



annd

Arab NGO Network for Development
شبكة المنظمات العربية غير الحكومية للتنمية

UNDEF
The United Nations
Democracy Fund



FNUD
Fonds des
Nations Unies
pour la démocratie

Human and Social Development and the Sustainable Development Goals Challenges and Opportunities

Iraq

Human and Social Development and the Sustainable Development Goals in Iraq

Challenges and Opportunities

Prof. Adnan Yasin Mustafa PhD.

Professor of Development Sociology/ University of Baghdad

This paper was presented at a workshop organized by Tammuz Organization for Social Development (TOSD) on 10/11/2021.

■ Foreword

Like several other countries in crisis, Iraq has been at a critical crossroads for over three decades (specifically since the second Gulf War in 1990), curbing its chances of maintaining humanitarian security and social and economic stability, providing public services, ensuring people's welfare, safeguarding justice and equity, and providing opportunities for integration and social development. This comes after the entire Iraqi society fell victim to serious breaches and violations, threatening the livelihoods of many, aggravating deprivation, and undermining the ability to fulfil people's needs for a better life and ensure access to comprehensive and coordinated human development.

Undoubtedly, the path towards comprehensive sustainable development in Iraq is still thorny, given many challenges it faces, and some of which could naturally impede Iraq's efforts to enhance the quality of life (a more just, sustainable, and developed people). However, inequality rates remain concerningly high despite several national and local initiatives. Recent surveys and studies revealed that inequality rates in Iraq have soared over the past two decades, despite improvements in income distribution. Similarly, inequality and disparity in income and wealth have increasingly become interconnected and interdependent, as such disparities and gaps have widened between the Kurdistan Region and the Centre, not to mention the tangible gaps between urban and

rural development, among governorates, and between males and females. The most stable governorates offered the best living conditions, which enabled them to benefit from the situation and new investment opportunities more swiftly. Southern governorates and regions that were highly exposed to terrorism lagged, in light of the major setbacks and obstacles they faced. These gaps continued to steadily increase, particularly after the double crisis in 2014 (the terrorist occupation of several governorates and the collapse of oil prices).

The aftermath of wars, sieges, and occupation have worsened, along with their repercussions on human security. From sharp declines in human development indices to environmental disasters, societal variables, and epidemics, this bleak situation has not only taken a toll on development, but also society, in terms of structure, civilization, identity, and resources. This manifested in a series of major events, coupled with several local and national humanitarian crises, and a plethora of political, economic, health, and social issues that have significantly undermined social cohesion in the country and therefore human security on the individual and social levels, including all segments and components of society.

The whole spectrum of Iraqi society has suffered from stark deprivation which has accumulated over several years and major incidents. Nonetheless, the dual crisis which struck the country, like many others around the world, during the first half of 2020 (i.e. the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic crisis), has heavily weighed on all aspects of life in Iraq and has threatened the fundamental elements of sustainable development. The economic and social crisis resulting from the pandemic, along with the collapse of oil prices have disrupted the economic life in the country, causing a decrease

in incomes and deterioration of public health (directly resulting in increased mortality rates and indirectly leading to a further increase in daily child mortality rates). Additionally, the country's infrastructure has deteriorated, developmental gaps have widened, and illiteracy and school dropout rates have increased, while services and infrastructure have also had their share of the fallout across all governorates. This was reflected both directly and indirectly on social conditions in general, including the increasing rates of domestic violence, divorce, crimes, and suicides which have not yet been fully documented. Thus, their indirect impacts on society's human security have not yet been calculated.

These issues have caused tensions and heightened unresolved social risks between people and technology, between people and their surrounding environment, and between those who have enough resources and those who do not. The tensions are effectively breeding a new generation of inequalities related to enhanced capacities now considered a necessity in 21st-century societies, as defined by the 2019 Human Development Report. However, responding to and mitigating crises and social risks as well as building resilience can determine how these tensions can be addressed and whether disparities in human development have decreased.

Data and field documentation on the situation reflect the severity of the development crisis, along with its daily unfolding repercussions. Not only have these challenges cast a shadow over the country's social landscape, but they have also aggravated the issues on the individual, household, and community levels. Violence, extremism, and terrorism have also been on the rise, including gender-based violence. This situation was only

exacerbated by the challenges brought about by the pandemic and economic crisis (the dual crisis) and the ensuing deprivation, poverty, and unemployment affecting many poor segments of society and preventing workers in the informal sector from performing their jobs. These factors have all conspired against the country's overall development, particularly exacerbating social risks. This calls for a careful examination of these issues and their repercussions, and set of recommendations and proposals that would benefit both policy- and decision-makers.

■ First: Human Development in Iraq: The Dilemma and the Constraints

Major challenges and decades of prolonged conflict, with overlapping causes and widespread effects, have all contributed to placing Iraq at the 120th position on human development indices in 2019. Fragile, conflict-ridden, and crisis-affected states usually face significant vulnerabilities, and are often less prepared or capable of achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs), while the international community makes strides towards drafting permanent constitutions, empowering state institutions, strengthening infrastructure, reducing deprivation, and fulfilling the requirements for building knowledge societies. For decades, Iraq has been plagued by conflict and complex crises, leaving structural impacts on both society and state institutions. As such, rapid actions are necessary to develop plans and set policies fostering opportunities for recovery and peace, uncovering the new potential for human development. This comes at a time when the government of Iraq has announced its commitment to achieving the SDGs by 2030.

This report looks into the possibility of adopting recovery policies to mitigate the impacts of the dual – health and economic - crisis, accelerate the achievement of human development goals, and alleviate poverty, while continuously assessing the human development process. Iraq is yet to recover from more than four years of conflict. The Iraqi scene is still fraught with dangers and considered among the least secure and stable environments around the world.

At the global level, Iraq ranked 113th out of 166 states on the 2020 Sustainable Development Index, with an Index score of 63.1, and 12th at the Arab level. The performance gap in achieving the

sustainable development goals between Iraq and Sweden, which ranked first globally with an Index score of 84.6, amounted to nearly 34.1%. Iraq still faces significant challenges in achieving 12 out of the 17 SDGs.

Iraq’s Human Development Indices and Indicators:

1. Human Development Index (HDI)

The pandemic revealed an unprecedented development crisis with human development rates declining for the first time since 1990, as shown in Figure (1).

Figure (1):
Change in HDI
Value, 1990-2020

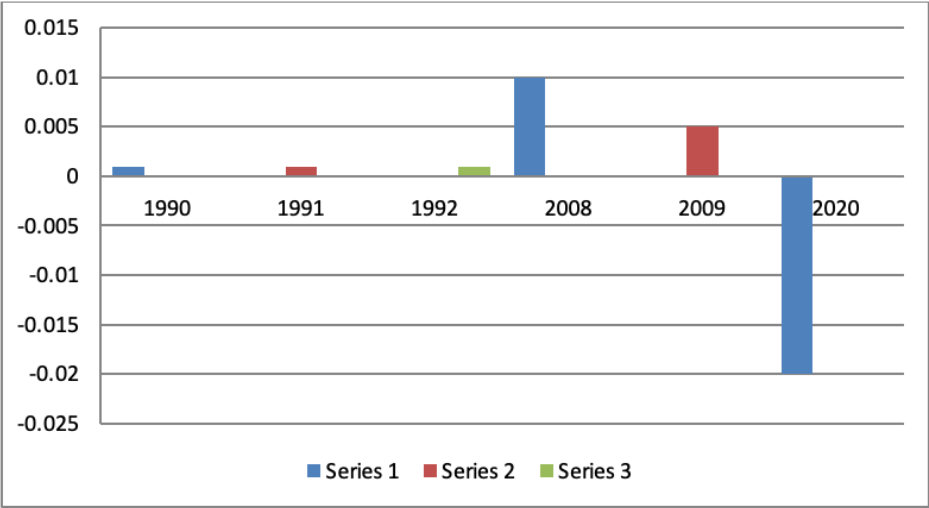
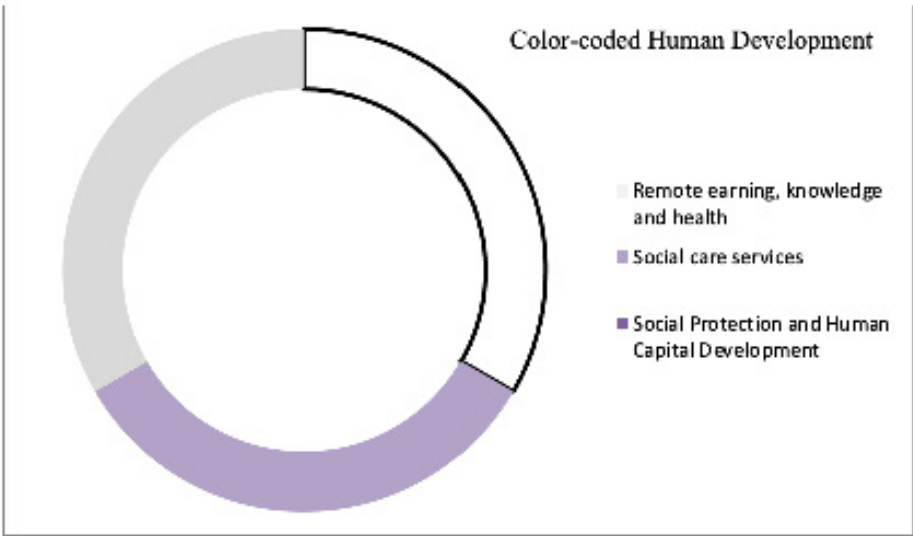


Figure (2):
Colour-Coded
Economy
from a Human
Development
Perspective



The pandemic is unleashing a crisis that affects human development in all its dimensions. Its current circumstances are similar to deprivation levels last recorded in the mid-1980s. This has taken a toll on all constitutive elements of human development: income (with the largest economic recession witnessed since the Great Depression); health (the pandemic is solely responsible for more than 1.5 million deaths around the world); and education (more than 60% of children in the world are not receiving an education since most of them lack internet access). These impacts have, in turn, indirectly affected the levels and types of violence, deepened inequalities, and heightened disparities in human development rates.

It is, therefore, safe to say that response plans, policies, and programs that aim to promote human development in Iraq have yielded no impact, as crises have only been exacerbated, and prolonged, widespread, and impactful epidemics have emerged and recurred. This has corroded the positive impact of development as well as the progress made towards achieving the SDGs. This economic-health crisis has curbed our aspirations for a better future.

Iraq is no different from other crisis-affected states in terms of human development. In light of the stark challenges and decades of conflict, with overlapping causes and widespread consequences, Iraq ranked 123rd out of 189 states in human development indices in 2020. This reveals that Iraq is yet to recover from over forty years of insecurity and economic instability and that the Iraqi environment is still fraught with risks and considered among the least secure and stable environments around the world. Adding to the economic crisis (i.e. the drop in global crude oil prices), the Covid-19 pandemic has undermined the quality and sustainability of life in Iraq, leaving a structural impact on individuals, societies, the economy, and state institutions. As a result, achievements made at the level of human

development were overshadowed, poverty rates soared along with multidimensional fragility, and social cohesion crumbled, as Iraq's rank fell by an Index value of 0.674, according to the global 2020 Human Development Report.

2. 2020 Sustainable Development Index

At the global level, Iraq ranked 113th out of 166 states in the 2020 Sustainable Development Index, with an Index score of 63.1, and 12th out of 18 states at the Arab level, as shown in Table (1).

Table (1): Arab States Rankings on the 2020 Sustainable Development Index

Country	(Rank (global level	(Rank (Arab level	Score
Algeria	56	1	72.9
Tunisia	63	2	71.4
Morocco	64	3	71.3
United Arab Emirates	71	4	70.3
Oman	76	5	69.7
Bahrain	82	6	68.8
Jordan	89	7	68.1
Lebanon	95	8	66.7
Saudi Arabia	97	9	65.8
Qatar	103	10	64.7
Kuwait	112	11	63.1
Iraq	113	12	63.1
Syria	126	13	59.3
Mauritania	130	14	57.7
Djibouti	138	15	54.7
Yemen	151	16	57.3
Sudan	159	17	49.6
Somalia	164	18	46.2

Source: The Sustainable Development Report 2020, P. 36.

