political polarization grew stronger.

## **Third: Long-Term Consequences**

These transformations have long-term implications for Kirkuk, including:

The continuous and unstable reshaping of the city's demographic landscape.

Entrenchment of social and political divisions rather than integration.

Weakening of development efforts, as economic and urban projects are often entangled in debates over the city's ownership and administrative identity.

Ultimately, these dynamics contribute to brain drain and youth migration, gradually depriving the city of its human capital and productive capacity.

## **Conclusions:**

- 1. The trends in demographic transition and changes in the age structure of Iraq's population—**specifically the movement of individuals from the “under 15 years” category into the working-age group, along with a slight increase in the elderly population—indicate that Iraq will soon enter the

phase of the **demographic dividend** (the opening of the demographic window) within the next few years.

2. **The demographic dividend is a temporary phenomenon**, typically lasting about one generation. International experiences demonstrate that it represents a developmental opportunity capable of accelerating economic growth, advancing development processes, increasing employment rates, and contributing to the reduction of unemployment and poverty.
3. **Iraq faces a critical and sensitive path in the coming years** regarding the activation of population, educational, service, and health policies. This includes culturally and behaviorally guiding society toward maintaining current trends of reducing infant and under-five mortality rates, as well as lowering total fertility rates to levels closer to the optimal threshold for fully opening the demographic window.
4. **Limited employment opportunities and current unemployment rates**—despite their gradual decline in recent years—along with the weak role of the domestic and foreign private sector and inadequate investment and savings policies, constitute major challenges that Iraq must address to effectively capitalize on the demographic dividend in the coming years.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. **Adopt balanced population policies:**

The government should develop a national population strategy that considers population growth, geographic distribution, and age composition in order to ensure sustainable development.

2. **Improve the management of displacement and return:**

Support voluntary return programs for displaced persons, compensate those affected, reintegrate them into their original communities, and provide essential services and infrastructure.

3. **Promote demographic balance in cities:**

Address unbalanced demographic shifts caused by displacement and migration through equitable housing policies and comprehensive development projects in affected areas.

4. **Support minorities and safeguard demographic diversity:**

Protect the rights of religious and ethnic minorities affected after 2003 and implement measures to ensure their voluntary return to their areas of origin.

5. **Reform the educational and health systems in line with population structure:**

Develop educational and health infrastructure in areas with high population density—particularly youth—to meet developmental needs.

6. **Activate the role of population and social research centers:**

Support research and studies on demographic transformations and establish accurate databases to inform evidence-based policymaking.

7. **Promote family planning and population awareness programs:**

Especially in rural areas, to achieve a balance between population growth and available economic and service capabilities.

8. **Reduce external migration and encourage talent retention:**

Implement programs to attract skilled migrants and improve the political and economic environment in Iraq to mitigate negative migration trends.

9. **Redesign urban planning based on scientific principles:**

To accommodate population growth, regulate urban expansion, and address informal settlement issues.

#### 10. Engage civil society in monitoring demographic phenomena:

Through community initiatives aimed at raising awareness and contributing to solutions—particularly concerning displacement and social cohesion.

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