



The Role of Social Protection Programs in Reducing Poverty in Iraq: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

This research paper deals with SPP and their role in reducing poverty in Iraq. The study aimed to identify the impact of economic empowerment policies and programs and their effectiveness in generating income, in addition to social protection network programs, to verify the credibility of the hypothesis presented in the research. The analytical method and both the deductive and inductive approaches were relied upon. The results indicated that SPPs are effective tools for improving the conditions of people with low incomes, enhancing their productive capacities, providing sustainable job opportunities, and achieving social justice. This study examines the impact of SPP on poverty reduction and analyzes its effectiveness in different regions. It provides insights for policymakers and sheds light on the economic and social impacts. This study contributes to the literature by providing an analytical perspective on the effectiveness of SPP in reducing poverty, providing empirical insights, and proposing policy recommendations to enhance their impact on fragile populations.

Keywords: Social Protection Programs (SPP), Personal Income, Poverty Reduction Strategy.

1. Introduction:

Multidisciplinary research on the impact of social protection programs and instruments on poverty in developing countries is gradually growing. Although multidisciplinary research on social protection has been around much longer, during the past 15–20 years, quantitative RCT-type impact assessments have become very popular (Pouw & Bender, 2022).

Different methods are used by governments, practitioners, international organizations, and policymakers to measure poverty. It is a complex idea that includes social, natural, and economic elements that are a part of larger sociopolitical processes. The World Bank states that "poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being (Tariq et al., 2021). The inability to attain a certain level of material living, which is the measurable standard of living and represents the reasonable and acceptable minimum in a particular society within a given time frame, is another definition of poverty (Hammadi, 2015). According to the World Bank (2015), any household living on less than \$1.90 a day or \$715.4 a year is extremely poor (Amofa et al., 2023). Many developing countries have adopted social protection schemes as a means to address extreme poverty, rising inequality, risk, and vulnerability (Borga & D'ambrosio, 2021). In the majority of advanced economies, poverty and inequality are successfully reduced due to the existence of the welfare state, which ensures a fairer distribution of the gains from economic growth by means of progressive taxes, social transfers, and in-kind services such as free or subsidized education and healthcare (Abdelkhalek & Boccanfuso, 2022) ; (Popova, 2023).

Poverty alleviation is a multifaceted and complex concept that encompasses various strategies and interventions aimed at reducing the incidence and severity of poverty; it involves improving the living conditions and opportunities for individuals and communities who are economically disadvantaged (Saputra, 2024). Communities can flourish and realize their full potential when poverty is reduced because it promotes inclusive economic growth, social stability, and inequality reduction. A strong basis for sustainable development can be established by tackling poverty (Padmakanthi, 2023).

A critical reaction to the "safety nets" debate of the late 1980s and early 1990s was the emergence of social protection. In times of crisis, "safety nets" are a kind of social protection that assists individuals in meeting their most basic requirements (Orunbon & Adeleke, 2024). Early by the 1990s, the SPP has been executed by many countries to cope with the economic crisis. Recently, the European Consensus included the SPP in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development due to its vital role in combating hunger, reducing poverty, and social inequality (Abdoul-Azize & El Gamil, 2021). Social protection and security programs are closely related to poverty alleviation. Poverty alleviation and realizing economic prosperity have long since been on the world agenda and one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Kuntjorowati et al., 2024).

SPPs are vital instruments in the fight against poverty and social inequality, offering essential support to fragile populations. These systems encompass a wide range of programs, including cash transfers, social insurance, in-kind benefits, and public services, designed to provide financial security and improve living standards (Komilovich, 2024). The overlapping crises of deglobalization, climate change, and, most recently, COVID-19 have increased demand for social protection. In addition to the 648 million people already living in extreme poverty, the pandemic alone has added 87,124 million more, especially in areas with limited resources (Javed & Mumtaz, 2023). Social protection has historically aimed to alleviate poverty by providing consistent, dependable assistance to people with low or no income (Rana et al., 2022).

According to (Hammoud & Ali, 2019), it can also be defined as any official organization-run programs, devices, and organizations that aim to improve the economic and health conditions of all or a portion of society.