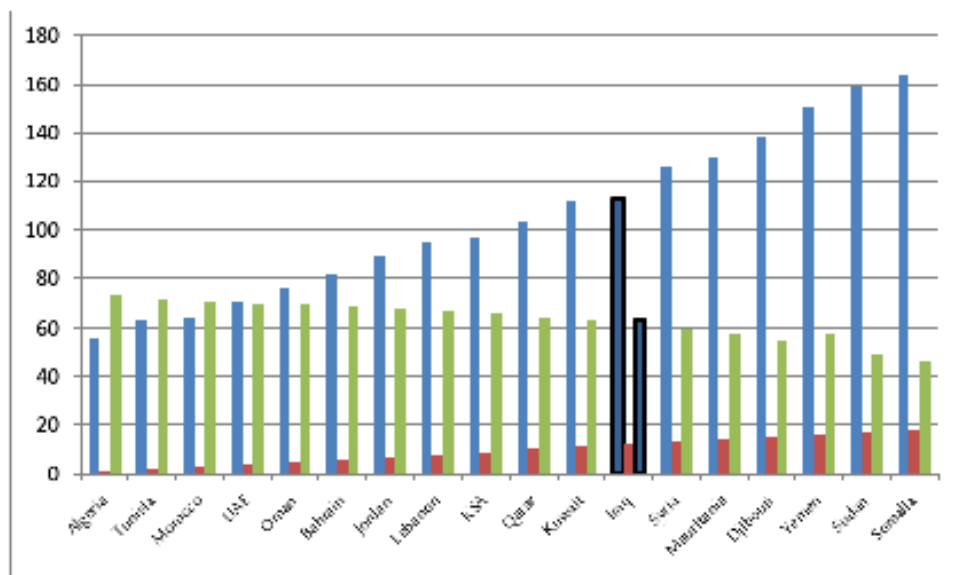


Figure (3): Ranking of Arab States in the 2020 Sustainable Development Index

The performance gap in achieving the SDGs between Iraq and Sweden, which ranked first globally with an Index score of 84.6, amounted to nearly 34.1%. Iraq still faces significant challenges in achieving 12 out of the 17 SDGs.

On the Arab level, the performance gap in achieving the SDGs between Iraq and Algeria, which ranked first among the Arab states with an Index score of 72.3, amounted to nearly 14.6%, as shown in the figure below.

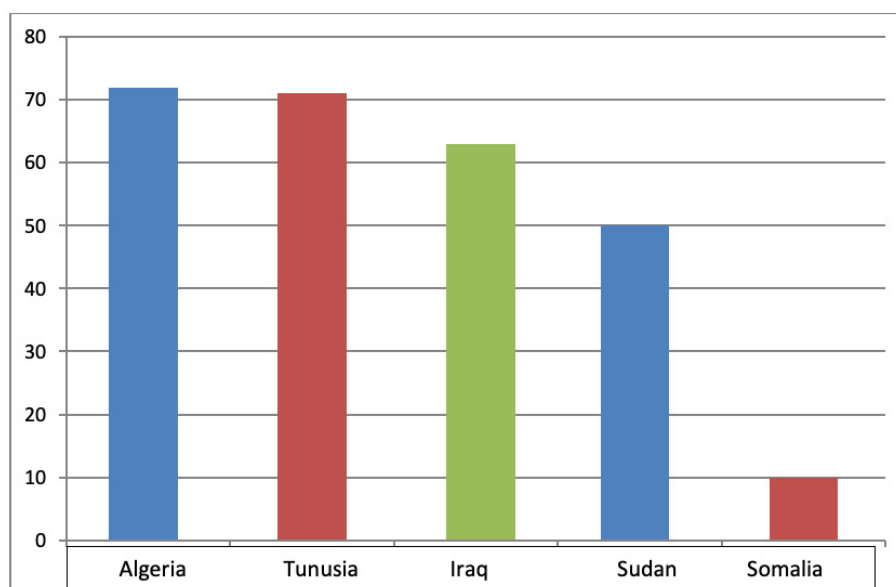


Figure (4) SDG Performance Gap, 2020

Overall, Arab states did not score high on the SDG index where the average Index score reached 58 out of 100 score points. Iraq, like other countries plagued by war, conflict, and disorder, lagged. Both Iraq and Syria scored a red rating on more than 10 SDGs according to the SDGs dashboard, which reveals that they were far from achieving these goals in 2019. With the outbreak of Covid-19, this decline not only persisted but also increased, which doubles the effort needed in the transformative recovery phase and emphasizes the need for support from regional and international partners to ensure that no one is left behind.

3. Life Quality Index

This index ranks countries based on the degree of "liveability" where citizens enjoy a higher life expectancy better health, social security under a cohesive and strong social structure, diverse economic opportunities, education for all, educational systems that respond to the needs of the labor market and meet the demand for skilled labor, competent law enforcement agencies, high prosperity and luxury, and a strong infrastructure that enables innovation and offers different "lifestyle" choices. At the level of Arab states, Iraq ranked 14th out of 19 states on the Life Quality Index for 2019.

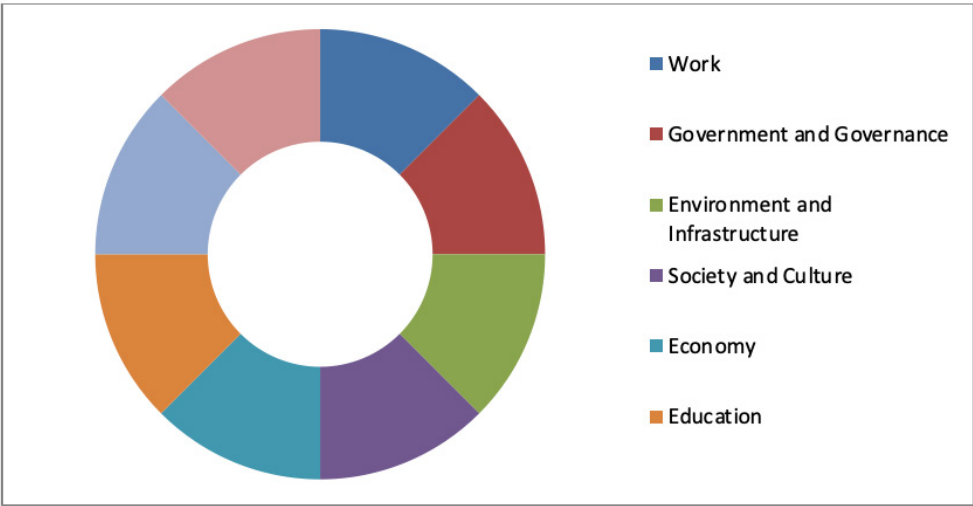


Figure (5): Life Quality Index, 2019

The impact of the pandemic is admittedly complex and affects us all. It has erased and risked decades of progress in combatting poverty and reducing elevated levels of inequality within and among countries. Moreover, the volatility, instability, and manipulation of markets, compounded by poor storage and lack of control over storage mechanisms, are now affecting the prices of food products, with food items allocated to the most vulnerable groups being particularly harmful. Unless effective measures are immediately put in place, the disruptions and ramifications brought about by the pandemic and the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus will further complicate the situation. This is particularly important, at least in the least developed countries, where the degree of complexity is compounded and the effects of the crisis are likely to be exacerbated by the scale and density of vulnerable populations, as well as the expansion of the informal sector.

■ Second: Covid-19 and the SDGs

The Covid-19 pandemic is perhaps notable for resulting in unprecedented events, as it evolved from a health shock into an economic and social crisis. Social distancing and the disruption of non-essential business have slowed human activities. In this context, the International Labour Organization (ILO) predicts that working hours will decrease in the second quarter of 2020 by an estimated equivalent of 195 million full-time workers¹.

Unlike other crises, the Covid-19 pandemic has shocked the employment in two main aspects: 1) a contraction in the demand for labor, as a result of reduced human activities and the impact of global recession on wealth; 2) a short-term decline in labor supply in light of the disruption of non-essential production activities in many countries². This decline in labor supply and increased unemployment calls for effective macroeconomic policies. However, the pandemic's fallout by far exceeds the typical decline in aggregate demand, and which is usually addressed by stimulating consumption and boosting economic activity. This is due to the public health policies adopted to curb the spread of Covid-19, which are primarily based on limiting human interaction which, in turn, reflects on the overall economic activity. In practice, several countries with high human development first suffered the health shock which then triggered responses based on strong health systems and supporting monetary and fiscal policies. On the other hand, developing economies that were affected by Covid-19 (with some exceptions such as China and Singapore) had delayed responses to the crisis. Nonetheless, the health crisis persists and developing countries are expected to remain heavily affected during

the rest of 2020³. The situation in some countries has been exacerbated by the economic collapse and growing uncertainty (including in health, food, and job security), under weak structural conditions that undermine their abilities to address the crisis.

These shocks struck a world wealthier than ever before, yet that suffers deep divides in human development, undermining countries' vulnerability to and preparedness for crises. While it is too early to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the consequences of Covid-19 on human development, it is possible to estimate the pandemic's likely effects on people's capacities using a modified version of the Human Development Index (HDI) which is more sensitive in measuring the pandemic's impact. This index retains the standard HDI aspects but adopts modified education indicators to reflect the outcomes of school closures and mitigation measures. In terms of capacities, what matters is whether students are engaged in educational activities, which rely on natural (physical) and virtual (internet-based) access to schools and learning resources. The modified index also uses International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections to determine the gross national income per capita for 2020. On a similar note, life expectancy at birth in 2020, based on the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs' 2019 Revision of World Population Prospects, takes into account the potential effects of Covid-19 on health, while also considering a low-impact scenario from a recent study on child mortality published by the World Health Organization (WHO). In light of this scenario, the global life expectancy at birth in 2020 is expected to be similar to the one recorded in 2019.

SDG 1: No poverty

- Loss of income and profit, affecting all social segments and causing many households to fall below the poverty line;
- Increased poverty due to job losses, economic recession, and lockdowns;
- Profound impacts on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;

SDG 2: Zero hunger

- Disruption of food production and distribution as well as food insecurity due to a drop in global food supplies;
- Increased hunger rates due to a drop in incomes and reduced food availability during lockdown;
- Higher food loss and waste due to transportation challenges and reduced labor availability;
- Poorer nutrition among students due to the interruption of school meals;

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

- The devastating impact on the provision and quality of healthcare services;
- Higher disease incidence and mortality from Covid-19;
- Higher mortality due to the deterioration and overstraining of health systems during the pandemic;
- Slight decline in mortality from accidents due to reduced economic and social activities (e.g., traffic accidents);
- Potential short-term health gains due to lower environmental pollution;
- Detrimental impacts due to the worsening health conditions and their effect on psychological and mental health (e.g. depression/frustration/...);

SDG 4: Quality Education

- Full closure of all educational institutions across the country;
- Loss in the development of human capital;
- Poorer nutrition due to the interruption of school meals;
- Remote learning which remains less effective and inaccessible for some;

SDG 5: Gender Equality

- Women's economic gains are at risk (e.g., job loss, poverty);
- Other social impacts on women due to lockdown (e. g. rise in gender-based violence);
- Women represent the majority of health and social care workers, which makes them more prone to infection with the virus;
- Higher mortality rates from the virus among men (as they suffer from more chronic respiratory diseases due to higher smoking rates);

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

- The deterioration of equipment and access to clean and safe water, limiting access to cleaning and washing facilities, i.e., one of the most important prevention measures for Covid-19;
- Incompletion of water and sanitation projects due to lockdowns and curfews;

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

- Lack of electricity supply to institutions and individuals disrupts access to electricity, which undermines the health system's ability to respond to healthcare demands;
- Slowing economic growth hindering the

completion of energy projects and affecting the quality and sustainability of life;

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- Disruption of economic activities and lower-income rates, leading to fewer working hours and inevitable unemployment in certain occupations;
- Global economic crisis affecting all aspects of life;
- Trade disruption;
- Mass unemployment;
- Business bankruptcies/recession;
- Overall economic deficit and economic paralysis;

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

- Decline in industrial outputs;
- Possible nationalization of some industries, and bankruptcies and closures of others;
- Scientific collaboration to develop treatments and vaccines;
- Accelerated uptake of digital technologies, for e-health, e-education, e-governance, and e-payments;

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

- Adverse health and economic impacts on vulnerable groups (including refugees, displaced persons, and migrants), especially in countries with weak social safety nets;
- Loss of jobs among lower-skilled, lower-wage labor;

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

- People living in poor neighborhoods and slums face a higher risk of exposure to Covid-19 due to higher population density and poor sanitation levels;
- Rise in urban poverty and vulnerability;
- Disruption of public transport;
- Lower access to public/green spaces;
- Sharp short-term reduction in pollution levels;

