

# Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile



Source Image: [Joint Analysis and Policy Unit](#)

## Sulaymaniyah at a Glance

### Fast facts

- Area: 17,023 km<sup>2</sup>
- Average High Temperatures: 7,9°C (January) to 38,9°C (August)
- Population: 1,783,270
- Capital City: Sulaymaniyah
- Average Low Temperatures: -0,2°C (January) to 24,1°C (August)
- Population Distribution Rural-Urban: 15,1% - 84,9%

## Geography and Climate

The governorate of Sulaymaniyah is located in the northeast of Iraq, on the border with Iran. Sulaymaniyah hosts the fertile plains of Sharazur and Bitwen, which give way to hills and the Zagros mountain range in the northeast.

Sulaymaniyah has a climate typical to the region, with hot, dry summers and cooler winters. Compared with neighboring areas, Sulaymaniyah is cooler in summer and wetter in winter. Rainfall is limited to the winter months.

## Population and Administrative Division

The governorate of Sulaymaniyah is part of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The majority of its inhabitants are ethnical Kurds. The Sunni branch of Islam is the dominant religion in Sulaymaniyah, but the governorate also hosts Shiite Kurds and a number of Chaldean Christian communities.

The governorate is divided into sixteen districts: Bashder, Bejween, Chamchamal, Darbandikhan, Dokan, Halabja, Kalar, Khanaqeen, Kifry, Mout, Qaradagh, Rania, Said Sadiq, Sharazoor, Sharbazer and Sulaymaniyah, which also hosts the governorate's capital city with the same name.

## Economy

The governorate of Sulaymaniyah benefitted greatly from the relative calm and stable security situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq after the 2003 invasion. Due to a number of reasons, the Kurdish region was less affected by the UN sanctions, which were imposed on Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait and were only lifted after the 2003 invasion. One of the main reasons was that the UN, instead of the Iraqi central government, managed the humanitarian relief and development efforts in the Kurdish region after the war. A large share of the UN Food for Oil program was allotted to the Kurdish region, and the higher presence of international aid organizations in Iraqi Kurdistan also dampened the effect of the sanctions. Finally, cross border smuggling made it easier to circumvent sanction imposed import restrictions.

The relative stable security situation after 2003 lured foreign investments and both domestic and foreign tourists to Sulaymaniyah. Since 2003 the governorate also witnessed a construction boom. Thanks to its vast water supplies and fertile plains, agriculture is one of Sulaymaniyah's strongpoints, but the agricultural production still suffers from the

**The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is a semi-autonomous region** consisting of the governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah. The KRI was granted autonomy in the 2005 constitution of Iraq and is ruled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its parliament, the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA). Under the 2005 constitution, the KRG is allowed to have its own security forces, which operate independently from the Baghdad controlled Iraqi military and security hierarchy. The KRG's budget and oil export remains dependent of Baghdad, which in the past years regularly lead to tensions between the KRG and the central government. Unresolved territorial disputes about Kirkuk and other areas in the governorates of Diyala and Ninewa with a significant Kurdish presence also continue to poison the relations between the KRG and the central government.

consequences of the 1980's Anfal campaign, which will be addressed in more detail in the historical introduction section of this profile.

The flurry of foreign investment however also brought high inflation and failed to create sufficient job opportunities for the governorate's inhabitants. Poor infrastructure and corruption hamper the governorate's economic development. A long running budget disagreement between the KRG and the central government, which started in 2013 and was only resolved in December 2014, also affected Sulaymaniyah: due to a dispute over oil exports, the central government partially withheld the KRG's share of the federal budget, resulting in payment arrears for government employees.

## Historical Introduction

The region's modern history is characterized by an ongoing struggle for autonomy from the central Iraqi government.



Sulaymaniyah City. Source: Thomas Brechmann

Since the 1920s, Iraq's Kurdish region witnessed many revolts against the central authorities in Baghdad – be them the British, the Hashemite monarchy or the Baathist regime – all of which were violently put down.

The relations between the Kurdish region and the central government started off relatively well after the Ba'athist takeover in 1968. The promising Kurdish Autonomy Agreement of 11 March 1970 however was cancelled and replaced by a

unilaterally declared autonomy statute in 1974 following disagreements over the borders of the Kurdish region and the disputed territories around Sinjar, Kirkuk and Khanaqin, issues which still linger on today. The following Kurdish revolt led by Mustafa Barzani was crushed by the regime, which then embarked on an 'Arabization' campaign aiming to alter the demographical balance of the Kurdish region. The Iran-Iraq war, which started in 1980, diverted Baghdad's efforts and resources and the central government gradually lost control over the Kurdish region.

