



## Article

# A Proposed and Enhanced Development Model to Invest in The Demographic Opportunity and Support Youth in Iraq After 2004

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**Abstract:** Iraq's demographic transition presents a pivotal opportunity for socio-economic transformation, particularly with a rising working-age population projected to reach 67% by 2037. However, decades of conflict, economic instability, and governance deficits have eroded human capital and hindered sustainable development efforts. Existing studies inadequately address the intersection between demographic opportunity, youth empowerment, and the compounded effects of insecurity and underinvestment in Iraq. This study aims to propose a comprehensive development model to capitalize on Iraq's demographic opportunity by empowering youth and aligning policy with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research identifies the adverse impacts of prolonged military spending on health, education, and employment, revealing high opportunity costs and lost growth potential. It proposes a policy roadmap grounded in participatory governance, sectoral reforms, and youth-oriented strategies. The study introduces a multidimensional model that integrates demographic dynamics with economic diversification, human rights, and conflict mitigation—a rare approach in post-conflict state planning. Effective implementation of this model may transform Iraq's youth bulge into a development catalyst, reduce dependency rates, and secure long-term stability. Further research is recommended to empirically validate the model and explore its scalability in similar fragile states.

**Keywords:** opportunity, youth, Population, investment, sustainable growth

**Citation:** Al-Kuraity, E. A. J. A Proposed and Enhanced Development Model to Invest in The Demographic Opportunity and Support Youth in Iraq After 2004. American Journal of Social and Humanitarian Research 2025, 6(5), 856-870

Received: 10<sup>th</sup> Mar 2025

Revised: 21<sup>th</sup> Mar 2025

Accepted: 02<sup>th</sup> Apr 2025

Published: 09<sup>th</sup> May 2025



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## 1. Introduction

Investing in the demographic transition in the population's age structure is one of the most important issues of concern to countries, especially those countries expected to capitalize on the demographic opportunity, with the aim of achieving socio-economic well-being for all their citizens and guaranteeing their rights and choices. Iraq is among the countries that will benefit from this demographic opportunity and seeks to crystallize the positives of investing in it through a set of national plans, policies, programs, initiatives, and activities that enhance the relationship between population and development and respond to the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030. This is despite the fact that Iraq is a country in crisis, a fertile ground for conflict, a target for ambitions, and a source of gains. Unfortunately, these external conditions and factors have generated similar internal ones, making internal conflicts a widespread reality in Iraq, laying the foundations for a new syndrome between insecurity and development and its negative repercussions on the population. Iraq has sought and continues to seek to respond to the growing global interest in the relationship and its reciprocal impacts between insecurity and development on the one hand, and security, development, and

population on the other. This is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, specifically through Goal 16, which focuses on promoting peaceful societies in which no one is marginalized, and strong institutions to establish the foundations for sustainable peace and justice, guarantee human rights, and achieve human well-being and choices. This will place Iraq within the top half of the Global Peace Index and the World Happiness Index. These goals can be achieved through the presence of an effective development state, innovative comprehensive and sectorial policies, purposeful scientific planning, and responsible citizenship [1].

#### Importance of the Research:

Iraq seeks to capitalize on the upcoming demographic opportunity, which is expected to open its doors in 2037, according to population projections. According to these projections, the working-age population will reach 67% of the total population. Iraq will thus have a significant opportunity for investment and savings, achieving high rates of economic growth that generate job opportunities, raising the rates of added value generated by economic sectors, and increasing the rate of economic participation, especially among women of working age. This can be achieved by drying up the sources of waste and loss in human capital formation, limiting the decline in human development levels, and overcoming all manifestations of violence, its causes, and its effects. Resources derived from a depleting wealth can be allocated to productive areas that generate income, based on sound foundations for building human capital, represented by high-quality, comprehensive education and sustainable health, while ensuring a sustainable and secure income. All of this can be achieved by adopting a development model that aims to capitalize on the demographic opportunity through comprehensive and sectorial policies that respond to sustainable development goals, and development programs that support youth and fulfill their hopes for innovation. Creativity, achievement, and participation are key elements. Therefore, we must start now, because time waits for no one [2].

#### Research Problem:

Reconstructing countries torn apart by conflict, whose resources have been depleted by military expenditures, whose development opportunities and youth empowerment have been lost, whose populations are characterized by poverty, unemployment, fragility, and inequality, and whose administrative and financial corruption are deeply embedded in the functioning of their institutions. This requires exceptional effort and a dramatic, thoughtful expression of the need for recovery, advancement, and change, with a new phase of a new path to sustainable development [3].

#### Research Hypothesis:

Positive investment in the demographic opportunity in Iraq, which supports youth, is achieved through the three-dimensional syndrome of (security, development, and population) [4].

#### Research Objectives:

- To investigate the relationship between insecurity and development and its impacts.
- To chart a course that defines the priorities required to invest in the demographic opportunity in Iraq, responsive to the Sustainable Development Goals and enhancing the three-dimensional syndrome of (security, development, and population) [5].