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

- Short-term reduction in natural resource use due to reduced economic activity and consumption;
- Pressure to loosen up regulations on the economy and postpone the adoption of new measures;
- Increased plastic pollution (e.g., used to produce personal protective equipment);

SDG 13: Climate Change

- Reduced commitment to combatting climate change;
- Fewer contributions to preserve the environment due to the lack of production and transportation;
- Short-term reduction in global GHG emissions;
- Pressure to reduce environmental safeguards;
- Lack of clarity on environmental investments;
- Slowdown in economic growth contributing to a drop in energy prices (e.g., oil), which could potentially increase access to energy but reduce incentives for renewables;

SDG 14: Life Below Water

- Short-term reduction in threats to marine biodiversity due to reduced global economic activity and consumption;
- Pressure to reduce marine biodiversity and ecosystem safeguards;

SDG 15: Life on Land

- Short-term reduction in threats to land and freshwater biodiversity due to reduced global economic activity and consumption;
- Pressure to restrict the convention regulating land and freshwater biodiversity and ecosystems (for instance, on deforestation);

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

- Conflicts prevent effective measures to fight and address Covid-19;
- Populations in conflict-affected areas are most at risk due to the devastating suffering caused by material and human losses from the pandemic;
- Increased pressure on governments to mitigate the health and economic impact of the pandemic
- Pressure to promote accessible healthcare in countries that have not yet achieved universal health coverage
- Increased public deficits and debt;
- Disruption of legislative processes and public debates;
- Suspension of freedom-of-information laws and transparency policies;

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- Increased objection to globalization, while highlighting the importance of international cooperation in the field of public health;
- Possible reduced responsiveness of the international community to the needs of poorest countries;
- Reduction in international remittances and cross-border financing;
- Border closures;
- Slowdown in international trade;
- Debt crisis;

■ Third: The Dual Crisis and the Human Development Struggle in Iraq

1. Education Sector:

When it comes to human development, Iraq is facing a human capital crisis primarily attributed to its low education outcomes. According to a World Bank report, based on current enrolment rates, an Iraqi child is expected to complete only 6.9 years of schooling compared to 11.3 years in the MENA region. However, when taking into account the actual amount of learning that a student acquires based on standardized tests, this child would have completed only 4 years of schooling by age 18 compared to the average 7.6 years in the region. As a result, 2.9 years of the total 6.9 spent by an Iraqi child in school (40%) are “wasted” and fail to translate into productive skills when this child enters the workforce⁴.

These averages conceal substantial disparities pertaining to the geographical location and socioeconomic status of students on most educational levels. This is noticeable in the school attendance ratios reported in household surveys, whereby only 0.3% of rural children attend preschool, equivalent to one-tenth that of their urban peers. In middle school, only 35% of children from poor families attend school (compared to 77% of children from the wealthiest families). Similarly, only 44% of rural children attend middle school (compared to 64% of their urban counterparts)⁵.

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the education sector. For instance, 166 countries around the world implemented complete closures of schools and universities across the country. More than 1.52 billion children and youth were

out of school or university, i.e., 87% of students enrolled in schools and universities globally. In addition, nearly 60.2 million teachers did not attend classes⁶.

Long-term school closures have serious adverse effects on childhood and youth, including the disruption of learning mechanisms and the loss of human interaction, an essential factor in socio-behavioral development. When schools close, many children are deprived not only of school meals but also of safe spaces. This impacts children's nutrition as well as their families' incomes, which, in turn, increases the demand for women's and girls' unpaid work. In this regard, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that more than 320 million primary-school children in 120 countries are deprived of school meals. School closures also create gaps in child care, strain the capacity to strike a work-life balance, particularly for women, and parents when they are required to facilitate their children's learning at home.

On the social level, the continued disruption of education can lead to a rise in child labor and the marriage of children and minors, which restricts growth in developing countries. A recent paper by the IMF shows that child marriage contributes to a 1% reduction in the GDP of low-income countries⁷.

The pandemic has brought about a new reality where digital technologies play a positive role in promoting empowerment opportunities to confront the crisis, facilitating business, and ensuring its continuity, connecting people more than ever before, and helping them maintain good physical and psychological health. Nevertheless, inequalities persist in the access to a wide range of communication means, coupled with a lack of access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) that ensure participation and

effective access to education, health, information, and telemedicine arrangements by all. According to reports by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 3.6 billion people in the world still lack access to the internet, with the majority of unconnected people living in the least developed countries.

This paper aims to draw attention to the responses of some countries to the health crisis and the lessons learned which can be utilized in the field of public health (governments, the public, and the parties concerned with addressing the crisis). This crisis has uncovered deep weaknesses in our public health systems, especially since the pandemic was exacerbated in many of the wealthiest countries often considered to be well-prepared for such a pandemic. Meanwhile, some countries, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, have (so far) shown remarkable success in containing the pandemic and mitigating the damages incurred by their societies.

It is worth noting that OECD countries have adopted a novel approach and a pilot indicator to measure the effectiveness of responses to the pandemic. This indicator takes into account both health and economic considerations. Poor performance in the indicator does not necessarily imply that countries have not adequately responded to the effects of the pandemic under the circumstances they are experiencing. In countries that lack personal protective equipment for Covid-19, such as masks and testing kits, and have limited ICU capacity, strict and prolonged closures were the most urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus and reduce death rates. On another note, some countries (like South Korea) have thus far been better prepared to deal with the outbreak very efficiently through rapid testing, tracing, and isolation as well as the immediate use of personal protective equipment by most of the population, which significantly has contributed to mitigating the pandemic's adverse economic

effects. Besides government actions, there are other explanations for the drop in death rates associated with Covid-19 such as geography, demography, and other environmental and societal factors including recent experiences of outbreaks.

Not only do human development strategies and programs place 'man building' at the heart of sustainable development dialogues and discussions, but they also go beyond the traditional human development approach, which assesses economic growth processes, to include an assessment of the human development process in all countries around the world. 'Man Building' has also been placed at the forefront of development goals in the Iraq Vision for Sustainable Development 2030.

Despite considerable progress around the world in the fields of education and knowledge, particularly in countries with low human development, in addition to narrowing the educational gap at national levels, gaps and inequality in education among generations remain higher in countries with low and medium human development, including Iraq. This limits people's options and reduces social mobility. As such, investing in 'man building' during the initial stages of education can serve as a starting point for addressing cycles of inequality among generations.

When exploring the historical and cultural backgrounds and spillovers of these inequalities in-depth, it is necessary to unveil why and how they emerged, interacted, and persisted across generations. Most development literature and indicators, which shed light on this issue, have shown that income inequality reflects negatively on four basic interlinked and overlapping areas of human development. While two of them are related to human development: education and health, the third and fourth areas go beyond

individual outcomes, and rather pertain to the conditions that frame human development including social cohesion, the scale of trust among people, their participation in the civic and social life of their communities, along with peace and security. This is the safe environment people need to develop their full potential. Much of the literature has also indicated that the obstacles in each of these areas do not only stem from inequality, but also create more gaps and inequalities in other areas of human development, as they are essentially interlinked. In addition, inequalities are often passed from one generation to another and are thus perpetuated through time.

A. Education prior to the pandemic:

According to the SDG Index and Dashboards Report annually issued by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Iraq scored (26.0) points for the quality of education compared to the United Arab Emirates that ranked first among Arab states with (81.6) score points and Canada that ranked first globally with (99.3) points. This implies that Iraq's capability and potential in achieving the targets of the SDG 4, "Quality Education", is lower by (282%) than that of Canada, which ranked first globally, and by (237%) than that of the UAE, which ranked first among Arab states, based on the SDG Index for 2018.

Table (2): Indicators of Quality Education in Iraq, 2018

Indicator	Iraq	First-ranked Globally	First-ranked among the Arab States
Net primary enrol- (%) ment rate	Iraq 92.3%	Canada 100%	Tunisia 98.6%
Mean years of school- ing	Iraq 6.6%	Switzerland 13.4%	Qatar 9.8%
Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, both sexes (%)	Iraq 52.3%	Uzbekistan 100%	Kuwait 99.3%

Source: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2018, Global Responsibilities, 2018, P26-28

Iraq's performance in the "net primary school enrolment rate" indicator is 8.3% lower than Canada, which ranked first globally, and 6.8% lower than Tunisia's, which ranked first among Arab states. Iraq's performance in the "mean years of schooling" indicator is 103% lower than Switzerland, which ranked first globally, and 48.5% than Qatar, which ranked first among Arab states. Iraq's performance in the "Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds for both sexes" indicator is 91.2% lower than Uzbekistan, which ranked first globally, and 89.9% lower than Kuwait, which ranked first among Arab states.

Table (3): Performance Comparison in Education Indicators between Iraq, the UAE, and Finland

Indicator	Iraq		Finland		UAE	
	2008	2018	2008	2018	2008	2018
Access to Education	23.3	19.0	31.8	32.4	30.6	30.8
Human Capital of the Workforce	3.9	5.0	10.6	14.0	5.5	5.7
Quality of Education	17.4	17.9	39.9	40.9	32.0	34.0
Overall Education Indicator	44.7	41.9	83.2	87.4	68.0	70.4

Source: Legatum Institute, the Legatum Prosperity Index 2018, Country Profiles, Twelfth Edition, London, 2018, P.25, 211,235.

B. Education in the wake of the pandemic:

Since the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century (2020), the world has been witnessing an unprecedented occurrence that may threaten education with a globalized crisis that could prove to be the most dangerous of our time. Iraq is not shielded from the fallout of this crisis, as more than 10 million male and female students were forced to drop out of education. This came at a time when the country was already facing an educational crisis since many students enrolled in schools, unfortunately, do not receive the basic skills, they need in practical life due to the differences in light of the deep divide between the labor market and the education sector.

- The lack of correlation between the educational system and the economic sector has undermined the functional role that they can jointly play and has separated education from the economy. This excludes traditional labor and consumption ties that neither produce knowledge nor contribute to the economy by meeting its needs through an active and dynamic labor market. Similarly, scientific research institutions play no visible role in consecrating scientific research to serve local production and create effective technological solutions to the issues at hand. High unemployment among graduates is only straightforward evidence of the absence of such a role.
- Higher education in Iraq lacks compatibility between workforce development requirements on one hand and the number and quality of graduates on the other. A gap between higher education outcomes and society's expectations in this regard can be noticed.
- The crisis has put educational, cognitive, and social systems to the test. Traditional systems have been shaken and traditional patterns in socialization and education have been threatened. In light of the pandemic, schools and institutions have lost much of their status. Under this new social variable, social and educational systems have shifted to new responsibility which consists of continuous redefinition, as well as addressing variables and repercussions and identifying response elements.
- In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, households are now experiencing new living conditions where children remain at home and the family cannot perform its vital integrated roles in shaping the child's character within normal settings (educational/ moral/ social), whether in parenting and socialization in general or the educational process in particular. Schools significantly contribute to shaping students' values, morals, and education, yet they are losing many of their traditional roles in this regard.

- Despite the progress made by many countries during the past decade in boosting human capital, the Covid-19 pandemic poses a direct and indirect threat to many development achievements and gains. This requires a swift and calculated response through a series of strong measures that aim to maintain the advances made in developing human capital through vigorous efforts and work, especially among the poor and vulnerable groups; it also requires interventions targeted towards maximizing effectiveness.

Table (4): Number and Percentage of Students per Educational Level, 2018-2019

Level	Males		Females		Total
	Number	%	Number	%	
Preschool	106948	51.1	102432	48.9	209380
Primary	3435847	52.9	3065206	47.1	6501053
Vocational					50603
Teacher Training Institutes	5108	61.3	3226	38.7	8334
High school	1631363	54.7	1352785	45.3	2984148
Undergraduate	127924	54.7	106011	45.3	233935
Graduate (Higher education)	20112	51.4	19029	48.6	39141
Total	5327302	53.1	4648689	46.4	10026594

Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Social and Educational Statistics.

C. Education Challenges:

The Covid-19 pandemic came at a time when the education sector was already dealing with a complex crisis resulting from:

- Historical events: leading up to the evolution of the education system in Iraq, which is based on fulfilling families' desire to educate their children without attention to linking education outcomes with labor market needs.
- Financial conditions: due to a drop in spending on education and the severe lack of investment in educational infrastructure (schools and universities).
- Security: This has forced more children to drop out of schools due to rising instability and attacks in the country since 2003.
- Corruption: which hinders the completion of educational infrastructure projects, particularly schools, in most governorates, noting that the pandemic has exacerbated the lack of investment in infrastructure.
- Fear of infection with the virus: which weakened students' motivation to attend school due to families' increasing fear of their children contracting the virus during their interaction with their peers and given the considerable number of students in each classroom.

