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# Expansion of Iraq's Public Sector: How Many New Civil Servants Were Appointed Last Year?

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In recent years, in an effort to alleviate youth dissatisfaction and respond to the demands of a generation that comprises nearly one-third of the population, the government has increasingly turned to large-scale public sector appointments. This trend has accelerated year after year. In 2015, the total number of civil servants stood at 3,027,069. A decade later, that figure has risen to 4,074,697. Notably, according to the Ministry of Finance's salary records, more than one million new civil servants were added in just the past year alone.

The increase in this figure reflects a rise in operational expenditure and a corresponding reduction in investment spending in Iraq. Between 2015 and 2024, annual salary expenditures—excluding the social welfare program costs, which themselves are essentially salaries—rose by 27.4 trillion dinars, surpassing 60 trillion dinars last year.

These figures are drawn from Ministry of Finance reports and, when available, the annual budget laws. What matters most, however, is understanding why these expenditures rise in certain years and fall in others: which sectors are driving the increases, whether Iraq truly requires such a large number of civil servants, and why their numbers decrease when oil revenues decline. Equally important are the broader economic, social, and political consequences of this growth in operational expenditure—particularly the heavy burden of salaries and social safety net programs. By tracking Iraq's fiscal data over the past decade, this analysis examines these dynamics, focusing in this section on the rise in the number of civil servants and the expansion of operational expenditure.

According to the 2023-2025 budget law, the total number of civil servants for all institutions, ministries, and governorates was 4 million, 074 thousand, and 697 people, with total expenditure of 47.2 trillion dinars for civil servant salaries that year. However, in 2024, salary expenditure reached 60 trillion dinars, meaning that if we exclude promotions and salary adjustments, approximately 1 million, 107 thousand, and 771 new civil servants were added to the public sector payroll in Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Region.

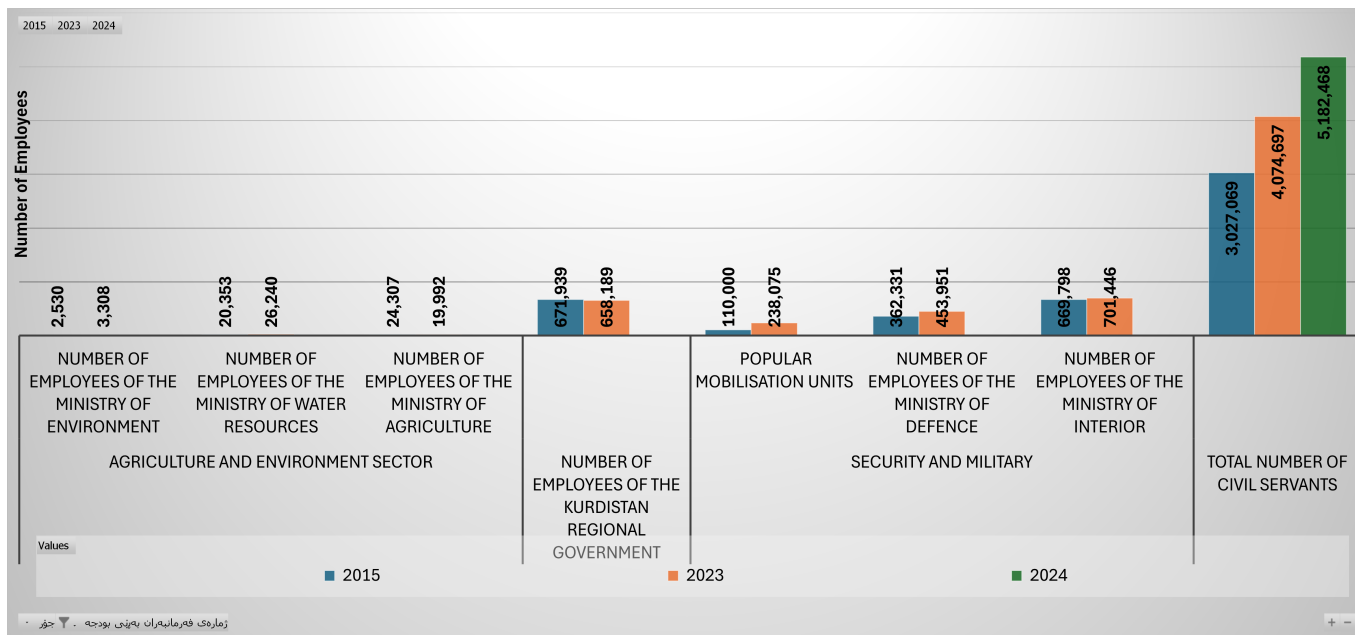
Although comprehensive data for total expenditures in 2025 are only available up to June, the amount spent during the first six months on civil servant salaries and the social welfare program indicates that the government requires approximately 7.3 trillion dinars (or \$ 5.5 billion) per month to avoid salary delays.

Another notable point is that during the first half of this year, total salary expenditures exceeded 30 trillion dinars. By comparison, a decade ago, the total annual spending on salaries during wartime was 32 trillion dinars. If the second half of the year mirrors the first, it will further confirm that roughly one million new civil servants have been appointed in Iraq, excluding the Kurdistan Region.

