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مركز المنصة للتنمية المستدامة  
Platform Center for Sustainable Development



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Policy Briefs

# Aligning Education Outputs with Labor Market Demands

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## A brief overview of the Iraq Policy Program

The Iraq Policy Program aims to bridge the gap between youth elites and decision-makers by training young elites to effect positive change through influencing the decision-making process. The program aims to empower participants to prepare policy papers and propose policy alternatives aimed at enhancing system performance and supporting its legitimacy. This program enables participants to communicate with decision-makers and understand the main difficulties and problems affecting the implementation and follow-up of public policies. Additionally, the program seeks to provide participants with a realistic understanding of the decision-making environment in Iraq, as well as an understanding of the opportunities and challenges of change.

## The program stages

**Preparation:** Assisting participants in acquiring the fundamental skills to prepare policy papers and effective advocacy campaigns. **Discovery:** Clarifying important public policies in Iraq by experts through stakeholder engagement, frameworks and institutional procedures, practical realities, and discussions surrounding each public policy, as well as reform prospects. **Engagement:** Training participants to develop promotional campaigns and coordinate meetings with government officials to initiate their campaigns. **Enrichment:** Supervising participants to prepare a policy paper in their area of interest to enrich dialogues, develop policy alternatives, which can help address current challenges.

## About the Center

The Platform for Sustainable Development is a registered center with the Non-Governmental Organizations Department at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers under the number (1S2106012). It serves as a space for thought, dialogue, and action towards positive change.

## Vision

We seek to establish a platform for dialogue and policies that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Iraq.

## Mission

Filling the gap between the state and society to ensure the essence of democracy by engaging citizens in the decision-making process through training, monitoring, analysis, research, awareness, and advocacy.

## Strategic Goals

- Preparing a youth elite that rises to its social responsibilities through studying problems, proposing policy alternatives, and working towards their implementation.
- Utilizing knowledge outputs and encouraging youth to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals
- Presenting statistics and issues that occupy the political arenas and societal circles to reflect a deeper understanding of the Iraqi reality.
- Creating a network of active, informed, and committed citizens dedicated to the project of building the Iraqi government.



The Iraqi state faces multiple problems, and one of the most significant issues affecting the economic and productive processes is the lack of alignment between the outputs of education and the requirements of the labor market. Additionally, higher education institutions are unable to control market needs and keep up with the constant changes and developments in those needs, especially in the face of the growing demand for education and the proliferation of its outputs.

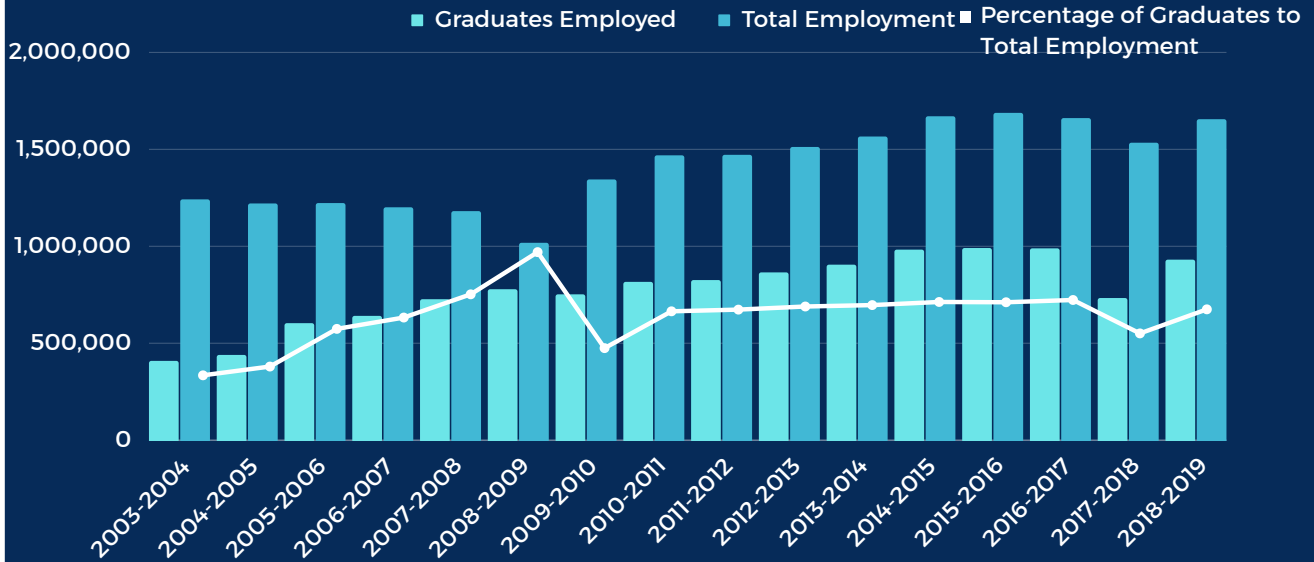
All indicators point to the weak alignment between the outcomes of education and the needs of the local and global labor market and the requirements of human and economic development in Iraq. Part of this problem relates to the failure to develop universities' curricula and the inadequacy of training, both in terms of content and methods. The results indicate that these curricula are rigid or change too slowly to match the pace of changes in development needs and labor markets. As a result, unemployment has spread, and the rates of unemployed university graduates have increased, posing a burden on government authorities to provide suitable job opportunities for the large number of graduates each year. Alignment has become a real necessity given the transformations of the modern era, the concept of globalization, and technological advancement.