#### Research Structure:

The research includes four main sections. The first focused on analyzing the relationship between population and development. The second section highlighted the characteristics of the demographic opportunity in Iraq and identified the economic challenges that could create a turbulent environment for demographic opportunity investments. The third section analyzed the impact of the insecurity and development syndrome by identifying the costs of lost opportunities in building human capital due to recurring crises and conflicts in Iraq. The fourth section announced a proposed development model that aims to positively enhance demographic opportunity

investments and support youth, ensuring well-being, rights, and choices. The research concluded with a set of conclusions and recommendations [6].

## 2. Materials and Methods

This research employed a qualitative, analytical, and descriptive methodology to examine Iraq's demographic transition and propose a development model aimed at harnessing the demographic opportunity by 2037. The study draws upon a wide array of secondary data sources, including national development plans, reports from the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, Central Statistical Organization data, UN and World Bank publications, and prior academic research on population dynamics, human capital investment, and conflict economics. The analysis focused on the interaction between security, development, and demographic variables to identify structural obstacles and opportunity costs that impede youth empowerment and socio-economic progress. Statistical indicators such as the age dependency ratio, health and education expenditure from GDP, unemployment rates, and youth participation rates were critically examined to understand the extent of underutilization of Iraq's human capital. The proposed model was constructed by synthesizing best practices from successful demographic transitions in other countries and adapting them to Iraq's sociopolitical and economic context. A participatory governance approach, rooted in human rights and youth inclusion, was integrated to ensure long-term sustainability. The study also incorporated policy simulation insights based on the anticipated demographic structure by 2037, aiming to align interventions with the Sustainable Development Goals. The methodology reflects an interdisciplinary approach that combines elements from economics, demography, development studies, and public policy, enabling a comprehensive exploration of Iraq's demographic opportunity and the pathways to transform it into a catalyst for inclusive and sustainable development.

## 3. Results

### First: Population and Development... The Dialectic of the Relationship

#### A. The International Conference on Population and Development... The Beginning of Interest

The world celebrates "World Population Day" on July 11th of each year. The anniversary of this day's selection dates back to 1987, when the global population reached 5 billion. With the continued increase in the population growth rate, where population projections indicate an addition of approximately 83 million people each year, the world's population is expected to reach approximately 8.6 billion in 2030, and at the end of the first century. By the end of the third millennium, the population is expected to reach 110 billion (Figure 1) [7].

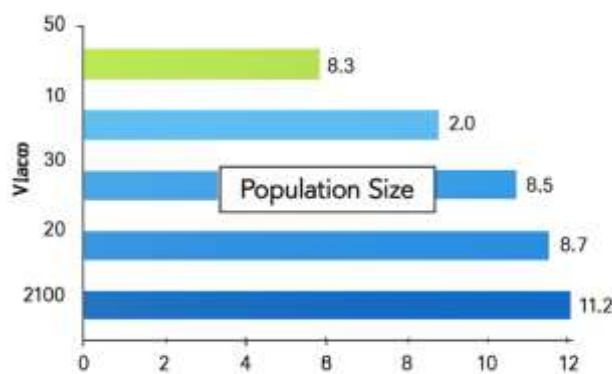


Figure (1) World Population / Projections until the Year 2100

Countries where population growth is slowing or may even stop must prepare for a rising proportion of the elderly (65 and over) and pay greater attention to social protection laws and retirement systems.

These demographic realities and their consequential impact on the path of sustainable development, both positive and/or negative, have highlighted the importance of integrating demographic variables into sustainable development plans and programs.

Thus, the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994 with the participation of 179 countries, responded to this importance and produced a program of action for the next twenty years. It addressed numerous issues related to population and development, such as reproductive health, education, gender, human rights, the environment, internal and external migration, and HIV control. Thus, we see that the Cairo Program of Action established a comprehensive vision for sustainable development and its requirements, addressing its challenges. Accordingly, the rights of future generations are not sacrificed for the sake of present generations. The Cairo Programme of Action also expanded the scope of population policy work beyond the issue of family planning to include other diverse elements such as maternal care, childbirth and the postpartum period, harmful practices against girls and women, adolescent health and infertility, all in order to advance women's health and status. Thus, the Cairo Programme established a new approach based on human rights, focusing on meeting people's needs and rights, which we find a comprehensive framework for in the contents of the Third Millennium Development Goals 2000-2015. Today, the world celebrates the 25th anniversary of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo), which is a turning point for humanity and a direction with a qualitative dimension in the path to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030. These goals were built on the pillar of "ensuring rights and choices for all". They made the human being its focus, his rights its approach, and his choices at the core of their concerns. Accordingly, the countries of the world, including Iraq, made a moral and solidarity commitment to adopting the implementation of the seventeen goals and raising the efficiency of the rates of progress in achieving them, making its pillars (people, prosperity, planet, peace, justice) targeting elements in its emergence and development plans, taking the balance between population growth and material resources and building human capital with possible capabilities (education, health, training, rehabilitation, skills) in order to bring human development to high levels, and relying on the participatory and solidarity approach among all players in sustainable development as a "strategic" basis in planning and implementation. In order to establish the foundations of "the future we aspire to," Iraq's Vision 2030, the National Development Plan 2018-2020, and the first voluntary report on the Sustainable Development Goals 2019 were created in response to this developmental approach and human rights approach [8].

