

Wassit Governorate Profile



Source map: [IAU](#)

Wassit at a Glance

Fast Facts

- Area: 17,153 km²
- Average High Temperatures: 16°C (January) to 42°C (July)
- Population: 1,149,059
- Capital City: Kut
- Average Low Temperatures: 5°C (January) to 26°C (July)
- Population Distribution Rural-Urban: 42,1%-57,9%

Geography and Climate

The governorate of Wassit is located in eastern Iraq, on the border with Iran. The Baramadad border crossing in Wassit connects the two countries. Wassit shares internal boundaries with the governorates of Diyala, Baghdad, Babil, Qadissiya, Thi-Qar and Missan.

Wassit is intersected by the Tigris River, along which a ribbon of irrigated farmland runs, giving way to a dry desert landscape to the north east. Wassit has a dry, desert climate, with temperatures easily exceeding 40°C in summer. Rainfall is scarce and concentrated in the winter months.

Population and Administrative Division

The majority of Wassit's inhabitants are Shia Arabs. A minority of Failli Kurds is living in the district of Badra. The Failli's are a Kurdish group living in southeastern Iraq and western Iran, near the border between the two countries. A community of Lurs (Iranian people speaking a language related to Farsi) is residing to the east of the governorate's capital of Kut. Both Failli Kurds and Lurs are predominantly Shia.

The governorate of Wassit is divided into six districts: Al-Hai, Al-Kut, Al-Na'maniya, Al-Suwaira, Aziziya and Badra.

Economy

Trade is an important sector of Wassit's economy. The governorate is a hub for trade flowing along the Tigris River, connecting northern and southern Iraq. Cross-border trade with Iran also passes through Wassit, while the governorate's capital of Kut is an important market for the agricultural produce of the area. Wassit's farmlands produce a variety of cereals and dates. Fish is also produced in the governorate. Industrial activities include textile manufacturing, food packaging and gravel quarrying. In 2013 test drilling started in Wassit's Badra oilfield, which is estimated to hold three billion barrels of oil. A consortium led by Russia's Gazprom started commercial exploration of the oilfield in September 2014.

Wassit's agriculture and fishing industry are reliant on the Tigris River. The increasing salinity of the Tigris' waters is thus a major threat to the governorate's economy. Outdated machinery is further hampering the development of the agricultural sector. A lot of jobs in agriculture are also informal and unwaged. Wassit's manufactories need investment to be brought to modern standards.

Historical Introduction

The governorate of Wassit has a history stretching back to at least the seventh century AD and was the location of one of the greatest British defeats of the First World War. More recently the governorate was a battleground in the Iran-Iraq war.

In 1980 the Iraqi army crossed the Shatt Al-Arab and invaded Iran, triggering the Iran-Iraq War which would last until 1988. Although the Iraqi army achieved some initial successes it was Iran that gained the initiative in 1982 and drove back the Iraqi forces from its territory. A number of massive Iranian offensives and Iraqi counterattacks would follow, which costed thousands of lives on both sides but

neither one of the two countries managed to gain a clear upper hand. One of these Iranian offensives took place in February 1984 and aimed to take Kut, Wassit's capital, in an attempt to cut the Baghdad-Basrah highway. The Iranians managed to conquer some strategic terrain near the highway, but ultimately the offensive failed.

The Iran-Iraq War exacerbated the persecution of the Failli Kurds, who are Shiite Kurds living in Wassit and other southeastern governorates of Iraq, and western Iran. The Failli Kurds were accused of being Iranian, and had already faced discrimination for decades. During the 1970s 40,000 Failli Kurds were expelled to Iran, and in 1980 Decree 666 declared that all Failli Kurds should be stripped of their Iraqi



The banks of the Tigris in Kut, as pictured by a British soldier in 1916. Source: [C.H. Weaver](#)

nationality. The Failli Kurds who were forced to flee to Iran, stayed as stateless persons in refugee camps, with a small minority gaining Iranian citizenship. The others who stayed in Iraq lived without a nationality for decades, thus being excluded from basic state services like identity documents, schooling or jobs.

Only in 2006 the new Iraqi Nationality Law repealed Decree 666 and stated that all Iraqis who had been stripped of their nationality should have it reinstated. Because of the requirement to provide documents proving their Iraqi origin, many stateless Iraqis still face difficulties obtaining citizenship. Distrust towards the Iraqi government also made a number of Failli Kurds stay in Iran or seek refuge in third countries.