According to the ILO, Social protection is broadly understood as a set of public and private policies and programs undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work, to assist families with children, as well as to provide people with housing and health care (Sarfo-Adu, 2021). The concept of social protection is widely used in addressing issues of poverty and marginalization through the promotion of enhancing human rights (Gunhidzirai & Rankopo, 2025). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization, it is defined as financial or in-kind initiatives that aim to alleviate poverty by redistributing wealth and shielding individuals and families from sudden increases in income. Along with ensuring a minimum standard of nutrition or risk management for families, the social safety net also aims to guarantee a minimum standard of well-being for individuals and families (Al-jubouri & Ali, 2024). Effectively implemented, well-thought-out SPP could not only promote growth and its effects on poverty reduction but also stimulate economic expansion that benefits the impoverished in rural areas (Jamir & Pongen, 2024).

Our study adds to the body of research on SPP and poverty by analyzing how these programs affect poverty reduction. Section II looks at pertinent theories and empirical research, Section III deals with methodological issues, Section IV presents and discusses the findings, and Section V offers a summary of the study along with suggestions and conclusions.

Iraq faces persistent poverty due to economic instability, high unemployment, and inadequate social services. Many beneficiaries remain dependent on aid rather than achieving financial stability. This study examines the effectiveness of Iraq's social protection programs in reducing poverty, identifying gaps, and proposing reforms to enhance their impact. The findings will provide insights into improving policy implementation and achieving sustainable poverty reduction. The current study's significance is clear from the necessity of examining the phenomenon of poverty in Iraq, which takes on particular significance given the ongoing consequences it produces, which manifest in not only economic but also social, political, and even security aspects at the Iraqi level, as well as the numerous factors that contributed to the rise in poverty without taking into account the significance of addressing the causes.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development:

A study (Livani & Graham, 2019) looks at how public spending on social protection in Iraq relates to subjective well-being as well as objective well-being outcomes like income, employment, education, health, and SPP. During violent conflict and uncertainty, the need for government assistance is clear. Based on data from the Iraqi household survey, the study concludes that, even in times of significant political and economic unpredictability, people care about their income source and how it is earned. People are more satisfied with public assistance programs and income-generating activities that prioritize independence and self-sufficiency.

In addition to learning about the activity of SPP offered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in Iraq and identifying the elements of strengths and weaknesses in implementing those programs, the study (Hana & Hamoed, 2019) sought to ascertain the reality of the most effective funding sources in boosting the efficiency of protection programs and determining the level of benefit from spending those sources of funds. It also sought to ascertain the size of the service provided to the most affected groups in society. The study concluded that some laws' lax application prevents these programs from offering complete protection to all impacted societal segments.

The intricate effects and hazards of SPP in Ghana and Kenya on the welfare, voice, and empowerment of the impoverished, as well as their interactions with the social protection legislative framework and policy tools, are examined by (Pouw et al., 2020). To investigate the intricate effects of cash transfers and health insurance at the individual, household, and community levels, the study uses a comprehensive development framework. The results show that SPP continues to exclude the poorest people and that the less resource-poor people are primarily affected by the reinforcing effects of increased productivity.

The research conducted by (Taban & Shahib, 2021) aims to clarify the concept of government support, the most important mechanisms followed, especially in Iraq after 2003, and what are its most important economic and social effects, as well as find a significant relationship between government support policies and poverty indicators using the quantitative method. The research extended for a period of (2003-2018) by analyzing government support policies in Iraq, including (social security, social protection network, and ration card systems). The research reached several results, the most important of which is that poverty is one of the most important reasons that hinder the process of human development in Iraq. There are also multiple reasons behind the increase in poverty, including the high unemployment rate among young people, in addition to the circumstances that Iraq went through because of the wars and the economic blockade imposed on Iraq.

Sani et al. (2022) investigated the effect of government spending on SPP on poverty reduction by applying the ordinary least squares (OLS) method to annual data on government spending on SPP and per capita income (poverty). The study concluded that SPP should be expanded without separating its structures to increase the likelihood of reducing poverty.