#### **B. Demographic Opportunity: Concept and Stages.**

International, regional, and national interest in the concept of demographic opportunity, or what some call the demographic gift or "demographic window," is growing. The coming decades of the third millennium, known as the era of demographic change, will witness a quantitative and qualitative demographic transformation, particularly in the age structure of the population. This transformation will reshape sustainable economic development for decades to come. Addressing these challenges will provide a path to reducing poverty and unemployment and achieving sustainable prosperity. This is what World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim considered the primary driver of economic growth and achieving prosperity and social justice if a set of comprehensive and sectoral economic and social policies are formulated that are healthy, sound, and responsive to this change [9].

Countries typically undergo what is known as the demographic transition, which occurs in four stages.

1. The first stage: characterized by high birth and death rates, while the population growth rate is low.
2. Stage Two: In this stage, the mortality rate tends to decline due to advances in public health, while the birth rate remains high, leading to a significant increase in the population growth rate.
3. Stage Three: In this stage, the birth rate begins to decline, while the death rate continues to decline. This results in a significant decline in the population growth rate and changes in the population's age structure, shifting to a structure dominated by the working-age group (15-64 years), the group capable of working and earning an income. This shift in the dependency ratio decreases, the tendency to save and invest increases, and opportunities for economic growth increase with the increase in the size of the labor force.

This demographic shift in the population's age structure is called "demographic opportunity," which occurs as the population in the 15-64 age group grows by more than 60%, while the proportion of dependents in the age groups below and outside working age is at its lowest. © Stage Four: This is when the large increase in the working-age population shifts to the non-working-age group, i.e., the retirement age. The dependency ratio rises again, with people relying on their savings, family support, or state support to meet their needs. This requires attention to the post-population opportunity stage. Countries with development opportunities are those that leverage demographic age shifts in their populations, noting that these shifts are a double-edged sword in the hands of economic planners. If they manage and plan well, the economy will have ample opportunities. Otherwise, burdens will increase, and opportunities and comparative advantages will be lost. Among the countries most successful in capitalizing on their demographic opportunity are Malaysia, China, and Singapore. Mexico, Brazil, and Tunisia, however, lost out due to a lack of planning, preparation, and investment. This creates complex economic and social conditions that limit their development path and the achievement of their goals and priorities [10].

#### **A. Demographic Characteristics.**

##### **Population Size:**

Actual data indicate that Iraq's population increased from approximately 5.2 million in 1950 to 13.2 million in 1980, reaching more than 25 million in 2003. Population projections also confirm that Iraq's population will reach approximately 42,448 million in 2022, when Iraq will rank 35th in the world in terms of population, representing 0.54% of the world's population [11].

The population of Iraq is distributed as follows: those under the age of 15 constitute 40.5% of the total population, while those of working age (15-64) and older constitute 56.5%. The percentage of the elderly (65 and older) constitutes 3.1%, the lowest percentage of the total population [12] (Figure 2).



**Figure (2) Age distribution of the population of Iraq in 2022**



### **Population Opportunity... The Beginnings of Openness**

Iraq is no different from other developing countries in terms of its high population growth rate. According to statistical data, the population growth rate reached 3.3% in 1980 and rose to 3.9% in 1990. This increase has been declining relatively, reaching 2.3% in 2022, influenced by the decline in the fertility rate from 5.3 children per woman in 2000 to 3.6 children per woman in 2022. Perhaps the most significant factors explaining this decline are women's increasing interest in education, their entry into the labor market, and their participation in economic activity. These shifts in the population growth pattern indicate that Iraq is close to entering the demographic opportunity stage, in which the working-age population (15-64 years) exceeds the dependent population (children under 15 years of age and adults over 65 years of age). Population projections predict that Iraq will reach the peak of the demographic opportunity stage in 2037. The fertility rate will reach 2.6 children per woman, and the population will be distributed by age according to United Nations standards\*, with 65.3% for the working-age population, 29.8% for the under-working population, and 4.9% for the non-working-age population, after it was 3.1% in 2022. These percentages will create the possibility of decreasing dependency rates in Iraq from 77 individuals per 100 people in 2018 to 53 individuals per 100 people in 2037. It is worth noting that the proportion of youth (15-29 years old) will increase from 27.4% in 2018 to 29.7% in 2037. This increase, some call the "youth bulge" of the population under 30 years old, which Iraq shares with seven other Arab countries (Mauritania, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen, Comoros, and Iraq). It is expected to continue until 2050. This reality requires governments to be prepared in terms of planning and procedures in terms of providing healthcare, education and training services, and job opportunities. If countries fail to formulate policies and identify mechanisms and options that support the demographic opportunity and the youth bulge, this opportunity will turn into a set of challenges that hinder the path to sustainable development and the achievement of its goals [13].