- Home-schooling: which has imposed new burdens on families and students, and which might aggravate the situation due to lack of time, lack of financial resources, or parents' illiteracy.
- Increased issues related to the quality of education, as the pandemic, prevented some children to take exams, especially in pre-university education, as well as online in university education. The impact of this situation remains unclear with respect to the academic achievement of students who have passed on to higher levels without acquiring the necessary knowledge and qualifications. In light of the crisis, students are also deprived of their daily schoolwork and face social integration problems given that schools, universities, and educational institutions play a key role in socialization and social integration. As a result, there have been growing concerns regarding maintaining previous gains, especially those relating to girls.
- Varying cognitive impact of the pandemic according to family conditions, as it is unclear how poor families deal with the impact of Covid-19 on education. However, they are certainly less capable of providing their children with the tools that help them engage in e-learning, or with effective prevention equipment.
- Increased poverty rate due to the pandemic is likely to harm out-of-school boys and girls. It is also expected that the impact of the pandemic will vary between rural and urban areas given the different living conditions.
- High student dropout rates, and depriving students of their daily schoolwork.
- Social integration difficulties: whereby schools, universities, and educational institutions play a key role in socialization and social integration, thus raising concerns regarding maintaining previous gains, especially those relating to girls.

- The lack of electronic infrastructure, as data from the Central Statistical Organization indicates that no schools are equipped with internet access for educational purposes (0%), while only 35% of schools have computers for educational purposes. Therefore, public schools are not prepared for e-learning.

C. Policies Adopted to Limit the Impact of Covid-19

The outbreak of the pandemic caused a suspension of official working hours in all schools, colleges, and institutes, thus forcing ten million male and female students to remain at home. In light of this predicament, the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research rolled out a rapid solution for all educational levels through remote learning, whether via the internet or through television channels designated for this purpose.

Both ministries embraced remote learning as a viable solution, despite its complex nature, from providing automated content to supporting teachers and professors, offering guidance to families and students, and overcoming internet access difficulties.

2. Health Sector:

Despite the government's interest and readiness to improve the health status of individuals and society in Iraq, the health system still suffers from structural imbalances with economic and social ramifications, along with challenges facing public health policies. The state has issued various decisions and laws, as part of the many steps taken to ensure universal coverage for all Iraqis, while guaranteeing care for those with limited means. This process is in line with the constitutional rights provided for in many articles on ensuring the right to health and the right to treatment. The state has also expressed its commitment to providing the necessary funding to reach global rates.

In this context, the Iraq Vision for Sustainable Development 2030 was issued. It discusses the concept of “man building” in its first chapter and provides for establishing an efficient and inclusive healthcare system in Goal (1-4) by:

- Broadening the geographical and categorical scope of health services and improving their quality
- Implementing the health insurance system and rolling out its mechanisms
- Adopting a strict health monitoring system to reduce the spread of drugs, AIDS, and other diseases
- Improving the performance of health institutions and enhancing their financial capacities to address addiction problems.

These measures reveal the coherence and alignment between the goals of the Iraq Vision for Sustainable Development 2030 with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, the goal addressing the social axis aims to improve Iraq's ranking in human development, as well as improve its ranking in reducing environmental pollution.

Based on the above, the most crucial elements for achieving national health security require establishing an inclusive healthcare system, providing primary healthcare services, as well as basic health services.

Some aspects and indicators on the Iraq health system are presented below by reviewing some of the key issues governing this sector, including the perspective of development papers pertaining to this vital sector:

Achieving universal health coverage:

Achieving universal health coverage is an essential pillar to ensure greater justice and equity in the health sector, and that everyone receives the health services they need. To do so, it is necessary to:

- establish an efficient healthcare system that meets all needs
- ensure the sustainability of funding
- provide medicines and modern equipment to diagnose and treat health conditions
- build the capacities of human resources in the health sector to meet health needs
- build a database, and develop and update it periodically
- strengthen ties with sectors that could affect the health sector, and which lay the foundations for a healthy society and population.

In this regard, the World Bank has identified three main objectives to achieve universal health coverage:

- Ensuring that all people have access to quality health services at affordable prices
- Protecting all people from falling into poverty to make sure they can afford the healthcare they need.
- Encouraging investments in other sectors as they lay the foundation for a healthy society

On another note, achieving the above objectives requires a series of measures outside the health and education sectors, social protection, the economy, infrastructure, technology, and information. The following table displays Iraq's ranking on the Universal Health Coverage Index compared to some Arab countries.

Table (5): Comparison between Iraq and other Arab States on the Universal Health Coverage Index

	Country	(%) Coverage Index
1	Iraq	61
2	Egypt	68
3	Jordan	76
4	Kuwait	76
5	Lebanon	73
6	Morocco	70
7	Oman	69
8	Palestine	64
9	Qatar	68
10	Saudi Arabia	74
11	Sudan	44
12	Tunisia	70
13	United Arab Emirates	76
14	Bahrain	77

Source: Monitoring Health and Health System Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2019, P. 16.

A: Primary Healthcare:

Primary healthcare is a set of basic health services that are made available in a comprehensive manner to individuals and families in the local community through acceptable means and with their full participation at an affordable cost for all⁸. These services are the core of the health system. They include the basic elements to achieve health security and face health threats such as pandemics. They are an integral part of the human, social, and economic development of society and focus on providing for health needs throughout a person’s life. In addition, they are not limited to specific diseases, but rather ensure comprehensive care with all its components, including treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care. The concept of primary healthcare focuses on:

- Meeting the community's health needs through comprehensive, outreach (raising awareness), protective (preventive), therapeutic, and rehabilitative care throughout a person's life.
- Addressing broader determinants of health (including social, economic, and environmental characteristics and the characteristics and behaviors of society).
- Enabling individuals, families, and communities to improve their health as advocates for policies that promote and protect health and well-being, as participants in the development of health services, and as healthcare providers for themselves and others.

- The data in the following paragraphs illustrate Iraq's position compared to some Arab countries in the indicator of coverage with primary healthcare services per 100,000 inhabitants.

Table 6. Iraq's position compared to some Arab countries in the indicator of coverage with primary healthcare services per 100,000 inhabitants

	Country	(%) Coverage Indicator
1	Iraq	0.7
2	Egypt	0.6
3	Jordan	7
4	Kuwait	0.2
5	Lebanon	0.5
6	Morocco	0.8
7	Oman	0.5
8	Palestine	1.6
9	Qatar	3.2
10	Saudi Arabia	0.7
11	Sudan	1.5
12	Tunisia	1.9
13	United Arab Emirates	3.8
14	Bahrain	0.2

Source: Monitoring Health and Health System Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2019, P. 16

Primary Healthcare Indicators:

Mortality Rates:

Table 8 shows that maternal mortality, mortality of children under five years of age, and neonatal mortality indicators, as well as mortality rates from household air pollution and unsafe drinking water and sanitation in Iraq, are the best compared to the global level as well as the regions of Africa and Southeast Asia, which are regions that include developing countries (most of which have weak indicators). However, these indicators are also the weakest compared to both Americas (except for maternal mortality indicators), the European, and the Pacific regions, which include developed countries (whose indicators are often high).

Table 7. Some Indicators of Primary Healthcare in Iraq, the World, and WHO Regions

Indicators	Iraq	World	Africa	The Americas	Southeast Asia	European	Eastern Mediterranean	Pacific
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births	31.5	211	525	57	152	13	164	41
Mortality rate for children under 5 years of age per 1000 live births ((2018	24.3	39	76	14	34	9	47	12
Neonatal mortality rate per thousand live births ((2018	13.9	18	27	7	20	5	26	6
Mortality rate from household air pollution per 100,000 inhabitants (2016	35	114.1	180.9	29.7	165.8	36.3	125	12.8
Mortality rate from unsafe water and sanitation per 100,000 inhabitants (2016	3.0	11.7	45.8	1.1	15.4	0.3	10.6	1.0

Source: Monitoring Health and Health System Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, p. 8, P. 10

B: Health Coverage for Some Therapeutic Interventions:

Table 9 compares Iraq and some Arab countries with regard to some therapeutic interventions provided through primary healthcare. It indicates that prenatal, perinatal, and post-natal health services that mothers receive in Iraq are moderate. The percentage of women who were provided with modern family planning methods in Iraq was 61.8%. As for mothers who received four or more pregnancy care visits, the indicator decreased to 35.0%, with the highest percentage registered in Bahrain, with 99.1%. On the other hand, the percentage of births that had been attended by skilled health workers in Iraq reached 91.1%. Kuwait, the Emirates, Palestine, and Qatar registered the highest percentage with 100.0%, while Sudan had the lowest percentage, registering 77.0%.

**Table 8. A Comparison Between Iraq and Some Arab Countries (Eastern Mediterranean Region)
Regarding Some Treatment Interventions**

Country	Of women who were % provided with modern family planning methods	Of mothers who received % four or more pregnancy care visits during pregnancy	Of births that had % been attended by skilled health workers
Iraq	61.8	35.0	91.1
Jordan	61.9	83.3	99.6
Egypt	81.0	87.8	91.5
Kuwait	54.6	59.8	100.0
Lebanon	61.8	90.0	-----
Morocco	78.5	60.9	86.6
Oman	38.0	76.3	98.6
Palestine	----	95.5	100.0
Qatar	61.9	85.0	100.0
Saudi Arabia	73.2	98.0	99.4
Sudan	33.3	50.7	77.0
Tunisia	74.7	86.4	98.6
United Arab Emirates	60.9	97.3	100.0
Bahrain	61.6	99.1	100.0

Source: Monitoring Health and Health System Performance in the Eastern Mediterranean Region, 2019, P. 16.

The responses of resources in countries prone to health crises are often not included in government services and basic healthcare. In fact, resources for addressing outbreaks are concentrated and all variables for addressing the crises are dealt with flexibly: During the Covid-19 crisis, priority is given to testing and managing confirmed cases. In Iraq, where there is weak social protection, with health systems that lack resilience and flexibility, which could lead to a lack of social and healthcare, this ultimately indirectly led to high mortality rates. This challenge has also been accompanied by the fear of health workers contracting the virus during the pandemic⁹.

The decrease in air pollution rates as a result of reduced traffic has led to a decrease in incidence rates of related diseases. However, the pandemic was one of the most important causes of new deaths. It added further burdens, as people who regularly visited health institutions feared contracting the virus, while the waiting periods in clinics increased due to the measures that were taken. On the other hand, some health services were affected because of the precautionary measures taken to fight the pandemic, and the chances of increasing rates of mental disorders became greater¹⁰.

On the other hand, the delay in finding vaccines further increased the challenges faced by the health system¹¹. In addition, the health system in Iraq is suffering further consequences, foremost of which are its weak infrastructure, lack of medical staff, lack of financial appropriations, and a high mortality rate among healthcare professionals. During health crises, the process of obtaining accurate information on disease outbreaks is as important as having information on indirect deaths, as the effects of the indirect deaths of the crisis, along with the non-flexible and non-resilient health system, are a real disaster, as they are no less important than the immediate effects of the crisis on deaths¹².

As for the health response to the pandemic, the capacities of individuals play a significant role in responding to the complications of the crisis. Non-medication-based interventions are linked to enabling factors that make the intervention less costly or facilitate its success. The most important interventions are different forms of precautionary distancing that affect people's ability to interact with others at the level of work, school, shopping, entertainment, and socialization.

3- Human Security of Women:

There is no doubt that the consequences and repercussions of the complex crises are successive, as their values accrue and their spillover effects multiply. As such, the complete lockdown quickly and negatively affected the economic situation of the Iraqi individual and family. In fact, unemployment and thus poverty rates increased from 20.5% to nearly 32% and had social and psychological consequences that threatened the human security of the individual and society.

The manifestations of the crisis revealed wide and dangerous effects on all societal patterns. The

pandemic was more than a biological issue, as its impact was reflected in the various fields of arts and sciences, and it became a primary concern for all people worldwide.