Higher education institutions in Iraq suffer from multiple problems that hinder their performance in preparing and enabling competent graduates who contribute to development plans and enhance performance and productivity. Graduates of higher education in Iraq face high unemployment rates, and private colleges have also contributed to raising these rates. Achieving economic development no longer depends solely on a country's natural resources and productive elements but also on the quality of human resources contributing to improving performance and evaluating educational institutions.

One of the most serious problems resulting from the lack of alignment, and perhaps the most dangerous to the economic and social system, is the problem of unemployment.



Figure (1) depicts the ratio of graduates employed to the total workforce for the years 2003-2018.



Source: Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Planning, Department of Human Development, Labor Force and Employment Policies Section for Multiple Years, Republic of Iraq, Central Statistical Organization, Information Bank.

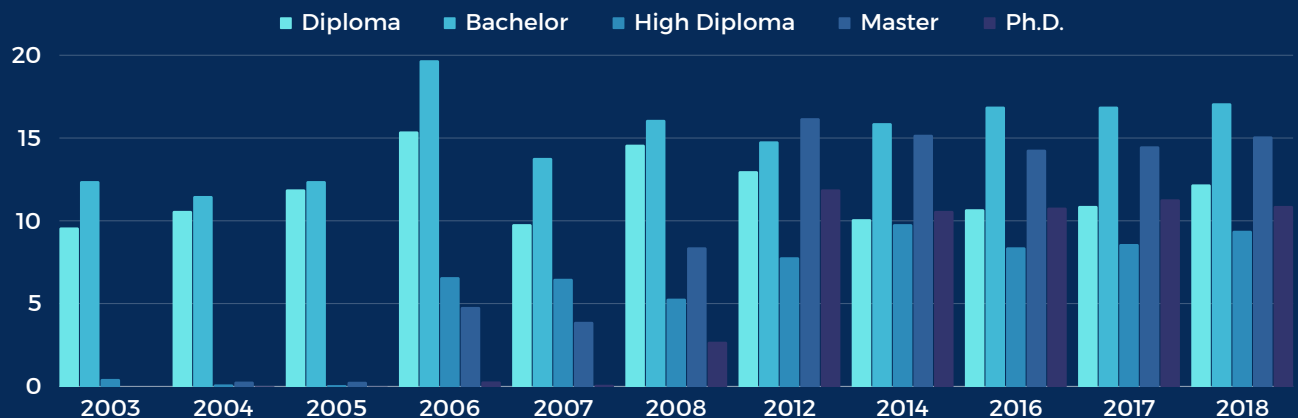
One of the main reasons for its exacerbation is the improper distribution of qualified personnel to perform the tasks needed by the country, given the economic conditions and the abnormal political events in Iraq after 2003. These events led to the destruction of economic and social institutions and infrastructure and the disruption of most industrial facilities, reducing their capacity for local production and increasing dependence on imports. All these imbalances and instability have generated a significant and deeply rooted problem, especially among educated youth and university graduates. Moreover, the inability of the higher education system, with the help of other government agencies, to keep up with developments and control market needs has exacerbated the situation.

The provided data indicates that the percentage of employed graduates as a portion of the total workforce increased from 32.9% in 2003/2004 to its peak of 76.4% in 2008/2009. There was a noticeable increase in the number of workers during this period. However, we observe a relative decrease in the subsequent years, attributed to the unstable security situation leading to the migration of graduates and youth abroad.



Furthermore, Iraq entered into a war with terrorist groups, impacting the number of workers and the country's economic situation. The rate fluctuated until it decreased to 56.2% in 2018/2019 due to falling oil prices and the budget deficit. Despite the accumulation of a large number of employees in government institutions, these rates are small in relation to the distribution of the workforce by educational status, contributing to increased unemployment among university graduates.

Figure (2): Graduate unemployment rate in Iraq for primary and higher studies (2003-2018)



Source: Republic of Iraq, Ministry of Planning, Central Agency for Statistics and Information Technology, Directorate of Social and Educational Statistics.

The data in Figure (2) illustrates the unemployment rates for various levels of education in Iraq from 2003 to 2018. The highest unemployment rate was in 2006 for bachelor's degree holders at 19.7%, while the lowest unemployment rate was for Ph.D. holders in 2005. The unemployment rate for Ph.D. holders increased to 11.3% in 2017, and the lowest unemployment rate for master's degree holders was in 2004/2005. The highest unemployment rate for master's degree holders was in 2012 at 16.2%. To enhance the alignment of education outcomes with the labor market, several key solutions and policy alternatives are essential, including:

- Aligning educational policies with the human resource needs of development plans to ensure alignment and considering the country's capabilities and the required developmental programs.



- Activating partnerships between employment organizations, universities, and technical vocational training institutions, establishing joint academic programs with foreign universities to transfer scientific and practical experiences.
- Encouraging private sector investment in technical education and focusing on practical rather than theoretical support to the private sector by bringing in large companies, providing loans, reducing taxes, and emphasizing the legal and legislative aspects related to workers' rights.

Working on a plan to reduce foreign labor, qualify and operate factories, and rely on local products instead of imports, creating many job opportunities. The efficacy of these proposals and policy alternatives lies in achieving alignment between education outputs and the labor market in the Iraqi economy, necessitating strategic planning and effective management to achieve coordination, alignment, and interaction among various institutions, ultimately determining the collaborative steps needed.

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