### **B. Economic Challenges.**

Conflicts, conflicts, and wars are a hallmark of today's world, which is increasingly being described as an "unstable world" or a world of wars. This reality has negatively impacted the path and goals of sustainable development for most countries around the world, prompting the United Nations to designate Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) to reduce the high levels of armed violence, insecurity, and terrorism [14].

Iraq is a paralyzed country that has lived for decades within the folds of the gray triangle represented by (war, terrorism, siege), with economic, social, and environmental repercussions that have crystallized again to reveal the continuation of the state of violence and conflict, transforming it into an economic setback due to the entrenched nature of these crises. Indeed, they have become its distinguishing feature, rendering planning and its indicators, policies and mechanisms, goals, and objectives hollow and unresponsive, generating a turbulent economic environment that reflects a state of schizophrenia and disharmony between sustainable development and its fruits (the quality of human life). This has destroyed the human being and its construction, prosperity and its necessities, and the peace economy and its pillars. Consequently, the economic significance of the beginnings of the demographic transformation in Iraq under the war economy plan has become devoid of effect and impact due to the incitement of these crises (violence, conflicts, terrorism), their recurrence, the length of their temporal and spatial extensions, and the strength of their effects, seizing the positive impact of the demographic transformation witnessed by the Iraqi population. Among these challenges facing the Iraqi economy are: 1. The deterioration of the investment climate and business environment, reflected in the levels of private sector investment and foreign investment, and the ability to attract them, as indicated by some international indicators, such as the

Ease of Doing Business Index, which ranked Iraq 165th out of 190 countries in 2019 (\*). Meanwhile, the general investment attractiveness index showed that Iraq was among the weak performing countries, with a score of 27.3 out of 100 (11). This reality led to a halt in investment in new economic projects, a delay in the implementation of projects underway, and the stumbling of the remaining projects, generating a negative cascading effect on employment rates, fixed capital formation, and the rate of economic growth. 2. The decline in the economic growth rate, as measured by the GDP growth rate, which followed negative trends in the years (2009, 2014, and 2015), where it was (-16.8%, -2.61%, and -25%), respectively. It rose in 2016 to reach 2.9%, then contracted again by 2.2% in 2022. This explains the failure of economic policy to achieve its goals and the impact it had on average individual incomes, the volume of investment and savings, and financing capabilities. This has undermined the means of achieving economic prosperity as a pillar of sustainable development [15].

3. The depth of the structural imbalances in the Iraqi economy, as measured by the percentage of contribution of the commodity-based economic sectors to GDP generation, in favor of the oil sector, and the failure of economic policy to achieve economic diversification, as the percentage of contribution of agriculture to GDP generation has declined. The GDP fell from 4.17% in 2010 to 2.02% in 2015, then rose again to 3%. The industrial sector's contribution also declined from 2.1% in 2010 to 0.84% in 2015, then rose again to 2.2% in 2022 [16].

4. The spread of financial and administrative corruption, and its deep roots serve interests that hinder the development process. Corruption has become a source of depletion and waste of public funds, deducting a portion of income and output, diverting it outside the economic system, and hindering the potential for building human and physical capital. Iraq has lost the most important elements for achieving sustainable development and sustainable human development. Transparency International announced that Iraq, which is ahead of the most corrupt Arab countries, ranked seventh in the International Organization for Culture's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index report.

5. The expansion of the informal economy in Iraq, influenced by the prevalence of elements of the war economy, economic stagnation, and the lack of decent job opportunities. The volume of private sector investments is due to the deterioration of the investment climate, in addition to the high dropout rates from education at all levels and stages. As a result, small economic activities have increased, which are not legally and regulatorily regulated and operate outside the state's tax and insurance framework and are not included in the calculations of the gross domestic product. These activities have become available opportunities for the unemployed and absorb a workforce that is not qualified in terms of education and training, despite the fact that they are unsafe, unprotected and unsustainable opportunities.

6. The total damage and human losses caused by military operations in the governorates affected by the conflict and the fight against terrorism, where the total damage in seven governorates amounted to approximately 55.461 trillion Iraqi dinars at 2014 prices, equivalent to 46.9 billion US dollars, in addition to the damage to residential buildings amounting to 18.7 trillion dinars, bringing the total to 75.306 trillion Iraqi dinars, while the losses resulting from the disruption of the development process were distributed between the suspension and failure of investment projects and the low efficiency of spending in them, in addition to the decline in opportunities for proper education, not to mention the high rates of unemployment, poverty and food fragility among the displaced, where food fragility was estimated at 5.3 trillion dinars annually during the conflict period. The displaced were also severely affected by food shocks, and their percentage was 40% of the total displaced and approximately 20% of non-internally displaced families, so the percentage of the Iraqi population who are food insecure increased to reach 2.5% of the Iraqi population in 2016, and it increased among the

displaced to reach 5.6%, most of whom are concentrated in rural areas (5.1%), compared to 1.7% of the urban population in the affected areas. Thus, food vulnerability levels among IDPs rose to 65.5%, compared to 54% at the national level [17].