Addressing violence against women requires implementing a proactive approach, including developing a new methodology to detect and respond to cases of domestic violence. Since the beginning of the crisis, civil society organizations, with the participation of the State, intensified their support to victims of human trafficking by strengthening the service delivery model for all crisis centers and state-run institutions, ensuring continued access to free services for survivors. And in order to prevent the spread of the pandemic, newcomers were temporarily isolated in separate accommodation. Some services were provided remotely, and employees were regularly provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). In addition, to raise awareness on violence against women, the Ministry of Interior has circulated messages to the public regarding an emergency hotline and mobile application related to survivors of domestic violence and violence against women.

On the other hand, public service announcements were broadcasted, with the participation of various high-ranking individuals at varying levels, calling on the public to report incidents of violence against women. As for victims' continuous access to justice, the courts were working remotely, and after a risk assessment was conducted, reports resumed in the oversight offices on the accused of domestic violence.

Economic Security of Women:

To support women's economic security, aid was provided in the form of in-kind food distribution. And to alleviate the most urgent needs of poor families and vulnerable groups, near full packages

of food and hygiene items have been distributed across the country to female-headed households, parents, ethnic minorities, community members, and IDP camps. The relevant public bodies, such as the Women's Empowerment Department in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, local councils, governments in all governorates, and the Human Rights Commission, were actively involved in this process.

Empowerment:

The government has also taken steps to ensure women's economic empowerment through small grants and economic programs. To mitigate the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has expanded economic support programs that provide loans to entrepreneurs. As a result, some conditions and barriers to the program have been removed to allow more women to apply. Furthermore, female-run companies and female applicants will receive additional points during evaluation.

Information for this case study was drawn from tracking the government policy to support and empower women, "Gender and Covid-19", which regularly identifies gender-responsive government measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

Iraqi women have made considerable progress towards defending their rights, establishing self-assertion, and building positive perceptions of the importance of the developmental roles that they can play, especially in the transitional conditions in the Iraqi society which has faced successive crises over four critical decades, and in a world that is changing at an unprecedented pace where everyone aspires to achieve major development ambitions. However, traditional cultural constraints have undoubtedly restricted all development aspirations and expectations on the ground.

After the 2003 occupation, dozens of feminist civil society organizations emerged. The principle of positive discrimination was implemented and, consequently, women started participating in political life, decision-making, and political party membership. In addition, a ministry for women and committees specialized in limiting discrimination against women were established, with feminist media, magazines specialized in addressing women's affairs, and radios and television programs also emerging. However, the realities and their resulting consequences demonstrate that positive discrimination is not always achieved. In fact, the patriarchal culture still dominates many policies and decision-making, and feminist civil society organizations among others still face problems, reflected in how well they can serve women's paths, including the goal of reducing gender-based violence.

In addition, the preoccupation of state institutions with extremism, terrorism, displacement, violence, corruption, and unemployment has prevented decision-makers from focusing on women's problems, foremost of which violence against them in daily life. Therefore, educated women live in a state of alienation, caught in the middle between their awareness of their rights and the current practices in their daily life.

Most importantly in this context, many women are still less aware of their rights. And as such, they justify every aggression against them, with social upbringing playing a significant role in conditioning them, to the extent that they become defenders of those who oppress them and succumb to those who rob them of their rights. Part of the violence that takes place in homes, and perhaps at schools, universities, and workplaces, reflects the inequitable division of labor, which is based on gender and age. As such, most accomplishments that have been achieved are elitists, as many women, especially in the countryside, have experienced only part of those achievements.

In light of globalization trends, third-wave civilization, and the manifestations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that we are experiencing today, women are facing dangerous changes resulting from catastrophic wars, in addition to the effects of structural transformations in the economy, the great developments in knowledge and technology, and lately, the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis and its resulting economic effects. In developing countries like Iraq, which is a fragile State with widespread corruption and weak enabling capabilities for women in a market governed by competition and unequal relations, and where there is weak protection and security mechanisms, women become victims of exploitation, unemployment, early marriage, and gender-based violence, among many others.

Crisis Response Policies:

Covid-19, which began to spread in 2020, revealed that there were deep-rooted inequalities and weaknesses in social and economic systems, which in turn amplified the effects of the crisis and its repercussions on human security. However, these effects are further amplified amid tension in conflict-affected communities and the weakness and fragility of their social systems due to persistent conflicts or long states of emergency, as social cohesion is already undermined, and institutional capacities and services are low. The impact and repercussions of the Covid-19 crisis on women and girls have intensified. However, their absence contributed to limiting the possibility of gauging the real impact of the pandemic on women, especially in terms of increasing rates of violence due to the lockdown and increasing rates of unpaid care work by women because of the total lockdown policy, in addition to active learning being replaced with e-learning, and children or the elderly staying at home, all of which increased the burden on women who shouldered double the pressure.

And at a time when the world has made sizeable progress in promoting gender equality and implementing gender equality strategies, the Covid-19 crisis, along with other challenges, such as the lack of women leaders with key tasks in humanitarian situations, the lack of sufficient financial resources for gender equality in development organizations, and the need for better treatments to address new forms of inequality, have threatened this progress. In fact, there is still thoughtful work to be done and lessons to be learned that will help accelerate progress on gender equality in the years to come

Reducing the Dominance of Social Norms:

Social norms are one of the main challenges faced when trying to act more quickly to help governments transform patriarchal institutions and structures and address discriminatory norms and collective behaviors through programs and policies. This process requires effective policies and programs to mitigate the impact of discriminatory social norms, including issues around redistribution of unpaid care work, leadership, digital domain, and more.

Creating and Promoting Strong Partnerships:

New partnerships are essential to the implementation of the gender equality strategy. And while the Covid-19 pandemic has created uncertainty around the commemoration of the Beijing Declaration (Beijing + 25) anniversary and the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325, many international organizations are still committed to working collaboratively to implement the principles outlined in these notable initiatives.

Commitment to Scale Digital Transformation:

There is a need to scale transformation in the primary areas that the Sustainable Development Goals seek to achieve. Thus, priority must be given to implementing the next generation of transformation in areas related to poverty and inclusive growth, including gender-responsive social protection policies and programs, to address how the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” and the digitization of the labor market affect women and girls. It is also necessary to address new forms of inequality and invest in the capacities of the state and society to ensure that problems of gender inequality are systematically addressed in crisis and post-crisis contexts, foremost among which are pandemics.

In-depth Review and Gender-Based Analysis:

Assessments show that a comprehensive and systematic analysis of gender equality is critical to boosting performance on equality and gender-responsive programs, in the context of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. While work continues towards addressing the unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, it is necessary to focus on maximizing the role of partners in reviewing the post-recovery phase to reach the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. This requires high commitment to transform this path into a tangible reality, as everyone knows that gender equality is a choice and that the time for change is now.

In any case, international bodies, with all their scientific and cognitive knowledge and human values on the theoretical level, in particular, have not achieved this reality yet. In fact, what has been achieved so far falls short of their level of ambition, especially in our crisis-hit societies, where women's rights are violated due to weak formal and informal controls.

4- Youth:

Women and youth are often victims of multiple and interrelated forms of discrimination and exclusion. This can lead to power imbalances that exclude them from participating in economic development and affairs that affect them, ultimately undermining their needs, aspirations, and opportunities for empowerment and access. It is a well-known fact that Iraq is on the cusp of "demographic access", with an estimated 40% of its population being under the age of 15, and 65.5% aged between 15-65. However, the question here is whether the "youth bulge" constitutes a continuous threat to the country's stability and human security, which largely depends on the degree to which youth are excluded and marginalized in economic, social, and political life, and the extent to which they have access to employment, education, and social mobility.

Youth: The Backbone of Society and the Most Affected by the Pandemic

Young people are among the most affected by the repercussions of pandemics. As such, this requires joining the global response. According to global estimates, millions of young people are in the health workforce, depending on the demographic composition of the country. Young people are among those most affected by the profound socio-economic impacts of the pandemic:

- More than 1.5 billion young people, or 87% of the total number of students in the world, have been removed from schools and universities in more than 165 countries.
- Young people are more susceptible to developing anxiety and mental health conditions.
- Young women and girls are more likely to experience gender-based violence and other forms of domestic violence throughout a pandemic.
- The number of laid-off workers from the private sector is expected to increase, especially among young people working in jobs related to tourism, restaurants, and entertainment.
- The income of paid workers has declined, especially in jobs where measures were taken to reduce wages or give workers unpaid leave during the pandemic.
- Most young people have reduced opportunities to engage in full employment in the economy due to the suspension of some economic activities or layoffs of workers.
- Young people will suffer greatly from the global economic stagnation. After the 2008 crisis, youth unemployment rates in the United Kingdom and the United States reached around 21% and 18% respectively, while in Italy, unemployment rates reached a record high of 43% in 2014. Since 2008, the global economy has faced more problems that led to increased vulnerabilities among young people.
- Young people are facing an increasing threat, with certain categories of workers in the private sector being affected by the decline in demand for them. In fact, the owners of small enterprises are affected due to the restrictions imposed on some economic activities.
- Young people make up more than 30% of the world's migrants and refugees who will suffer disproportionately from the pandemic and its consequences - be it because of their limited mobility, fewer job opportunities, potential increased xenophobia, and so on.
- Young people around the world are joining in many ways the global response to the pandemic. Some of them are organizing and managing awareness-raising and hand-washing campaigns. Some are volunteering to support the elderly and vulnerable groups, and others may be contributing as scientists, business people, and innovators.

Source: United Nations, Shared Responsibility Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19, 2020, p.18.

Many international statistics expect that 50% of the world's jobs will be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic has contributed to increased interest in self-employment and generating job opportunities through remote work. In any case, unemployment, which has been declining recently and varying according to gender and spatial dimensions, is witnessing a significant increase due to the pandemic, even among those who live in rural areas where the economic, health, and educational situation is affected. However, after evaluating the conditions of the labor force, the truth is that unemployment is the highest among young people who received post-secondary education, which, as noted, leads to feelings of frustration, poverty, migration, and possibly to delinquency or suicide, especially among the educated.

In essence, official data and reports revealed that in the southern part of the country, poverty reached its highest levels. This sobering truth has often reflected the so-called "failed promise" that many Iraqis had hoped would be fulfilled after the 2003 occupation. These developments, including wasted wealth, entrenched financial and administrative corruption, widening development gaps, fake social mobility (replacement), and multi-dimensional poverty, especially in slums, have led to the popular protests that broke out in early October 2019, with the conflict turning into a revolution. The number of informal settlements reached 3,687 and the number of improvised houses reached 521,947, with poverty rates increasing in rural communities. "State programs and policies lacked transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state. The levels of frustration and poverty among youth across the country created breeding grounds for delinquency, violence,

and terrorism. The whole problem is due to disintegration in public policymaking, as previous governments failed at all levels and were reluctant to make the welfare of citizens a priority. A state that allows its youth to remain unemployed is a ticking time bomb, because people become frustrated, and their sense of injustice leads to a justifying philosophy of delinquency.

It seems that Iraq also bore the brunt of many years of neglect, structural imbalances, and disparities that largely arise from the failure to address the poor living conditions and lack of economic opportunities. The economic decline continued and hopes diminished after the dual crisis (health and economic), even in terms of securing the salaries of workers and providing emergency needs. The country became deeply engaged in superficial and extravagant consumption at the expense of the interests and living conditions of the majority amid widespread poverty. And thus, the environment became a breeding ground for delinquency, terrorism, and violence. In addition, indicators of sustainable development decreased, and the country was unable to adequately respond to the needs and aspirations of the public. Thus, tribalism, regionalism, nationalism, sectarianism, and religious sentiments were used to justify unequal development.

This implies that provoking frustration and apathy among the majority of people, especially the youth, fuels rebellions and protests that lead to unrest, terrorism, violence, and other hostile activities towards society. In such unhealthy environments, some people tend to seek safety nets through subsidiary loyalties; including the desire to gain support, raising the ceiling of demands against the political system, or political mobilization in order to achieve security and stability.

■ Fourth: The Dual Crisis and Social Development:

Poverty, Social Protection, and Societal Cohesion

The pandemic crisis pushed nearly 4.5 million Iraqis, i.e., 11.7% of the total population, below the poverty line. The national poverty rate increased from 20.5% in 2018 to 31.7%. 42% of the Iraqi population suffered from deprivation corresponding to more than one dimension of the fragility indicator, in areas such as education, health, living conditions, and securing resources for a good living. The pandemic also led to the suspension of many freelances and private sector businesses, which led to increased unemployment, the danger of which, in addition to expanding the scope of marginalization and economic vulnerability, lies in security risks, which may increase the existing political tensions. The complex crisis and its economic and social repercussions have contributed to an unstable development outlook, with negative consequences threatening the human security of the individual, family, and society. The most prominent manifestations of this crisis perhaps consist of the elevated levels of poverty, the deterioration of living conditions for some social groups (vulnerable and marginalized groups), the exacerbation of the fiscal deficit in the federal budget, the growing problem of unemployment (full and underemployment), in addition to the consequent pressure on the health system, which is already facing structural challenges due to the financial crisis.

