1.4.4 Kirkuk

1.4.4 Kirkuk

Kirkuk map

Map 5. Kirkuk governorate, © UNOCHA and MapAction.252

For a general description of the governorate, please refer to section 2.5 of the EUAA COI Report Iraq – Security Situation (May 2024). Kirkuk governorate's population according to the latest available figures of 2022 was estimated to be 1 814 368.253

Kirkuk is described as ethnically and religiously diverse, with Arab, Kurdish and Turkmen populations254 as well as Christian and Mandean religious minorities.255 From 20 to 21 November 2024, a nation-wide census was carried out.256 This was considered by some as a politically sensitive undertaking, especially in the disputed territories such as Kirkuk governorate, where there were Kurdish concerns that new population figures might undermine Kurdish claims.257 Therefore, it was finally decided to exclude questions related to ethnicity and sect from the census.258 See section 2.3 on Ethnic and religious minorities.

In an analysis of August 2024, Iraqi journalist Mohanad Faris describes the fragmented nature of the security landscape in the governorate, characterised by the lack of local political consensus as well as the presence of numerous tribal forces and armed militias. He goes on to mention the continued interference of regional powers Iran and Türkiye, both of which have interests in the governorate's oil fields and provide material and financial support to local rival armed groups. 259

The ISF maintained a Provincial Operations Command in Kirkuk city.260 A joint force of Iraqi army and Peshmerga forces, formed in 2021 under the Joint Operations Command for operations in territories disputed between the KRI and the central government,261 also conducted operations to target ISIL cells in the governorate.262 Their deployment near Turkmen villages was however reportedly obstructed by local PMF forces.263 At the same time, PMF factions remained active in security operations within the governorate,264 including actions targeting ISIL militants.265 In February 2025, a gas field in Sulaymaniyah was struck by an explosive drone.266 The drone originated from an area in southern Kirkuk where the PMF 15th and 16th Brigade were reportedly deployed. However, the PMF denied involvement in the incident.267 In June 2025, a PMF fighter reportedly killed an 11-year-old child playing near a checkpoint in southwestern Kirkuk.268

ISIL reportedly operated in sleeper cells in rural areas of the governorate, capable of carrying out hit-and-run operations.269 As of August 2024, the Turkmen-settled areas of Tuz Khormatu (see section 1.4.6 Salah Al-Din), Daquq and the Ghaeda (Gaida) subdistrict were described as some of the last areas of regular ISIL activity in the country.270 In February 2025, ISIL militant activity between Kirkuk and Salah Al-Din governorates reportedly intensified, with a notable rise in cross-governorate movements.271 As of June 2025, the group's remaining presence was described to be in the mountainous areas of the governorate, particularly in the Hamrin Mountains, Wadi Al-Shay and Wadi Zghaytoun.272 Local news media regularly reported on anti-ISIL operations carried out in Kirkuk by the Iraqi army and the CTS during the reference period.273 These security measures involved clashes,274 air strikes275 and arrests.276 Some of these operations were carried out in coordination with KRI Peshmerga or the KRI internal security forces, *Asayish*.277

In January 2025, the Iraqi parliament voted on a contentious bill to return farmland seized by the Baath government in Kirkuk and other disputed areas back to its original Kurdish and Turkmen owners.278 This property restitution law came into force on 18 February 2025, however, the day before, confrontations erupted between Iraqi armed forces and farmers in Sargaran subdistrict.279 The army had blocked Kurdish farmers from accessing their previously confiscated lands, leading to clashes.280 In May 2025, some Kurdish farmers reportedly still faced threats and harassment by the Iraqi army while trying to access their land.281 See section 2.2 on Latest legislation impacting civil and human rights.

There were sporadic reports of IED explosions, such as an IED planted on the roadside near an army vehicle in the Ghara mountain area killing two officers282, an IED detonation near an army patrol in Wadi Al-Shay283 and an IED detonating in a Turkmen neighbourhood of Kirkuk city, injuring nine civilians.284

Security incidents (number and type of security incidents)

During the reference period (1 August 2024 – 1 August 2025), ACLED recorded 82 security incidents in Kirkuk governorate, of which 28 were coded as battles, 38 as explosions/remote violence, and 16 as incidents of violence against civilians. Security incidents were recorded in all governorate districts, with more than half being documented in Kirkuk district.285

Figure 10 Iraq

Figure 10: Security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' in Kirkuk between August 2024 and July 2025 on district level, based on ACLED data.286

According to ACLED data, ISIL was involved as main actor (coded as either 'Actor 1' or 'Actor 2') in 37 security incidents, 31 of which also involved Iraqi military forces as an actor, followed by unidentified armed groups with 23 incidents.287 For the period between 1 August 2024 and 1 August 2025, UCDP recorded 20 security events in Kirkuk governorate, leading to 61 casualties.288

Civilian casualties

During the reference period, UNAMI recorded 3 civilian casualties (2 killed, 1 injured) in Kirkuk governorate. 289 Likewise, UCDP recorded 2 civilian fatalities.290

Conflict-related infrastructure damage and ERW

On 1 July 2025, as two rockets struck the military section of Kirkuk airport, another rocket caused material damage when it hit a house in Kirkuk city.291 In terms of ERW contamination, the Mine Action Review as of the end of 2023 estimated that 79 109 square metres of the governorate's area were contaminated with cluster munition.292 In February 2025, a child was killed and another wounded by an explosion of an ERW in Riyadh subdistrict.293

Conflict-induced displacement and return

IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)294 unit stated in its Iraq Master List Report 134 (covering the period September – December 2024) that, as of 31 December 2024, Kirkuk governorate was hosting 92 916 displaced people, most of them (83 778) in Kirkuk district. This represented an increase by about 0.3 % compared to 2023. 58 % of these IDPs were displaced within the governorate, 22 % were from Salah Al-Din and 9 % from Ninewa.295 As of December 2024, Kirkuk had a return rate296 of 74 %. The governorate recorded 193 014 returnees, with the principal district of return being Al-Hawiga (175 722).297

- 252

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The return rate is calculated by dividing the number of returnees per governorate by the total number of returnees and IDPs originating from that governorate. (IOM Iraq, Returns in Iraq: 2021 Overview, December 2020 (Round11) to December 2021 (Round 14), February 2022, url, p. 2 footnote 5)

- 297

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