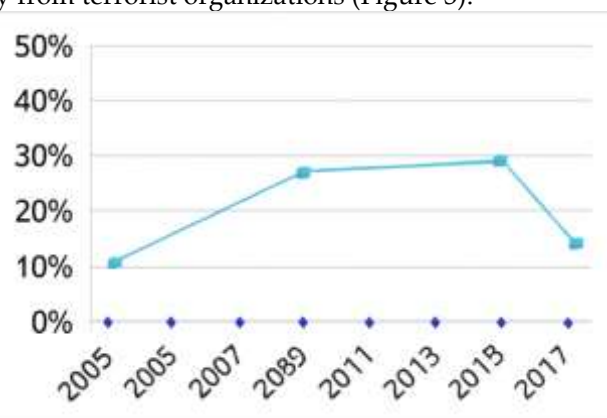
7. High rates of environmental pollution, as Iraq falls within the negative relationship between the environment and conflicts. This dual relationship has led to repercussions on the economy, society, and the individual, according to international standards. Iraq's ranking according to the Environmental Performance Efficiency Standard was 102 out of 180 countries for 2022.

These combined challenges reflect the disintegration of the development fabric between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, causing a loss of development opportunities, a waste of Iraq's economic and human resources, and a deficit in the potential to build human capital and raise human development levels in Iraq. This may make the positive investment of Iraq's demographic opportunity in light of these challenges almost impossible [18].

### **Third: The Waste of Human Capital in Iraq: Lost Opportunities and Escalating Costs.**

We demonstrated in the previous paragraphs that the Iraqi population has lived since 1980 (and until 2022, after the liberation of the territories controlled by terrorist organizations) within the edges of the gray triangle, reaping the brunt of the economic, social, and environmental setbacks affecting their quality of life, well-being, rights, and humanity. This was impacted by the shift in public spending toward financing the requirements of a war economy, which increased the opportunity cost in favor of military expenditures at the expense of spending on health, education, and a decent standard of living. The potential for building human capital and creating development opportunities wasted, human development levels declined, and the Iraqi economy transitioned from a peace economy to a war economy. With this, the human rights approach, freedoms, social justice, and positive discrimination were lost, striking at humanity at its core. Thus, the population and poverty syndrome culminated in rising opportunity costs. The sources of waste in human capital multiplied, its causes diversified, its costs escalated, and opportunities for growth were lost. The most prominent reasons for the waste and missed opportunities to build human capital in Iraq, as well as its high costs, are as follows:

1. The ratio of military spending to investment expenditures increased from 12.47% in 2003 to 25.11% in 2009 and to 27.2% in 2015, influenced by the spread of violence and the fight against terrorism. It then declined to 17% in 2017 as a result of the liberation of the country from terrorist organizations (Figure 3).



**Figure (3) Military spending to investment curve**

The increased defense burden at the expense of investment was reflected in the GDP growth rate, which declined from 53.4% in 2004 to 1.7% in 2005, then rose to 3.4% in 2009, then declined to 2.6% in 2015, before heading toward negative growth in 2017, reaching -3.8% at constant prices. The direction of these macroeconomic variables explains the

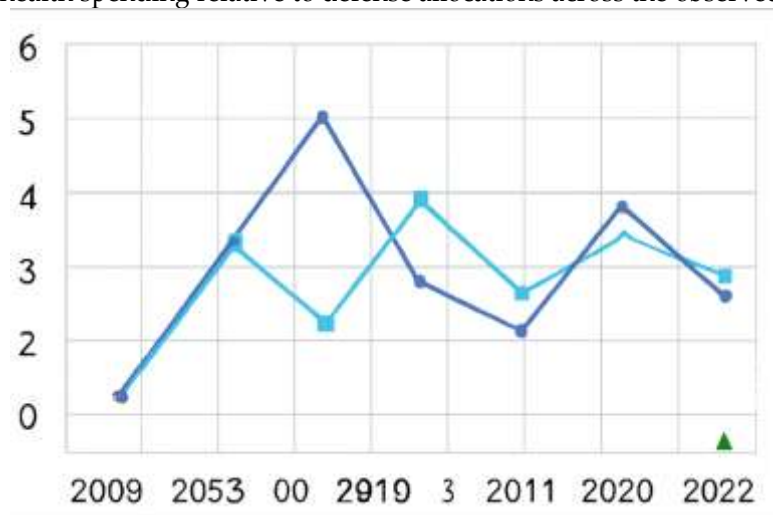


reasons for the lack of human capital formation in Iraq and the decline in human development levels there. The disconnect between the positive relationship between population and development is influenced by the causal relationship between insecurity and development. The decline in the percentage of health spending from the gross domestic product GDP in favor of military spending, as the percentage, in terms of the opportunity cost, was (0.38: 1.3) in 2003 and rose to (3.4: 3.1) in 2022. The increase in the cost explains to us the diversity of challenges in building human capital, the decline in levels of human development, the expansion of the scope of human poverty, the waste of development opportunities, and the decline in health indicators (Table 1).

