



Several international crises have grasped the international community's attention, and as a result, Iraq does not make the news very often these days. And ten years after US forces took over Iraq, opinions on the progress made are as polarized as ever. According to many experts, for every positive development, there's a negative development that counters it.

In the early 1980s, Iraq was regarded by many as the most developed state in the Arab world. The Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War, as well as subsequent years of sanctions, took a heavy toll on developmental indicators, yet Iraq continued to have strong state institutions - even if they were used to maintain Hussein's power.

The US invasion and subsequent civil conflict changed this, as violence and de-Baathification drove away the human resources needed to run effective institutions.

Iraq is now the only country in the Middle East where living standards have not improved compared to 25 years ago, according to the World Bank. In areas such as secondary school enrolment and child immunization, Iraq now ranks lower than some of the poorest countries in the world.

“By all measures and standards, there has been a deterioration in the quality of life of Iraqis as compared to 25 years ago,” Khalid Khalid, who tracks Iraq’s progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the UN Development Programme (UNDP), told IRIN News. “The invasion comes on top of sanctions that came before it and the Iran-Iraq war. It’s one continuous chain of events that led to the situation Iraqis are facing now.”

A million Iraqis remain refugees, and over a million are internally displaced. Iraq’s healthcare is undermined by a lack of medical personnel, unreliable utilities and fragile national security. Women and girls, who once enjoyed more rights than other women in the region, now all too often find themselves excluded from school and work opportunities, though great progress has been made towards gender equality in recent years.

While living conditions, clean water access, poverty rates and education levels are all disappointing compared to historical highs in the 1980s, they are greatly improved from the years Iraq spent under sanctions. And increased decentralization of power has offered some hope for the future.



However, [increased violence](#) in the Anbar province cast dark clouds over these hopes. “The situation in Fallujah is particularly concerning as existing stocks of food, water and life-saving medicines begin to run out,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Representative Nickolay Mladenov (picture) said in a [statement](#) in Baghdad. “According to our preliminary assessment, over 5,000 families have fled the fighting and sought refuge in the neighbouring provinces of Karbala, Salahadine, Baghdad and elsewhere. The UN is working with the Ministry of Displacement and Migration to identify their needs and meet them immediately.”

Voicing concern about the deteriorating security in parts of Iraq, United Nations

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged all political leaders to unite against terrorism and work together to stabilize the country and stop the “senseless deaths of Iraqi women, children and men.”

In the beginning of January, black-clad Sunni militants of Al Qaeda destroyed the Falluja Police Headquarters and mayor’s office, planted their flag atop other government buildings and decreed the western Iraqi city to be their new independent state.

On top of its own challenges, Iraq now faces the effects of the Syrian conflict as well, and the country is host to more than 200,000 [Syrian refugees](#) . Iraq also hosts some 3,200 Iranian exiles at Camp Hurriya located near the Baghdad airport - many of them members of a group known as the People's Mojahedeen of Iran who have been in Iraq since the 1980s.

Since 2011, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) together with the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), has been trying to find relocation opportunities outside Iraq for all camp residents. So far, the international community has secured relocation to third countries for only 311 residents.

No easy narrative can be accurately applied to the country’s experiences over the past 10 years. The direction the country has taken may only become clear over time.

*Read IRIN's full report on Iraq [here](#) .*