

# Diyala Governorate Profile



Source map: [IAU](#)

## Diyala at a Glance

### Fast Facts

- Area: 17,685 km<sup>2</sup>
- Average High Temperatures: 15°C (January) to 44°C (July)
- Population: 1,133,627
- Capital City: Ba'qubah
- Average Low Temperatures: 3°C (January) to 25°C (July)
- Population Distribution Rural-Urban: 25,5%-74,5%

## Geography and Climate

The governorate of Diyala is located in eastern-central Iraq, bordering Iran and sharing internal boundaries with the governorates of Baghdad, Salah Al-Din, Sulaymaniyah and Wassit. In the north the Hamrin mountain range crosses the governorate, giving way to desert plains in the south. The man made Hamrin Lake, formed by a dam on the Diyala River, is located approximately 50 km northeast of the governorate's capital of Baqubah. The construction of dams on the tributary rivers of the lake in Iraqi Kurdistan and neighboring Iran has been significantly lowering water levels over the past years, thereby threatening the governorate's water supply, which for an important part depends on the lake. The Diyala River and a number of other smaller rivers intersect Diyala, while the Tigris River crosses the southwestern borders of the governorate. Irrigated farmland stretches along these rivers.

Diyala has a typical dry desert climate. In summer temperatures easily exceed 40°C, while rainfall is very limited and restricted to the winter and early spring.

## Population and Administrative Division

Diyala has an ethnically and religiously diverse population. Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen all live in the governorate. Religious communities in the governorate include Sunni and Shia Muslims, Christians, Yezidi's and Ahl Al-Haqq, a religious group with roots in Shia Islam. Among the Kurdish population is also a community of Failli Kurds, a Kurdish group living in southeastern Iraq and western Iran, near the border between the two countries. The Failli's are predominantly Shia Muslims.

The governorate of Diyala is divided into seven districts: Kifri, Makmoor, Al-Muqdadiya, Baladrooz, Baquba, and Khanaqin. There are unresolved territorial disputes between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government on the administrative status of the districts of Baladrooz, Khanaqin and Mandali.

## Economy

Agriculture has traditionally been one of the main economic activities in Diyala. The governorate is famous for its production of dates and citrus, and livestock and poultry farms are also to be found in the governorate. The Khanaqin area is the location of an oilfield and an oil refinery.

Private sector development is being hampered by the poor infrastructure in the governorate. The Ba'ath regime neglected the development of the governorate. The Iran-Iraq War, the 1991 Gulf War, the following UN sanctions regime, the 2003 invasion and the following insurgency and sectarian fighting also took their toll on the governorate's infrastructure. Cheap imports and a lack of skilled labor and capital are further stalling Diyala's economic development.

The Al-Munthiriyya border crossing connects Diyala with neighboring Iran. The University of Diyala is located in the governorate's capital Ba'qubah.

## Historical Introduction

For decades the governorate of Diyala has been a flashpoint of conflict. Just like other areas in northern Iraq claimed by both Arab and Kurds like Kirkuk and Sinjar, the districts in Diyala which are currently disputed by the KRG and the central government saw extensive attempts at population redistribution. Starting from the 1930's but intensifying in the 1970's the Iraqi government attempted to alter the demographic balance in these disputed territories in favor of ethnic Arabs. After the 1974 Autonomy decree and the following confrontations between Kurdish guerillas and the Iraqi army the Iraqi government launched a so called 'Arabization' campaign, deporting the Kurdish population in and around Khanaqin. Where the homes of the deportees were not destroyed, they were allotted to Arab families brought in from other areas in Iraq. These Arab settlers, predominantly hailing from the tribal population of the Al Jazeera desert, mostly moved to formerly Kurdish areas voluntarily after being promised land, although some (mainly Shia) groups were forcefully relocated to the disputed areas. The displaced Kurds found refuge in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil and Dohuk, fled to neighboring countries or were forcefully resettled in other areas of Iraq. The 1988 Anfal campaign, which is discussed in detail in the governorate profiles of [Dohuk](#), [Erbil](#) and [Sulaymaniyah](#), further exacerbated the forced displacement of the Kurdish population. Many of the forcefully resettled Kurds lived in miserable conditions in their areas of displacement in other regions of Iraq. A number of inhabitants of the city of Khanaqin and its surroundings were also forced to leave their homes following clashes during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988).

Following the defeat of Iraq in the 1991 Gulf war uprisings broke out in the Shia governorates of southern Iraq and the Kurdish majority areas in the north. Kurdish forces managed to take most of the northern Kurdish majority areas. The uprisings were however violently crushed, which triggered an international response in form of a safe haven in northern Iraq, guaranteed by the US, Great-Britain and France. From this safe haven the later Kurdistan Region of Iraq was formed, but the Kurdish population living outside this area including the Kurds living around Kifri and Khanaqin was once more targeted by a forced relocation campaign.