**Table (1) Health spending from the gross domestic product (GDP) in favor of military spending**

Year	Health % GDP	military spending %GDP
2003	0.38	1.3
2009	2.04	2.9
2015	1.95	5.3
2016	2.51	3.6
2017	1.7	3.9
2020	3.4	3.1
2022	2.3	2.6

Figure 4 illustrates the fluctuating trends in health expenditure as a percentage of GDP, compared to military spending, over selected years. Despite inconsistencies in year labeling, the graph indicates periods of prioritization shifts, with notable peaks and declines in health spending relative to defense allocations across the observed timeline.



**Figure (4) curves of Health spending from the gross domestic product (GDP) in favor of military spending**

3. The percentage of spending on education from GDP declined in favor of military spending, which led to a decrease in the per capita share of spending on education in terms of the opportunity cost (4.7: 5.3) in 2015, and then to add the years 2017, 2020, 2022, there is a decline in agreement on education and it became in favor of military spending, as the percentage in 2017 reached (1.8: 3.9), while in 2022 (1.78: 2.6) (Table 2).

**Table (2) The percentage of spending on education from GDP**

Year	Spending on education%	Per capita spending on education	Defense spending%	Per capita military spending
2003	1.13	12.7	1.3	14.7
2009	4	66.3	1.8	119.6
2015	4.7	256.2	5.3	301
2016	5.1	276.6	3.6	187.9
2017	1.8	107.2	2.9	233.8
2020	1	53.7	3.1	168.7
2022	1.78	174.6	2.6	161.8

Education is the source of knowledge and talent, and it is the path to economic prosperity. Consequently, Iraq has lost its ability to build a stock of knowledge and creativity, and to develop and nurture talent due to the lack of security and its negative impact on human capital development, as evidenced by indicators of high dropout rates, declining school enrollment rates, high illiteracy and unemployment rates, and the entry of young people into unsafe and unprotected employment, leaving them vulnerable to apparent unemployment and underemployment [19].

The indicators of waste and lost opportunities for human development in Iraq due to education can be explained by the decline in the quality of higher education indicators issued by the World Economic Forum in Davos, which confirmed that Iraq is outside the international education classification. 4. The gender gap is a significant indicator of the squandering of a human resource that constitutes nearly half of Iraq's population. There are serious obstacles to women's economic, social, and political empowerment. Economic participation, unemployment, and wages remain disadvantageous to women. The unemployment rate among women in Iraq stands at 28.2%, double the male unemployment rate in Iraq, which stands at 14.7%. In the same year, the rate among young people (15-24 years) rose to 38% among women compared to 20.1% among men. The gap in education enrollment rates remains [20].

5. Iraq's ranking in the Human Development Index declined to 123 in 2022, with a value of 0.674. This decline is explained by the negative relationship between the security and development syndrome, which has shaken the equation for human development and its essence (development of the people for the people and by the people). These facts impose the necessity of "planning for Iraq's upcoming demographic opportunity," which, according to population projections, will peak in 2037. This requires adopting a development model with policies, mechanisms, and programs that support the youth segment (15-64 years old), which is estimated to constitute approximately 67% of Iraq's total population in 2037. This model must also include responsive interventions beyond the demographic opportunity, with special attention paid to the non-working-age population as a reservoir of knowledge and accumulated experience that supports sustainable development and guarantees their rights and social protection.

#### **Fourth: The Proposed Development Model.**

**A. Model Slogan: The Flowers That Bloom Tomorrow Are the Seeds of Today**

**B. Model Vision: "Ensuring Human Rights and Choices to Enhance Well-being"**

**C. Model Assumptions:**

- Humans are both the end and the means.
- Youth are a lever for development.
- Pillars of development (people, prosperity, planet, justice, peace).
- Our priorities are:

### A. Empowered Humans.

B. Economic diversification and competitiveness.

C. Sustainable environment.

C. Good governance, strong institutions, and responsible citizenship.

C. A state of law for a secure country.

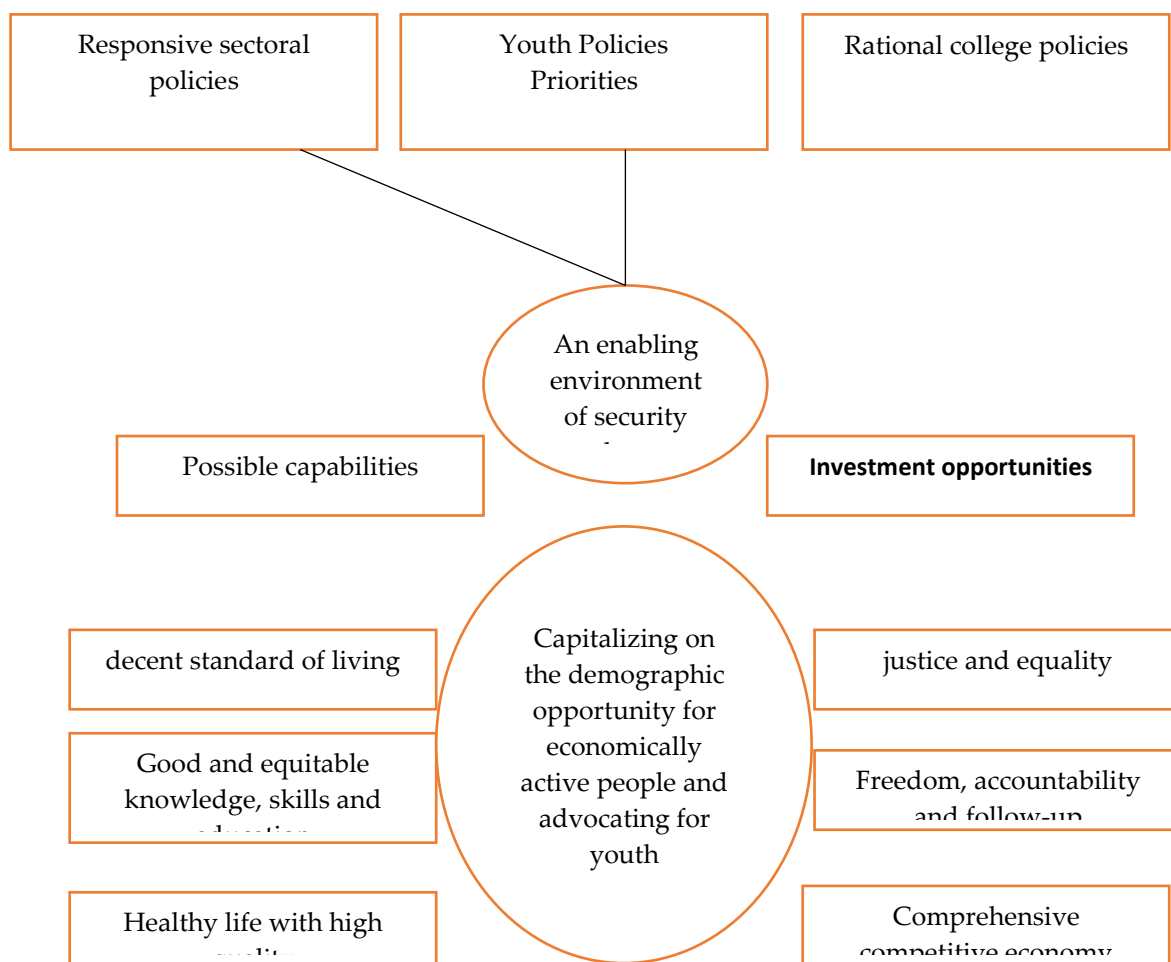
H. Social justice and affirmative action that supports women and youth.

G. Model values:

Participation, equality, justice, freedom, accountability.

D. Roadmap for investments that respond to demographic opportunity and support youth.

The figure illustrates a strategic framework for leveraging Iraq's demographic opportunity through youth empowerment and active population engagement. It emphasizes an enabling environment supported by responsive policies, investment, justice, and equitable access to education, healthcare, and economic participation, ultimately fostering sustainable development and inclusive governance for future generations (Figure 5).



**Figure (5) Roadmap**

### Model Objectives and Intervention Options (Policies)

Objective 1: Reaching the Peak Population Opportunity by 2037

Intervention Options:

a. Policies to improve and modernize the health system.

b. Policies to improve health prevention systems.

- c. Developing health information management.
- d. Improving health service delivery mechanisms.
- c. Developing safe, effective, and high-quality family planning services.
- h. Policies to implement administrative governance in the health sector.

Objective-level measurement indicators:

- Age dependency ratio (%).
- Percentage of the population aged 15-64%.
- Life expectancy at birth by sex.
- Maternal mortality rate.
- Infant mortality rate per 1,000 healthy births.

Objective 2: "Investing in the Population Opportunity"

Intervention Options:

1. Policies to improve the efficiency of the education system.
2. Creating an educational environment conducive to learning and scientific research.
3. Policies that enhance the role of vocational education in development.
4. Policies that support entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation.
5. Increasing women's economic participation.
6. Policies to empower, qualify, and train youth.
7. Policies that support achieving zero illiteracy.

**Measurement indicators at the goal level:**

- Unemployment rates by gender and age.
- Economic activity rates by gender and age.
- Enrollment rates at all levels of education.
- Number of inventions and innovations.
- Number of rehabilitation and training programs.
- Number of people enrolled in literacy centers.
- Number of people enrolled in vocational education.
- Iraq's ranking on the International Competitiveness Index.

**Third Goal: Improving the quality of life beyond the demographic opportunity**

**Intervention options:**

- Policies to develop the efficiency of social services in accordance with international standards and facilitate access to them.
- Policies to expand the health insurance coverage to ensure citizens' right to a healthy life.
- Policies to support the elderly and enable them to work and live decently after retirement.
- Improving the level of services provided to people with special needs and enhancing their active participation in society.
- Encouraging the ethics of volunteer work and developing social integration and solidarity programs.
- Ensuring the delivery of aid and assistance to those who deserve it, especially among displaced persons.
- Implementing the National Poverty Strategy programs and ensuring comprehensive coverage of social protection systems among the poor.

**Measurement indicators at the goal level:**

- Percentage of coverage of those covered by social protection systems.
- Percentage of coverage of those covered by social security to the total employed.
- Number of institutes for the disabled, distributed by location and gender.
- Number of poor people covered by social protection systems, benefits, and assistance.
- Number of programs and volunteer activities supporting the elderly population.