The impact of the crisis on poverty and its intensity, as well as its impact on the levels of

spatial inequality in both rural and urban areas, has important consequences on Iraqi society. It affects government policies and strategies in a way that makes their success in the long term subject to the government's ability to protect the most vulnerable groups of society. And unless national strategies and plans are given full effect to alleviate poverty, the conditions of low-income families and families who live in substandard conditions due to the crisis, as well as price changes, unemployment, or low real wages, are likely to become more difficult due to the persistent crisis.

The starting point in studying the repercussions of the current crisis on poverty in Iraq is to understand the interrelationships between variables closely related to this phenomenon, such as income growth, redistribution, and poverty alleviation. In addition, poverty outlook in society is used to distinguish between poor and non-poor groups, and analyze the features, trends, and pockets of poverty, and the characteristics of the poor. These major transformations led to direct and indirect effects on all segments of society, especially the youth, who constitute an important part of the population demographics. The number of young people aged 15 and above reached 23,450 million, i.e., 56% of the total population. In this category, the percentage of youth who are economically active (working or looking for work) amounted to 42.8% of the total labor force, i.e., approximately 10 million people.

Interestingly, the problem has increased for workers in the private sector, whose number of employees ranges between 5-6 million, with 40% of them working in the informal sector. It should be noted that the private sector constitutes 33% of the total economic activities of the country. In fact, 99% of the workers work in the agricultural

sector, 57% in the manufacturing sector, 97% in the construction and building sector, 90% in the trade and hospitality sector, and 93% in the transportation, communications, and storage sector.

As for private-sector workers who are gainfully employed, their number has reached 3.15 million, representing 70% of the total workers in the private sector. On the other hand, the number of workers from the private sector who are self-employed (owner of a stall, a taxi, a small shop, a craft) is around 0.7 million.

The current problem, coupled with instability, fragility, and infrastructure corrosion, has led to increased suffering of the private sector, with its many branches and sections, placing it in an inconvenient situation in light of the suspension of businesses and activities, lockdown, the situation of the poor, their human security and their basic requirements. This requires a kind of flexible approach and mapping the reality of work, family spending, the social protection network, the poor, and the comprehensiveness of the ration card. The role of the government in this regard was to support those affected by the restriction measures after the spread of the pandemic by providing monthly grants focused on workers in the parallel sector, as well as postponing the repayment of loans to the government Housing Fund and loans to the Central Bank for small and medium enterprises for a period of three months. However, such initiatives remain disproportionate to the requirements of vulnerable groups and to meet their long-term needs, especially if the pandemic persists for a longer period.

On the other hand, in December 2020, the government raised the exchange rate of foreign currencies against the Iraqi Dinar, which

negatively affected vulnerable groups. As such, this required determining the extent to which these groups suffered from indigence because of the increase in the prices of food and basic foodstuffs for the Iraqi family and the rise in the national poverty line in Iraq. In addition, the government also increased social protection payments to bring their amount into line with changes in the exchange rate.

Family Environment:

The dual crisis increased risks for further progress towards gender equality. In fact, the crisis has deepened existing social inequalities and exposed vulnerabilities that, in turn, amplified the impacts of the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic on women and girls was reflected in their economic situation (lower earnings, lower savings, and job insecurity), as well as their reproductive health, unpaid work, authority-sharing compromise within the family, and gender-based violence.

And while government and public efforts focus on securing opportunities for self-isolation to ensure protection and safety for many people, the crises conditions that our eastern societies are going through may constitute a dangerous environment for thousands of women, as the home becomes an unsafe place where women experience gender-based violence and intimidation. Based on this data, studies on Arab women have attempted to document the gender-based impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on men and women in the region, focusing on roles, attitudes, and practices related to gender equality and violence against women

A UN Women study found that the pandemic has contributed to an increase in the burden of unpaid

care and domestic work for men and women in the region and that women in the Arab region perform, on average, 4.7 times more unpaid care and domestic work compared to men. Due to the measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus and increase the time people spend at home, women spend more time doing domestic work, providing support for children in e-learning, and caring for the elderly and the sick. The virus has also forced changes in work methods, with an increase in the rate of remote work .

At the family level, gender inequality is perpetuated by a vicious cycle of deficiency, often deep-rooted in gendered social norms, which force women to face heavy constraints or even make 'tragic choices'. Due to health interventions, women are often asked to stay at home, isolated in a supposedly safe place for them. Many women are thus forced to face the reality of their families, shouldering a heavy burden through unpaid work. There is also a higher risk of females becoming victims of domestic violence. In fact, a slightly larger number of women have reported that they feel unsafe in their homes compared to men. In countries covered by the study, at least one in five women reported fear of domestic violence .

It should be noted, in this regard, that the response to the virus has a varying impact on segments of the population. In fact, indicators show that 70% of women in the health workforce are at greater risk of infection. In addition, the crisis conditions were accompanied by an escalating increase in reports of domestic violence, while services, including the rule of law, health, and protection services, were being provided to address the effects and repercussions of the pandemic. And while families were isolated in their homes, children also faced a rapid increase in online child abuse.

The Iraqi society also witnessed a rise in suicide cases in 2020. In fact, according to the Centre for Human Rights, the number of registered cases reached about 298 throughout Iraq, with 130 cases in Baghdad, 68 cases in Basra, and 33 cases in Dhi Qar. It should be noted here that the methods of suicide varied between poison, hanging, drowning, and gunshot wounds. Perhaps the major causes for this increasing phenomenon are the economic, social, and psychological effects, as the rates of poverty and unemployment and the increase in cases of domestic violence and the misuse of technology have increased .

Globally, the average number of women who work without pay and in domestic work is about 2.5 times that of men . This number affects women's participation in the labor force, hindering their productivity and limiting their opportunities to allocate time. The closure of schools also affected care for children, as women are mostly the ones who provide care in their families for their children and the elderly . As for other forms of inequality, gender inequality in enhanced capacities can be exacerbated by measures taken during a pandemic if households lack enablers. Under these circumstances, this will lead to an increased burden on women, reduced active participation in work and productivity – and enhanced capabilities constraints –, which limits opportunities for women to live to their fullest potential at work and home. In the United States, married women account for 60% of the unpaid labor force, even among husbands who work full time. If the relative distribution of burdens remains the same as care needs and unpaid work, working hours will rise to 20 hours per week during the pandemic, which means an increase in working hours to 12 hours per week for women and 8 hours for men. Without structured arrangements and flexibility in working hours, one spouse may

have to temporarily stop or reduce paid work. And because of the patterns in the division of labor, the burden is more likely to fall on women, as women's continued unpaid work in the family is a challenge that impedes their bargaining power and participation in family decision-making.

There is no doubt that gender-based violence is the most severe impediment to empowerment, as it increases inequality and reflects the impact of traditions and social norms that legitimize harassment and discrimination. More than a third of women - and even more than two-thirds in some countries - have experienced physical or sexual violence by a non-partner, as these forms of violence against women can be perpetuated by social norms or attitudes. Internationally, according to the World Values Survey, 30% of people believe that it is justified for a man to beat his partner

These behaviors and attitudes are not only a threat to women but also their children, especially when women experience traumas and disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or health emergencies. Although it is too early to acquire comprehensive data, there are already many worrying reports of an increase in violence against women around the world, as reported cases doubled in some countries.

There is plenty of evidence about the increase in violence cases, as shown in several reports around the world - from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, China, Cyprus, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United States

In addition, there is a persistent pattern of increasing cases of domestic violence reported due to isolation because of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the great risks that the Iraqi society had been facing before the Covid-19 pandemic

and its repercussions, is the low rates of youth participation in the labor force. As is the case with adult participation, young men's labor force participation rates are higher than those of young women. However, there is not necessarily a direct link between trends in youth labor force participation rates and adult participation rates. In Iraq, youth participation rates in the labor force are decreasing more rapidly than adults'. In fact, the participation rate of young men decreased from 64% in 2005 to 49% in 2017, while the participation rate of young women decreased during the same period from 18% to 5%. Participation levels are expected to decrease more in light of the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the poverty rate will rise to about 31.7%.

Vulnerable Groups

The repercussions of the crisis on some countries and groups extend through its deep, difficult, and adverse impact on some segments and categories. For instance, as soon as the health crisis started escalating in certain countries in Asia and Europe, developing countries began to hedge against the pandemic's economic repercussions before tackling any of its other noticeable effects on public health. Some impacts had even hit certain key sectors in developing countries prior to the pandemic.

A 2021 World Bank report shows that Iraq lacks a comprehensive, equitable, and equal social protection system that is able to absorb shocks and protect the elderly, people with disabilities, and survivors such as widows, orphans, and others. Despite the hefty cost of the current system and the difficulty ensuring its financial sustainability, it offers low coverage

that mainly serves public sector employees (about 3 million people), compared to about 200 thousand employees only from the private sector employees, while excluding about 5 million others. The social protection system is also experiencing other socio-economic challenges, which creates large disparities, not only between public and private sector employees but also between various individuals benefiting from the system.

On another note, the pension system current design generates negative incentives, such as encouraging early retirement; as well as obstacles that impede private sector development as the majority prefer working in the public sector. The current pension system does not provide sufficient pensions to beneficiaries; in fact, those pensions can be calculated even before retirement. All these issues represent significant challenges that hinder the development of adequate human capital in Iraq.

The Coronavirus pandemic posed a serious challenge to all social segments and categories. But in countries characterized by high disparities in terms of social class, age, gender, ethnicity, or residence status, these impacts may be deep and severe, at least in the short term. In many countries, certain groups are indeed disproportionately affected; these are the Vulnerable Groups: the elderly, women, disabled people, young workers, migrant families, unprotected workers, people living in shelters and camps, the homeless, and people with underlying health issues. Comorbidities seem to have a harsher impact than the virus, along with underlying health problems associated with social fragility; health issues tend to be more prevalent among people from ethnic minorities or low-income groups. Vulnerable groups, namely the elderly, not only struggle to cope with health risks but may also

be unable to support themselves against isolation risks. Likewise, the homeless may not be able to permanently secure adequate shelter and are more vulnerable to the virus' dangers. People with disabilities may be unable to obtain vital support and advocacy due to social exclusion. People in prisons, migrant detention centers, or mental health institutions may be at a higher risk of contracting the virus due to the confined nature of the structures.

Safety Nets and Social Protection:

The adoption of national policies and programs to confront the socio-economic impacts of escalating crises seem to have generated a near unanimity on the need to provide greater safety and social protection nets for groups affected by the crisis and its repercussions, as they are linked to the need to curb the rise of adverse social phenomena and to mitigate their impact. The most important of these social policies would probably be supporting social safety nets. They consist of programs packages that are primarily state-funded, along with some additional funding from non-governmental organizations (informal), or which are provided within the framework of aid through private networks (insurances, social assistance, etc.).

During the pandemic, social safety nets in Iraq have relied on a set of basic mechanisms in implementing their programs to support basic services or aid programs (education/health/food) financial remittances, and in-kind assistance for those living in extreme poverty, in addition to the programs which can be supported in order to alleviate the crisis and facilitate social integration. Iraq has shown social cohesion and solidarity in facing the repercussions of the crisis, especially at the level of health and living conditions.

In Iraq, the national social protection net is one of the most crucial components of social safety nets, where the number of beneficiaries has reached about (1.4) million families in 2020 after they assumed a key role in sustaining the response and alleviating the burdens of the poorest families. In terms of food security, even though the 2016 Food Security Survey indicated that the percentage of food-insecure people reached (2.5%), and the percentage of vulnerable families amounted to about (53%), making these families prone to sliding into poverty quicker. Field information reveals relative stability and balanced flow in securing materials despite lockdown conditions. The ration card, which currently includes more than (90-95%) of Iraq's total population, has also contributed to covering the basic needs of poor people despite financial resources scarcity.