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq American Special Forces supported Kurdish Peshmerga fighters in their drive southwards. Kurdish forces seized control over most of the disputed areas, including Kifri and Khanaqin. Many Arab settlers brought in during the Arabization campaign fled these areas, fearing bloodshed and combat, while groups of Kurds and other minorities who had been forced to leave during the Arabization campaign returned. Arab settlers who did stay in the disputed areas faced threats and discrimination, sometimes leading to forced eviction. Homes and lands occupied by Arabs who fled or were forced to leave were taken over by Kurdish families, often relatives of Peshmerga fighters.

Following the escalation of sectarian tensions and violence after the February 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari mosque, Diyala became a hotbed for sectarian conflict with various Sunni and Shia armed groups targeting civilians, government institutions, American troops and the new Iraqi Security Forces while also violently clashing amongst each other. The main Sunni faction vying for control in Diyala was Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), with AQI's head Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi establishing his headquarters in a village northwest of Baqubah. Shia groups included the Sadrist Jaysh Al-Mahdi, various other Shia militias and

Iran-backed 'Special Groups'. Diyala's mixed population and its proximity to both Baghdad and the Iranian border made it a crucial prize in the sectarian struggle engulfing Iraq. The violence displaced almost 60,000 inhabitants and gravely disrupted everyday life in the governorate. In the summer of 2007 American forces backed by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) launched a number of offensives, which managed to restore stability in the governorate. A crucial element in the success of this operation was the inclusion of tribal groups and civilian defense committees, which assisted with securing the governorate and peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts. The threat of sectarian violence diminished but tensions between parts of the Sunni population in the governorate and the ISF lingered on as the latter cracked down on the same Sunni armed civilian groups that participated in restoring peace in Diyala. Kurdish-Arab tensions about the disputed Khanaqin district also continued.

Starting in 2012 AQI managed to regain control over some areas in Diyala, launching suicide attacks in different locations in the governorate. More attacks were launched in early 2013, with AQI officially turning into the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) in March of that year. With the number of attacks increasing the governorate witnessed an upsurge in sectarian mobilization, with Shia militias taking to the streets again and clashes erupting between Shia and Sunni tribes in the governorate, launching a new wave of displacement. ISIS also began attacking ISF positions, which were weakened after Iraqi troops were moved to Anbar to confront the ISIS advances there in late 2013. ISIS expanded its control in Diyala, at one point occupying large areas in the north of the governorate including Saadiyah and Jalawlah, while also launching attacks on Muqadiyah. After months of heavy fighting ISF and Shia militias managed to retake the governorate, declaring Diyala to be liberated in January 2015. The violence displaced thousands of Diyala's inhabitants.

ISF and allied militias have been accused of harassing, arresting, abducting and murdering Sunni inhabitants and returnees in liberated areas. The violence against Sunni civilians seems to have been sectarian inspired, with Sunni civilians automatically assumed to be collaborators with ISIS. Furthermore the destruction of houses and other civilian buildings in Sunni areas seemed to aim at preventing Sunni IDPs from returning and pushing the ones that stayed to other areas, thereby altering the sectarian makeup of the governorate.

## **Humanitarian Issues**

ISIS left numerous booby-traps in Diyala before being driven from the governorate. These and other improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and unexploded ordnance (UXO) continue to threaten civilians and humanitarians in the governorate.

The percentage of Diyala's population living under the poverty line of \$2,5 a day in is lower than the national average and decreased from 18,5% in 2007 to 10,3% in 2011. It should be noted that major differences exist between the districts of the governorate, with almost 30% of the inhabitants of Baladrooz living under the poverty line, a number which drops to less than 10% in Al-Muqyadiya, Ba'qubah and Kifri. In contrast with the relatively low poverty the governorate has one of Iraq's highest numbers of unemployment.

|                           | Population under the poverty line | Unemployment | Enrollment primary education | Enrollment secondary education | Literacy         |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Diyala Governorate</b> | 10,3%                             | 15%          | 92,3%                        | 45,8%                          | 84,2%            |
| <b>National Averages</b>  | 11,5%                             | 11,3%        | 91%                          | 48,6%                          | 79% <sup>1</sup> |

2011 data indicate that both the literacy rate and the enrollment rate in primary education in Diyala exceed the national average, but the enrollment rate for secondary education dropped from 48,2% in 2006 to 45,8% in 2011. As in other governorates the female enrollment rate for both levels of education is below the enrollment rate of males.