A significant part of the trend of expanding the public sector in Iraq has been concentrated in the security sector, even as the rest of the world increasingly allocates resources to artificial intelligence and climate change adaptation. For instance, the number of employees in Iraq's Ministry of Defense grew from 362,000 in 2015 to over 701,000 in 2023. In contrast, the Ministry of Agriculture saw its workforce decline from 24,000 in 2015 to 19,000 in 2023. This indicates that the addition of three million civil servants over the past decade has primarily strengthened security institutions rather than sectors in which the world is actively investing.

As illustrated in the chart below, the growth in Iraq's civil service has not targeted areas such as agriculture, environmental protection, or water resources—sectors currently prioritized by regional and international actors—but has been largely concentrated in security institutions, particularly the Ministries of Interior, Defense, and the Popular Mobilization Forces.

Graph 1: Number of civil servants in the Iraqi government and Kurdistan Region, 2015-2023 and overall total 2024



According to the latest census, the total population of Iraq under the age of 14 is approximately 16.5 million, while those aged 14 and above number around 29.5 million. Based on data from the Ministry of Finance, in 2024, roughly 8.8 million people received social welfare assistance of 250,000 dinars per month. This means that, combining civil servants who receive salaries and individuals receiving monthly social welfare, approximately 14 million people out of Iraq's total population of 46 million—including the Kurdistan Region—benefit from these payments.

What is particularly notable over the past decade is that, while the number of civil servants in Iraq has increased under successive governments, this growth has not extended to the Kurdistan Region. In fact, the number of civil servants in the Kurdistan Region's ministries and institutions has decreased. In 2015, the region employed 671,939 civil servants; by 2023, this number had fallen to 658,189. The figure may be even lower today due to retirements and resignations during the past decade.

**Table 1:** Number of civil servants and salary expenditure from 2015 to 2024

Year	Total expenditure for salaries/dinars	Total number of civil servants/persons	Total expenditure for social Support/dinar
2015	32,651,614,800,598	3,027,069	11,447,911,946,332
2016	31,833,403,210,783	2,951,214	10,350,616,707,457
2017	32,866,519,169,240	2,885,834	14,822,562,808,423
2018	35,835,518,757,816	2,885,716	15,166,802,944,820
2019	40,633,563,090,793	2,941,890	19,696,020,398,524
2020	40,037,297,199,732	2,898,720	16,427,871,468,379
2021	42,446,670,269,857	3,263,834	18,979,326,041,441
2022	43,614,045,349,018	3,353,596	24,783,472,458,026
2023	47,216,759,523,648	4,074,697	24,988,374,120,376
2024	60,053,380,659,361	5,182,468	26,692,922,758,384

**Note:** Iraq did not have an annual budget law for the years 2016, 2019, and 2020. During these years, the number of civil servants was estimated based on expenditure data compared to the previous year. A similar approach is reflected in the table for 2024.

It is important to note that fluctuations in these numbers are more closely tied to revenue levels than to the state's actual need for new civil servants. For instance, in 2020, when overall revenue—and oil revenue in particular—declined significantly, the number of civil servants fell from 3,027,000 to 2,951,000, as shown in the table.

Regarding revenue, the government's ability to pay monthly salaries is largely dependent on oil income rather than other sources of revenue. Non-oil revenues over the past ten years, even in the best years, have never been sufficient to cover even two months of salaries or one month of operational expenditure. This pattern is evident in the data: in years of high oil revenue, such as 2022 and 2023, the number of civil servants increased, whereas in years of low oil revenue, such as 2020, the number decreased, as illustrated in Table 1 above.

Iraq has another significant expenditure similar to monthly salaries: the social welfare program. Over the past decade, annual spending on this program has grown from 11 trillion dinars to 26.9 trillion dinars. Reports indicate that the monthly support or assistance amounts to 250,000 dinars per person. Accordingly, in 2015, approximately 3.8 million people received this assistance, while by 2024, the number had risen to 8.8 million Iraqis.

In reality, the doubling of expenditure over a single decade, coupled with an increase of more than 27 trillion dinars for salaries alone and 15 trillion dinars for the social welfare program, implies that oil prices will need to reach \$100 per barrel in the coming decade and that Iraq will need to export 6 million barrels of oil daily—assuming the next decade mirrors the last.

In Iraq, monthly payments from the government range from the minimum social welfare assistance of 250 thousand dinars to as much as 18 million dinars per month for a parliamentarian. The total number of salary recipients reaches approximately 15 million people, which represents over 51% of Iraq's population aged 15-64 years.

This expansion in the number of civil servants may currently be supported by oil revenues and can mask the underlying problems of public sector bloating and inefficiencies in a governance system heavily reliant on the public sector. However, even a modest drop in oil prices quickly exposes both the scale of civil service employment and the magnitude of annual expenditures. In the following section, we will examine how public sector spending has contributed to rising inequality in Iraq and how oil revenues have been distributed over the past decade.