The governmental and social response to the pandemic in regard to poverty has been rapid and comprehensive. For instance, even though the crisis has hindered the implementation of the national strategy for poverty alleviation, it employed a methodology of targeting impoverished areas and communities in Iraq based on (poverty percentages, deprivation levels, population number, and available services). Furthermore, several technical procedures through which the most deprived regions in Iraq are identified, have allowed stakeholders and decision-makers to improve targeting in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (locating the poor and providing them with rapid response). Additionally, the committee to reform the ration card system has exerted strong efforts in this regard by excluding groups that are not covered by subsidies and focusing support on the poorest.

Role of Civil Society:

Throughout the pandemic, civil society, grassroots organizations, community organizations, and religious institutions in Iraq have played a vital role in assisting the most vulnerable groups on the local and national levels, as these organizations actively provide economic opportunities and livelihoods and adapt responses according to societal contexts and conditions. These organizations, in many areas around the world, have been the main reference pillar for individuals and families during the pandemic, offering their services as main channels of communication to secure health services, through existing hygiene practices and quarantine measures. They are armies of volunteers performing public services, including food delivery and medical services, embodying the depth of shared responsibility and social solidarity: responding to socio-economic impacts of the pandemic on individuals and families at risk and low-income families, as well as primary health services in high-density communities such as slums as well as poverty belts and pockets in urban areas.

Active women's organizations - despite their limited resources - have also played an active role in enhancing community cohesion and have often been on the front lines of community response - by supporting the people most affected by the crisis, providing shelters for domestic violence victims, and directing education messages to women in the Public Health field.

On this course, civil society organizations (CSOs) have also devoted their efforts to maintaining social cohesion between individuals and families during lockdown periods to ensure social distancing. During those periods, religious institutions and

community centers provided virtual services, lessons as well as counseling sessions and made regular contacts through phone, SMS, and the Internet, to enhance the safety and unity of society and reduce feelings of isolation. Youth networks and actors in society have also provided new means to ensure enhanced interaction, a sense of unity, and human security.

This vision, embodied by traditional and modern societal systems through a series of spontaneous and regular measures to confront the crisis, has represented a real re-examination of the society's will and confidence in its civilization fabric, core value, and missionary extension to form a coherent umbrella that protects present and future generations. It is truly one of the most powerful tests for the social capital, which constantly require mobilizing all actors - governments, academia, companies, employers, organizations workers, civil society, local communities as well as individuals - to act in solidarity and new, creative and calculated ways in order to serve the common good and provide lessons and success stories that convey the essence of values to which we hold on the sake of humanity.

The following table shows the most prominent issues noted and which emerged during the crisis affecting human and social development.

Fifth: Strategic Challenges and Opportunities for Setting a Human and Social Development Policy

Despite the relative progress Iraq has achieved in some human development indicators, it still faces strategic challenges due to the successive crises that have struck the country since 2014, in addition to the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic crises in 2020. Poverty rates had decreased from 23% to 18% during the years that preceded the occupation of certain provinces by terrorist groups. Relative strides had also been made in addressing poverty through several means, establishing an enabling environment after having bolstered security, expanding the infrastructure, improving knowledge and skills, and investing in social services, namely health, education, and housing.

1. Challenges:

Income and multidimensional poverty remain high, and inequality spreads in a way that affects human development levels in Iraq, causing a loss in the Human Development Index value. The Iraqi government is aware of this challenge and aims in its 2030 vision and medium-term plan to achieve socio-economic transformation, which shall reduce all forms of poverty and mitigate inequality.

Multiple Vulnerabilities:

The poorest and most deprived areas often suffer from weak human security and food insecurity and are the most vulnerable to shocks, perturbations, and exogenous disturbance such as terrorism, epidemics, economic crises, and drought. This further affects the population's ability to escape poverty and deprivation. The most pervasive shocks are related to changes in health, security, and economic conditions; which affect the opportunities to achieve human security and increase weaknesses and vulnerabilities. Despite relative improvement in security levels after defeating terrorist groups and liberating the governorates, a sizable percentage of the population is still at risk due to failures resulting from structural imbalances in the economy's structure, financial and administrative corruption, and weak implementation of social policies. In order to emphasize the 'Leave no one behind' (LNOB) principle in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, people facing extreme marginalization, exclusion, and deprivation require special attention, such as landless people, people who live in large families, and those who live in informal settlements, poverty pockets, and belts constantly subject to turmoil.

Strengthening and up-scaling multi-sectoral responses that address root causes of vulnerabilities and are based on household profiling go in this direction. Applying such approaches to a broader range of innovative social policies would contribute to addressing multifaceted weaknesses more effectively.

Demographic Pressure:

Iraq has a high population growth rate, and most of the country is densely populated. Large

families in Iraq, as elsewhere, tend to be poorer and more deprived of the ability to satisfy basic human needs than smaller families. The poor are also more likely to live in hard-to-reach areas that lack infrastructure such as roads, clean water supplies, healthcare as well as basic education facilities.

The development policy must effectively target people and groups, take into account their extraordinary circumstances, and adapt provisions designed specifically for them in interventions and implementation methods. In fact, this policy offers an opportunity to integrate those groups and control population processes as well as reproductive health and include them in development policies. This shall help in achieving effective stabilization of population growth in Iraq, in addition to expanding and sustaining human development gains.

Weak National Employment Policy:

Persistent structural imbalances in the Iraqi economy have had a wide impact on the labor market, the expansion of the unorganized work phenomenon as well as the increase of unemployment rates before the pandemic had even occurred. Therefore, the labor market was the most affected by the coronavirus preventive measures and shutdown of institutions shutdown, namely in the private sector, making unemployment the main challenge that must be addressed. Preventive measures are expected to have negative repercussions on the Iraqi economy, including a decrease in growth rates in many economic sectors, and an increase in the unemployment rate (especially underemployment) to higher levels. There are elevated levels of labor shortages in Iraq, namely in rural areas, and not enough non-agricultural jobs have been created, not to

mention high production costs for companies and unskilled labor, namely in urban areas. Although education has improved over the past few years, yet marketable technical and vocational skills remain unavailable.

The main related challenge in this field is the economy's ability to generate decent employment and stable incomes for citizens. Although some progress has been indeed made, the percentage of workers in the informal sector is still high. Hence, job creation as well as projects and skills development, remain key areas in order to face this challenge. The population policy must have an active role in enhancing productivity and income generation as well as strengthening its link with creating job opportunities for young people.

Limited Local Capacities:

Inadequate institutional capacity and human resources determine the opportunities for the advancement of local actors in the policy-making process, yet the lessons they draw from daily implementation experiences can help improve innovative policies. Local government entities also need to build highly technical skills and must be given more challenging responsibilities to achieve beyond transforming operational inputs into outputs.

Enhancing the ability of local government entities to participate on strategic levels and cope with complex outcomes such as poverty eradication and job generation, would foster local initiatives, self-motivation, and creativity in order to find innovative solutions.

2. Opportunities:

In order to ensure the continuity of opportunities and sustainability of results to enhance human and social development, some positive key factors rooted deeply in national cultural values are incorporated into the development process: Iraqis have stored distinct collective systems and memories that highlight the depth of their strong cultural roots. They are likely to continue to offer opportunities for inclusion, interdependence, and sustainable development to a great extent due to their originality and being viewed as tools for restoring the positive cultural values of giving, participation, dignity, and accountability of leaders.

The main step is to integrate vulnerable groups into local action plans under the provisions of social policy and sectoral strategies. This requires identifying the activities that will be undertaken through national development plans and covered in annual budgets, provided that local development actors, including private sector actors, support the implementation of population policy in their action plans as well as local government programs in communities in which they do business.

It also requires that local and international NGOs funded by donors align their program priorities and implementation methods with the drawn plans. Within an enabling political environment: Creating a highly empowering enabling environment for sustainable development, with opportunities for success documented in several global and regional reports. These opportunities enable the transformation of national policy and the enhancement of regional integration and globalization, as well as the establishment of

information and communication technology infrastructure nationwide and determining Iraqi youth as engines for innovation nationwide within the framework of Iraq’s 2030 Vision, without however neglecting effective integration with education-based values.

Building a State of Citizenship that Embraces Diversity

Although the danger of slipping into the downward spiral had not dissipated in the Iraqi scene, amid the cycle of negative influences and challenges impeding development, nonetheless demonstrations and popular movement throughout Iraq contributed to transforming the political and popular discourse into a serious debate on national unity and "Community Peace". The concept of community peacebuilding prevails in territories that have been restored from terrorist groups and it is a discourse that facilitates repairing the shattered social fabric in local communities. Accordingly, it requires policymakers not to view protests as a threat, but rather to take advantage of them in order to reinforce the focus on national unity, build Iraqi citizenship that embraces diversity, and reduce deprivation of rights within both ineffectively represented minority and majority groups.

In light of all the challenges that the Iraqi society is facing, and following the victories, the liberation of the land from terrorism, the repercussions of the popular movement as well as its resulting facts on the ground, and the government change, the Iraqi society’s national mood seems to be shifting away from the sectarian-ethnic identity and rather highlighting the importance of all citizens being equal.



Enhancing Human and Social Development through National and Local Solutions:
In the context of enhancing innovations and up-scaling interventions regarding population policy in order to stimulate transformation in Iraq and achieve progress in human development indicators, a set of general recommendations is required, namely, strengthening human development indicators in all their dimensions and forms as well as building resilience in order to preserve these gains. Three levels of intervention are needed to ensure this.

First: On a policy level, initiatives and solutions are constantly being improved and adapted to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness at the level of inter-institutional interaction and coordination. This would be achieved by strengthening the links between various policies and coordinating their targeting by increasing and activating coordination opportunities.

Second: On a strategic level, development policies as an integrated system of interventions are still linked to transformation agendas at the meantime. These interventions will ensure the long-term sustainability of the gains and policies, with the gradual shift from a post-pandemic and economic crisis recovery agenda to sustainable development agenda. There will be a need for effective and controlled population policies, as well as programs for change and adaptation to new development needs coinciding with rapid change (a growing youth population, digital transformation, technological developments, and increasingly interconnected value chains).

There is still a critical need to align incentives on the local government level to encourage innovation in current policies and design a new population policy to support the transformation agenda in the development landscape and promote effective government action in this regard.

Active Participation of Private Sector:

The private sector is a key engine for growth in Iraq's strategic frameworks. Despite the state's awareness of the private sector's leading role in this regard, the Iraqi government continued to stall actions, despite encouraging results in some sectors. Accordingly, the private sector has not been fully harnessed, and its role has remained limited. Within the framework of

population policy implementation, private sector actors can contribute to enhancing development processes and benefit from them later in innovative ways. For instance, in some regions, several companies, namely ones that provide short-term employment opportunities in mining and construction, require applicants. This may encourage young people, who are often reluctant to participate, and consequently, participation rates increase with fewer mobilization efforts by local authorities. Moreover, in many regions, the private sector is the main partner that helps them cover contributions for poor households, and the private sector contributes at multiple levels, both individually and at the corporate level, as well as through comprehensive platforms. While this is commendable, private sector participation can be improved by engaging it in transformation.

It is important to upscale the participation of the private sector in the design and implementation of policies, plans, and programs. Several development outcomes will depend on private sector investments and/or the ability to deliver results in public investments.

Reliable Information and Knowledge Management System:

Following years of population policy programs implementation, valuable information and knowledge were generated. Nevertheless, due to little modern information and modern knowledge management systems; it is sometimes difficult to provide information from a single source that can assist in the implementation of a population policy or assess its impact. For example, social development mapping, in which citizens are classified by wealth or socio-economic categories. Currently, the main basis for local planning and

decision-making depends on resource allocation and selection of beneficiaries for social protection interventions within the framework of various development sustainability programs and other interventions on these classifications.

The database on vulnerable groups offers the possibility to support social development planning if it can be comprehensively developed with accuracy, consistency, and simplicity in order to enable different actors to enter and query data

Optimizing Benefits from Technological Development:

There are opportunities to address challenges such as resource scarcity as well as work quality and productivity by benefiting from available modern technologies, which can make a dramatic difference if productively exploited. The problem is that local initiatives have not fully exploited these potentials while recognizing that the population policy as part of the development strategy can contribute to achieving local and national development goals. Thus, the activities and events of development projects should be guided, by technical studies for instance (such as water supply systems, roads and bridges planned scientifically with technical guidance on the use of local materials.)

Innovation in Social Policies

Levels of resilience and elasticity achieved by conflict-affected communities depend mainly on the nature of the impact on living standards and their dynamism at various times. The loss of people's lives and property affects the ability of families and people to organize their socio-economic conditions in post-conflict phases. There is no doubt that the effects of armed

conflicts are not only limited to family-owned material assets (material capital) but also drain the accumulated human capital.