The availability of public services in Diyala is lower than in the rest of Iraq. Only 74,8% of the governorate's inhabitants has sustainable access to an improved water source, which is the lowest of the entire country. More than 20% of Diyala's households rely on a source other than the public water network to fulfill their water needs. Access to the public sewage system is also lower than average in Diyala, with only 0,8% of the governorate's population primarily relying on it of waste water disposal. As in other parts of the country power cuts are frequent in Diyala, forcing almost 60% of the governorate's inhabitants to rely on a secondary power source besides the public network like private or shared generators to fulfill its power needs.

Diyala's history as a hotbed for ethnic and sectarian conflict led to a large number of displaced persons even before the recent combat with IS in the governorate. The IS onslaught and following military operations forced even more people into displacement. Most IDPs hailing from Diyala fled to locations within the governorate itself. Diyala also hosts smaller groups of IDPs mainly coming from Anbar, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din. For an up to date overview of the numbers and locations of IDPs, refugees and camps in the governorate please consult [IOM's displacement tracking matrix](#) or [REACH Iraq's resource center](#).

## Presence of NGOs

Please see the [members' area](#) on NCCI's website for full access to our weekly field reports, which include an up to date humanitarian situation overview. NCCI's [online NGO mapping](#) gives an oversight of local and international NGO presence on a governorate level

<sup>1</sup>As by UNICEF, *State of The World's Children 2015 Country Statistics Table*, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html) , 25/02/2015. All other data are from JAU, *Diyala Governorate Profile* (2013), <http://www.iau-iraq.org/documents/471/GP-Diyala%202013.pdf> , 26/07/2015.

## Sources

### Diyala at a Glance

H. Halm, "AHL-E HAQQ," (Encyclopaedia Iranica, Online Edition, 1982), <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahl-e-hagg-people> , 28/07/2015.

IRIN, *IRAQ: Disappearing lake a blow to livelihoods* (18/06/2008), <http://www.irinnews.org/report/78802/iraq-disappearing-lake-a-blow-to-livelihoods> , 27/07/2015.

JAPU, *Diyala Governorate Profile* (November 2010), <http://www.iau-iraq.org/gp/print/GP-Diyala.asp> , 26/07/2015.

JAU, *Diyala Governorate Profile* (2013), <http://www.iau-iraq.org/documents/471/GP-Diyala%202013.pdf> , 26/07/2015.

M.R. Izady, *Iraq: Ethnic Composition (detailed)*, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq\\_Ethnic\\_detailed\\_lg.png](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq_Ethnic_detailed_lg.png) , 28/07/2015.

M.R. Izady, *IRAQ: Religious Composition (2004-2014)*, [http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq\\_Religions\\_lg.png](http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/maps/Iraq_Religions_lg.png) , 28/07/2015.

UNHCR, *Diyala Governorate Assessment Report* (November 2006), <http://www.unhcr.org/462cbf672.pdf> , 28/07/2015.

World Weather Online, *Baqubah*, <http://www.worldweatheronline.com/v2/weather-averages.aspx?q=XQV> , 27/07/2015.

### Historical Introduction

Al-Akhbar, *Iraqi Government Investigates Massacre in Newly Liberated Diyala* (29/01/2015), <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/23486> , 17/12/2015.

Encyclopaedia Britannica, *Khānaqīn* , <http://www.britannica.com/place/Khanaqin> , 24/08/2015.

Human Rights Watch, *Claims in Conflict Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq* (August 2004), <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2004/iraq0804/iraq0804.pdf> , 17/08/2015.

Human Rights Watch, *Iraq: Militias Escalate Abuses, Possibly War Crimes* (15/02/2015), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/15/iraq-militias-escalate-abuses-possibly-war-crimes> , 17/12/2015.

IRIN News, *IRAQ: Insurgency paralyses life in Diyala* (22/03/2007), <http://www.irinnews.org/report/70864/iraq-insurgency-paralyses-life-in-diyala> , 10/12/2015.

Jessica Lewis, *The Islamic State of Iraq Returns to Diyala*, (The Institute for the Study of War, April 2014), <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Lewis-Diyala.pdf> , 17/12/2015.



Kimberly Kagan, *The Battle for Diyala*, (The Institute for the Study of War, 25/04/2007), <http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/reports/IraqReport04.pdf> , 10/12/2015.

### Humanitarian Issues

JAU, *Diyala Governorate Profile* (2013), <http://www.iau-iraq.org/documents/471/GP-Diyala%202013.pdf> , 26/07/2015.

IOM, *DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX DTM ROUND 34 DECEMBER 2015* (December 2015), <http://iomiraq.net/dtm-page> , 10/01/2016.

UNICEF, *State of The World's Children 2015 Country Statistics Table*, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html) , 25/02/2015.