#### **Fourth Goal: Optimal Utilization of Internal Migration**

##### **Intervention Options:**

1. An investment policy responsive to the priorities of governorates that have reached the demographic opportunity stage, achieving prosperity, decent job opportunities, industrial localization, and agricultural development.

2. Harmonization between spatial development policies at the national and regional levels, enhancing opportunities for human capital investment.

3. A policy for a fair spatial distribution of development benefits.

Measurement Indicators at the Goal Level:

- Net internal migration at the governorate level.
- Percentages of investment allocations distributed by governorate.
- Unemployment rates in governorates, distributed by environment and gender.
- Number of small industrial projects in rural areas.
- Number and value of financial loans granted to rural youth.
- Percentages of public service coverage for governorate residents and provision of rural infrastructure.

#### **sustainable growth :Empowering Youth for Participation**

##### **Intervention Options:**

1. Strengthening the human resilience of youth by building their capacities in education and health and ensuring sustainable income.

2. Supportive policies to create an enabling environment for youth. A. An educational policy that stimulates learning and innovation.

B. An employment policy that fosters youth between the ages of 15 and 29.

C. A youth-friendly credit policy.

D. A policy that encourages the establishment of technology business incubators and is responsive to youth innovations and projects.

3. Youth protection policies that ensure an enabling environment against violence, deteriorating stability and security, extremist ideologies, and rising rates of drug and alcohol addiction and crime.

4. A participatory approach, political and financial support, and logistical development that responds to the needs of youth and encourages their active participation in development and sustainable peacebuilding efforts.

5. Empowering policies for youth affected by conflict and its effects, such as migration, displacement, exclusion, and social exclusion, that enhance their participation, initiatives, and aspirations and protect them from extremist ideologies, deviance, and acts of violence, enabling them to integrate into the general economic and societal framework to become effective, accomplished, and productive.

#### **4. Discussion**

Achieving the stated objectives in the proposed model will lead us to reach the desired final goal, which is to achieve the welfare of the citizen in light of the demographic opportunity. We must begin with proper planning for the desired goals according to the vision of the model, seeking to generate an environment responsive to demographic opportunity investments in Iraq, because time waits for no one, while giving priority to youth, especially youth affected by conflicts and violence, in response to Security Council Resolution No. (2250) of 2015, which was adopted on December 9, 2015, and according to which it urges countries to increase the representation of youth in decision-making processes and participation in development at all levels.

#### **5. Conclusion**

1. In Iraq, there is neither continuous conflict nor stable peace. Both are in a cycle of varying intensity and duration. Hardly does one conflict end before another begins.



Therefore, Iraq falls into a conflict trap. Any type of peace never reaches the stage of stable peace.

2. Instability, especially security-related instability, has led to the disruption and undermining of investment, the unsustainable allocation and depletion of resources, and consequently, the high economic cost, as reflected in the opportunity cost of military expenditures at the expense of investment, education, health, human rights, and human choices.

3. Undermining the foundations for building human capital in Iraq is the greatest cost of conflict, violence, and terrorism. 4. Youth were the most excluded, marginalized, and marginalized group during the period of violence and conflict in Iraq (2003-2022), which deprived them of their vital role as a "lever for economic growth."

5. Conflicts in Iraq have had a negative cascading impact on macroeconomic, social, and environmental variables education, poverty, unemployment, the gender gap, and health—which persist across time and generations, undermining the rights of current and future generations and delaying the ability to achieve sustainable development goals indefinitely.

6. The future prospects of the Iraqi economy, its material and human resources (building human capital, demographic opportunity), its civilization, history, values, principles, and societal will enable it to establish the foundations for a development model capable of neutralizing negative impacts and containing them with positive elements for the interactions of the development system based on the effective relationship between population, development, and security.

#### Recommendations:

1. Advocate for the necessity of adopting a participatory development approach in policy formulation and identifying mechanisms and programs that enhance positive investment in the demographic opportunity, which Iraq is expected to reach its peak in 2037.

2. Establish a general framework for an enabling environment whose basic elements include investment in building human capital, with youth being a priority in the goals and objectives. This should be combined with educational, training, health, employment, and credit policies that enable them to be participants, initiators, producers, and achievers of the positive impact of the demographic opportunity on the individual, the economy, and society.

3. Plan for investment in Iraq's upcoming demographic opportunity, making youth a lever for economic growth. The human rights approach, human rights, and human choices, governance, and accountability are the guiding elements of the relationship between population and development in Iraq.

4. Calling for the adoption of the proposed and enhanced development model to invest in the demographic opportunity and support youth with all its contents and objectives, based primarily on the specificity of Iraqi society, its values, historical circumstances, and its material and human potential, and seeking to achieve equality, social justice, sustainable development, and investment in youth (human capital), with full recognition of positive discrimination, as women and men are partners in construction and development, and concerned with eliminating all gender differences and guaranteeing the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups, displaced persons, and migrants, declaring the approach of the right to development.

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