During the American led invasion of Iraq in 2003 the governorate saw heavy fighting. US Marines on their way to Baghdad took the bridges over the River Tigris before seizing the city of Al-Kut, which was subdued after an intense confrontation with defending Republican Guard units. Later the Kut Al Hayy airbase near Kut was developed into a base for the international occupation forces and a training center for the new Iraqi security forces.

In April 2004 the Shia cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Trend and its armed wing the Mahdi Army, launched a revolt against the occupying international coalition force and the new Iraqi government. A string of attacks targeted international forces and Iraqi Security Forces in Iraq's southern Shia dominated governorates and Sadr City, Al-Sadr's stronghold in Baghdad. The revolt failed to create a massive popular uprising, but Mahdi Army fighters did manage to take control over a number of cities in the south, including Al-Kut. Eventually the Mahdi Army was driven back, and in August 2004 a ceasefire agreement was reached between Al-Sadr, and the Iraqi government and the international coalition. The Sadrists would continue their armed opposition against the Iraqi government and its international backers in the years to come after the 2004 uprising, but Wassit remained relatively peaceful.

Over the past few years the governorate did witness a number of bomb attacks. The bombings generally targeted civilian gatherings like markets or schools and were often connected to other waves of attacks executed by Sunni insurgent groups against Shia targets in other parts of Iraq. The governorate remained spared of the Islamic State's onslaught which swept large parts of Iraq in 2014.

Humanitarian Issues

Mines and unexploded ordnance from the past wars remain a lingering threat in the governorate of Wassit. During the Iran-Iraq war both parties deployed landmines all along the frontline, including in Wassit. Thousands of these mines remain scattered throughout the governorate, threatening the population and making farmland unusable. Floods and rain have been moving unexploded mines away from their original locations, increasing the risks for Wassit's inhabitants.

	Population under the poverty line	Unemployment	Enrollment primary education	Enrollment secondary education	Literacy
Wassit Governorate	17,1%	9,7%	83,7%	37,1%	75,8%
National Averages	11,5%	11,3%	91%	48,6%	79% ¹

The governorate of Wassit scores below the national averages on most development parameters. The percentage of the population living under the poverty line of \$2,5 a day is significantly higher than the Iraqi average. The number of inhabitants facing food insecurity (11%) is almost twice the national average of 6%. Where poverty decreased from 27,8% in 2007 to 17,1% in 2011, food insecurity actually increased with 3% in the same period.

Regarding education Wassit also performs badly when compared to the rest of the country. Enrollment rates for both primary and secondary education are significantly below the national averages, and not unsurprisingly the literacy rate is also lower than in most other regions of Iraq. It should be noted that enrollment rates did improve over the past few years.

Only 75,1% of Wassit's population has sustainable access to an improved source of water, the lowest number of all of Iraq. Less than 80% of the households are connected to the public water network, and from these less than one fourth has water available all day. Others rely on streams, rivers, wells or bottled water and water tankers to fulfill their water needs. The access to water varies greatly between the governorate's districts, with as much as 96,8% of households in the district of Badra relying on bottled water. The percentage of people with access to an improved sanitation facility (91,9%) is slightly lower than the national average. The situation regarding to waste water disposal is worse: only 11,4% of the population relies on the public sewer network, with the rest using septic tanks or a covered canal.

The access to electricity in Wassit is very limited. Almost 90% of the governorate's households who are connected to the public electricity network report daily power cuts of more than twelve hours. It is not

¹As by UNICEF, *State of The World's Children 2015 Country Statistics Table*, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html , 25/02/2015. All other data are from JAU, *Wassit Governorate Profile* (2013), <http://www.iau-iraq.org/documents/469/GP-Wassit%202013.pdf> , 16/06/2015.

surprising then that more than 70% of the governorate's population employs a secondary source of power like shared or private generators.

As in other governorates of Iraq the governorate of Wasit received a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing the IS conquests in northwestern Iraq. A large group of IDPs is staying in informal settlements, while others are sheltered by the host community. Smaller groups are staying in rented housing, religious buildings, unfinished buildings or schools. Religious buildings and vulnerable informal settlement arrangements or unfinished buildings often lack crucial services like health services and drinking water. Moreover IDPs in these types of settlement are always at risk of being evicted. 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

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