Based on these facts, innovation in social policies in the post-crisis phase becomes the main engine of policies and programs for healing wounds and transitioning to human development.

Sustainable Return of Displaced People

Millions of internally displaced people hope to return to their homes. But in many cases, their homes and neighborhoods would be destroyed during clashes with terrorist groups. In this context, reconstruction efforts have culminated in returning the displaced and the forcibly displaced people to their areas of origin, despite insufficient funding. The government has adopted an agreed comprehensive plan in order to address the return of displaced people and achieve coherent social inclusion affecting the internally homeless, the return of displaced people, and the reconstruction.

Field data in areas of origin of displaced people revealed the adoption of a hierarchy in priorities for the implementation of reconstruction and reintegration programs for displaced people, taking into account a set of basic principles: the magnitude of destruction and damage in the areas of origin as well as the number of displaced people in those areas. Furthermore, solving tribal and regional problems in areas that witnessed clan division and the involvement of some members of those clans with terrorist groups committing crimes against people of those areas), in order to ensure accountability and justice, and to solve problems in areas of origin of displaced people.

Investing in the Demographic Opportunity: Integrating and Organizing Youth in Public Life:

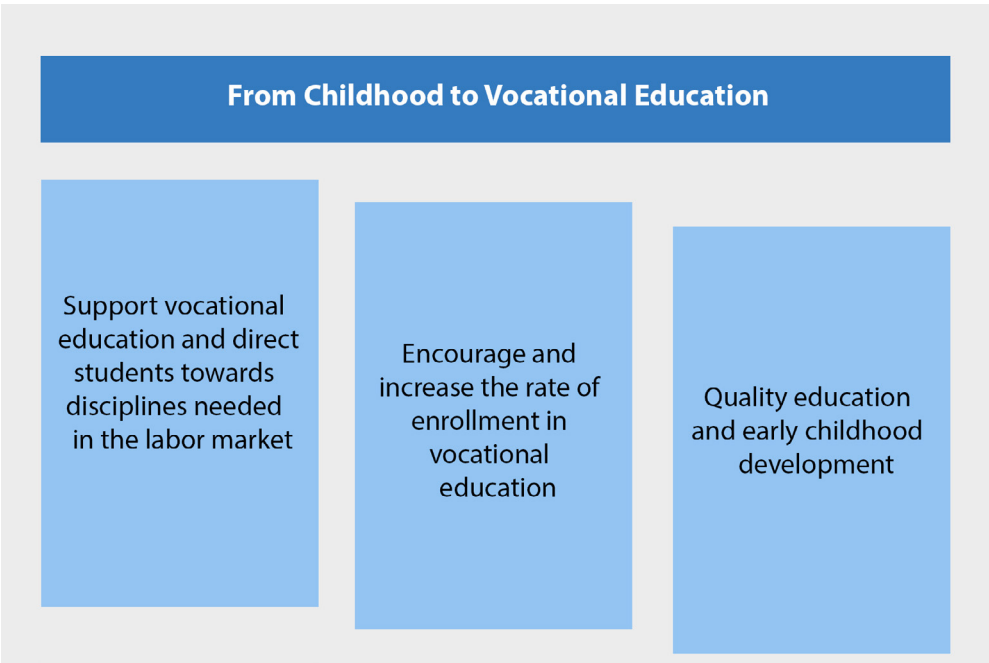
Although perceptions and definitions of youth vary according to the way young people view themselves in the twentieth century since adolescents and youth today have become clearer as specific groups affected by a set of educational reforms, work and employment systems and conditions, reorganization of the juvenile justice system, as well as the recognition of leisure as specific patterns for activities and skills of young people.

The voice of young people got higher and interest in them increased after political transformations and demographic changes as well as the subsequent popular movement that erupted in October 2019, as discussions with representatives of this sector and interviews with young people indicated that they would like to take part in change and decision-making processes that affect them. Therefore, the main priorities are:

- Enhancing youth participation and organizing them in public political, economic, and cultural life
- Youth work as well as their socio-economic issues
- Promoting healthy living conditions among young people
- Developing spiritual and cultural values of youth as well as patriotic education
- Sustaining education for young people and securing lifelong learning opportunities
- In this context, state support must be directed particularly to marginalized and excluded youth, and strive to contain and liberate them of stereotyped perceptions that hinder their integration.

Vocational Education is a Foundation for the New Labor Force: From Childhood to Vocational Education:

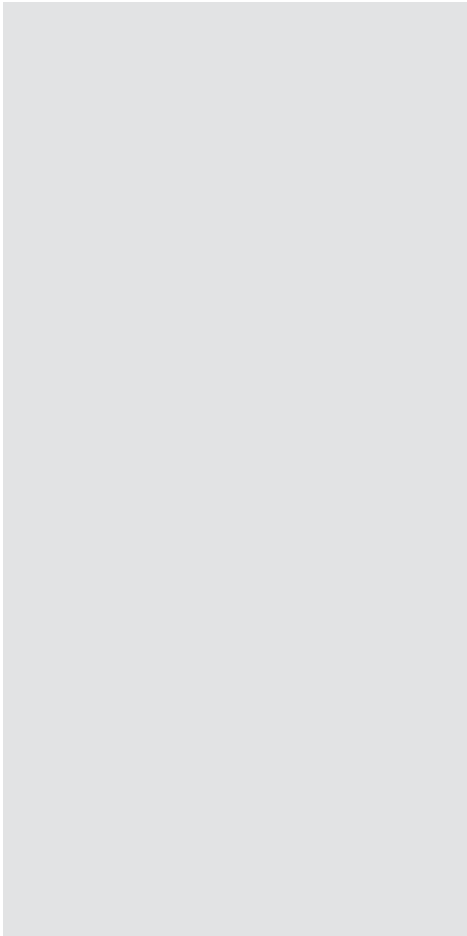
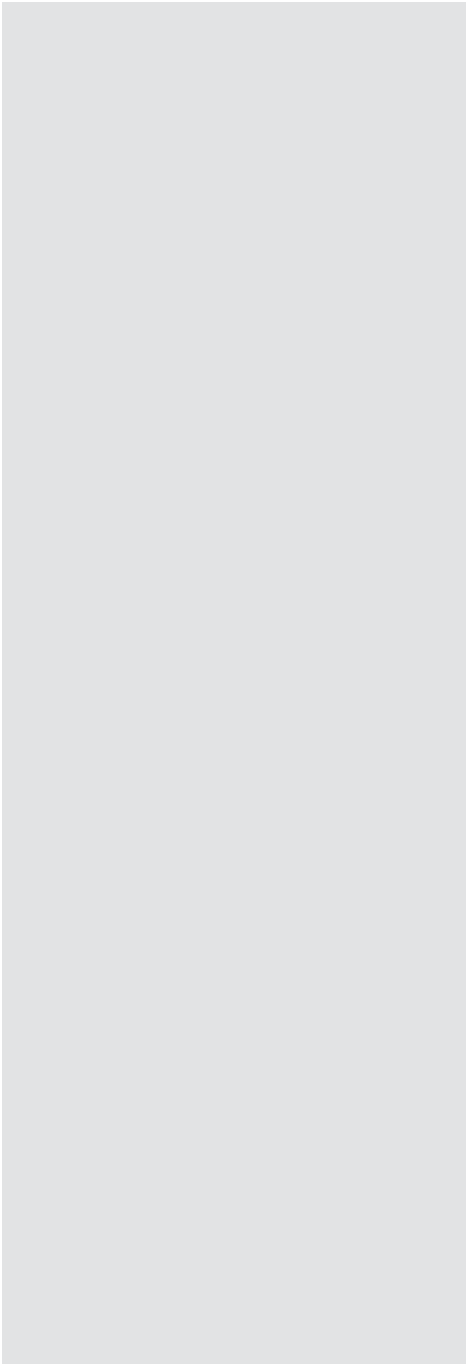
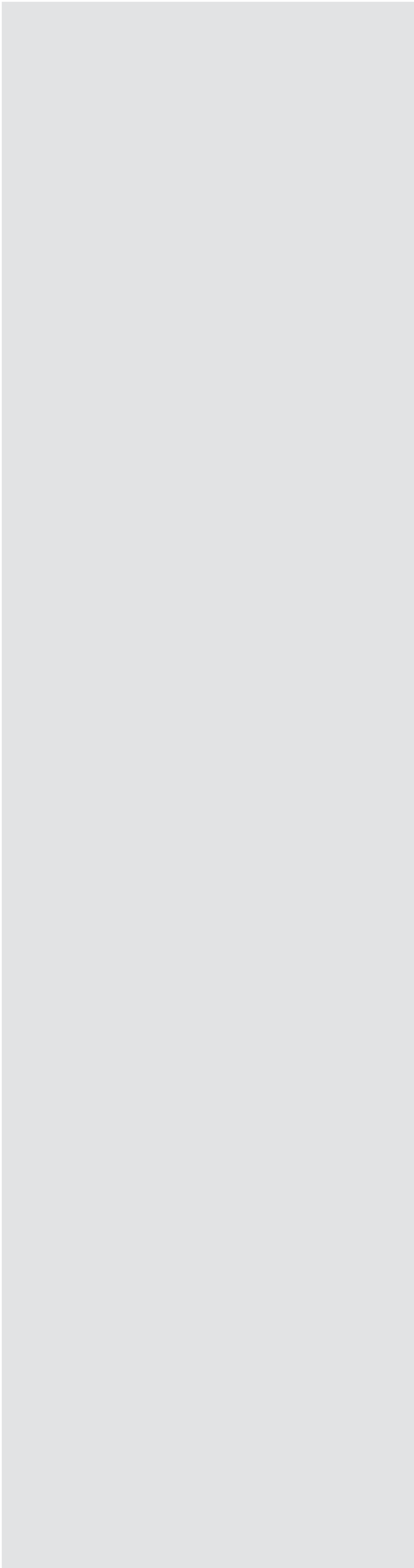
The seeds of creativity, problem-solving, and digital thinking can be planted in childhood (before the age of 18), without neglecting this age group as an enhancing force to human development in Iraq. However, current options and opportunities require a strong push in a new direction to meet human development needs and digital workforce requirements. In this process, vocational education shall play a key role in meeting labor market needs as well as lifelong learning.





In the context of all the aforementioned and in light of the extensive discussions concerning manifestations and dimensions of human and social development crisis, serious calls were made to establish a five-year national development plan to build human capital since it is the cornerstone for sustainable human development.



Endnotes

- 1 ILO. "COVID-19 and the World of Work: Impact and Policy Responses." Policy Note. 18 March. 2020
- 2 Guerrieri, V., G. Lorenzoni, L. Straub and I. Werning. "Macroeconomic Implications of COVID-19: Can Negative Supply Shocks Cause Demand Shortages?" Working Paper 26918. National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA. (2020).
- 3 Hogan, A., B. Jewell, E. Sherrard-Smith, J. Vesga, O. Watson, and others. 2020. "The Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Epidemic on HIV, TB, and Malaria in Low- and Middle-Income Countries", Imperial College London, May 2020.
- 4 The World Bank, Addressing the Human Capital Crisis, (A Public Expenditure Review for Human Development Sectors in Iraq), 2021.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Ibid, p.9.
- 8 -World Health Organization, Primary Healthcare, last accessed in February 2021, WWW. WHO. Int/topics/primary_health-care/en
- 9 Sochas, L., A. A. Channon, and S. Nam. 2017. "Counting Indirect Crisis-related Deaths in the Context of a Low-Resilience Health System: The Case of Maternal and Neonatal Health during the Ebola Epidemic in Sierra Leone." Health Policy and Planning 32(Suppl. 3): iii32–iii39. https://academic.oup.com/heapol/article/32/suppl_3/iii32/4621472.
- 10 The Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat), The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Sustainable Development Goals in the GCC countries, September 2020. -
- 11 Takahashi, S., C. J. E. Metcalf, M. J. Ferrari, W. J. Moss, S. A. Truelove, A. J. Totem, B. T. Grenfell, and J. Lessler. 2015. "Reduced Vaccination and the Risk of Measles and Other Childhood Infections Post-Ebola." Science 347(6227): 1240–1242.
- 12 Sochas, L., A. A. Channon, and S. Nam. 2017, Op Cit.



www.annd.org - 2030monitor.annd.org - civicspace.annd.org

 Arab NGO Network for Development
 @ArabNGONetwork

 Arab-NGO-Network-for-Development
 anndmedia