In 1987 the Iraqi regime decided to end the 'Kurdish problem' once and for all. Under the command of Ali Hassan Al-Majid, a cousin and close friend of Saddam Hussain, the Iraqi army launched the Spring 1987 campaign, which started with chemical strikes on villages in the Balisan valley. Then ground forces moved in and demolished hundreds of villages throughout Kurdistan, forcing their residents to resettle

or move to government-built camps. The Spring campaign however was only the prelude for the even bloodier Anfal campaign. Between February and September 1988, eight Anfal campaigns were launched, sweeping the entire Kurdish region of Iraq. The Anfal campaigns all followed a similar two-staged battle plan. First a wave of chemical attacks, airstrikes and artillery shelling was launched against both Peshmerga positions and villages. After the first phase Iraqi ground forces moved in, demolishing entire villages and detaining and deporting the civilian population. Captured battle age men were then split from the other detainees and executed. Other civilians of all ages were also targeted by mass executions and disappearances. By the end of the Anfal campaign, at least 2000 villages had been razed and varying sources estimate that between 50,000 and 187,000 civilians were killed during gas attacks, executed by the Iraqi army or had perished from hardships endured when they fled the violence. Many others had been 'disappeared', their fate unknown to their relatives up to today.

After the defeat of Iraq in the 1991 Gulf War, revolts broke out in Iraqi Kurdistan and the mainly Shiite southern governorates. The revolts were violently crushed by the government, but the stream of refugees fleeing Kurdistan triggered an international response: a safe haven was declared in the Kurdish region, guaranteed by the international coalition that fought Iraq in 1991. A massive relief operation was also set in motion in the Kurdish governorates. Clashes between Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi army however continued on a limited scale after the Kurds seized Erbil and Sulaymaniyah in July 1991.

In 1994, open hostilities broke out between the rival KDP and PUK factions, at one time involving Iran on the side of the PUK and the central government supporting the KDP. In 1998 the two factions finally signed a US brokered peace agreement. When the US-led coalition force invaded Iraq in 2003, Kurdish forces joined the fight against Saddam's regime. After the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime, the Kurdish region, including the governorate of Erbil, remained relatively calm and untouched by the sectarian strife that engulfed other parts of Iraq. Tensions between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government in Baghdad however remained. The disputed oil-rich areas around Kirkuk, the partition of the oil-revenue and the presence of Baghdad-controlled security forces in or near Kurdish areas are all points of contention between the Kurds and Baghdad. The IS-conquest of large parts of northwestern Iraq in 2014 and the following retreat of the Iraqi army left many of these contested areas de facto under control of Kurdish Peshmerga forces, thus adding another layer of complexity to the ongoing territorial conflict.

## **Humanitarian Issues**

Just like the other Kurdish governorates, Sulaymaniyah governorate escaped the widespread sectarian violence that swept Iraq after the invasion of 2003. This however does not mean that the governorate remained completely spared of incidents of violence. Political tensions between the rival PUK and KDP have abated for now, but renewed disputes could always flare up in the future. The governorate also borders some of the disputed areas claimed by both the KRG and the central government in Baghdad. The alleged presence of PKK fighters has also been a cause of tension with Turkey. Sulaymaniyah is still littered with minefields and unexploded ordnance.

Since the IS incursion into Iraq it has been getting increasingly difficult to employ Arab staff in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Arab Iraqi's working for NGOs in the KRI have been questioned, delayed or even blocked at security checkpoints. These checkpoint issues not only hinder NGO operations in the region, but also make the life of thousands of IDPs residing in the region more difficult. Arab Iraqis and Arab nationals from other countries are also facing problems in obtaining visa to enter the KRI.

	Population under the poverty line	Unemployment	Enrollment primary education	Enrollment secondary education	Literacy
<b>Sulaymaniyah Governorate</b>	0,3%	15%	98,2%	79%	76,6%
<b>National Averages</b>	11,5%	11,3%	90,4%	48,6%	79% <sup>1</sup>

Sulaymaniyah has the lowest poverty level of all Iraqi governorates. The participation rate of women in the labor market reaches nearly 20%, and is one of the highest of the country. The governorate also has above average accessibility to both improved water sources and sanitation. The access to water and sanitation however greatly varies among the districts. The governorate performs badly on other development indicators. Despite significant gains in enrollment rates in both primary and secondary schools over the past few years, illiteracy remains high among the governorate's inhabitants. The public electricity network also fails to deliver a consistent source of power, with more than half of the households connected reporting daily power cuts lasting more than 12 hours. A shortage of both trained medical personal and medical supplies hampers access to public health services, which are also seen as too far away or too costly by many of Sulaymaniyah's inhabitants.

The relative safety and stability of the governorate of Sulaymaniyah attracted a large number of refugees fleeing the civil war in neighboring Syria. An even larger number of internally displaced persons fled to the governorate following the militant takeover of large parts of northwestern Iraq in 2014. The majority of these IDPs are hailing from the provinces of Anbar, Ninewa and Salah Al-Din, fleeing the violence in these areas. IDPs and refugees are lacking access to food, water and health facilities. Most IDPs are residing in rented housing, but have difficulties coming up with the money for the rent. Others are staying in unfinished or abandoned buildings, schools, religious buildings or other vulnerable housing where they risk eviction. Complicating the matter is the fact that many IDPs are hosted in the Khanaqin and Kifri areas, which are claimed by both the KRG and the central government. The large number of displaced persons puts a lot of pressure on the governorate's resources and economy. 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](#).

<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, *Sulaymaniyah Governorate Profile (2013)*, <http://www.jauiraq.org/documents/463/GP-Sulaymaniyah%202013.pdf> , 01/03/2015.

## 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.

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