To find out the relationship between social protection expenditures, poverty, income inequality, and economic growth in a marginalized country like Pakistan, (Waqas et al., 2022) used annual data available from 1983 to 2015. Three time-standard models were developed; the first model explored the impact of social protection expenditures on poverty; the second model explored the impact of social protection expenditures on income inequality; and the third model showed the impact of poverty, income inequality, and social protection expenditures on economic growth. The results from cointegration techniques indicated that social protection expenditures reduce poverty and inequality in the case of Pakistan. Moreover, increasing spending on SPP has a positive impact on the economy and enhances economic growth.

Evaluating the contribution of social protection to the reduction of poverty in Bangladesh is the aim of the research project conducted (Chakarvarti, 2022). Twelve studies that employed quasi-experimental studies were part of the research study's systematic methodology. This involved analyzing the effects on income and food security of poverty reduction programs, such as public works initiatives, food subsidies, and cash transfers. These figures demonstrate how the implementation of these social safety nets improved household income, food security, and poverty prevention. However, a number of variables, including population base, design, and implementation, affect how well these programs work.

The study by (Hasan & Al Douri, 2024) aims to determine the number of impoverished residents in Kirkuk Governorate, Iraq, who are beneficiaries of the social protection network and the degree to which the program has helped to reduce poverty in the governorate. Between units across the governorate, the social protection network program's contribution to reducing poverty varied, but it was 53.4% overall. The study's most significant conclusion was that, as of 2023, 1770 people were living in the Kirkuk Governorate. In the same year, there were 55533 recipients of assistance from the social protection program, compared to 179.85 impoverished individuals.

In a study conducted by (Costa, 2024) in Brazil, the study aimed to analyze social welfare programs and poverty reduction. The results indicated that social welfare programs such as Bolsa Família in Brazil succeeded in reducing poverty significantly by targeting the poorest segments of the population. It also showed that these programs improved the outcomes of education, health care and nutrition among beneficiaries, thus contributing to breaking the cycles of poverty among future generations.

(Lekobane & Ton, 2024) Compare the targeting performance of specific social assistance programs based on (a) the program eligibility criteria, (b) the monetary poverty measure, and (c) the multidimensional poverty index using data from the Multi-Topic Household Survey. Most programs have high inclusion and exclusion error rates, according to the overall results, which suggests that they are not highly effective at reaching the people they are supposed to. Regardless of the poverty metric employed, the results also show high under-coverage rates.

The outcomes vary between the two poverty measures, though, when the programs are ranked based on leakage rates. Policymakers tasked with updating Botswana's national social protection policy may receive insufficient information if they only use the monetary poverty measure.

Using stakeholder theory as a framework, (Gunhidzirai & Rankopo, 2025) examine how social protection programmers in Botswana are managed to reduce poverty. It draws attention to the fact that one area of social policy in Botswana that has received little attention is the governance of social protection programmers. The study examines governance tactics and the effectiveness of social protection programmers in addressing poverty and inequality using an exploratory case study design and document analysis. The findings show that although social partnership programs help fragile groups, the unequal distribution of wealth continues to marginalize some communities. Considering this, we hypothesize that SPP significantly contributes to poverty reduction by improving economic stability, enhancing social welfare, and ensuring equitable resource distribution among fragile populations.

3. Methodology:

In order to verify the credibility of the hypothesis presented in the research, the analytical method and theoretical evaluation of poverty alleviation strategies and their data were relied upon, supported and based on a set of indicators, numerical data, tables extracted from sources, figures and graphs, to identify the appropriate means to solve the poverty problem, reaching conclusions and evaluative recommendations. In other words, we resorted to combining the two approaches: the deductive approach, which starts from the general to the specific, and the inductive approach, which starts from specific facts to formulate comprehensive conclusions from partial premises, by starting from a realistic, real and descriptive starting point to study the phenomenon of poverty in Iraq, and using available statistical information and data as much as possible, describing, comparing and interpreting them to enrich the research material, Figure (1) shows the research model :

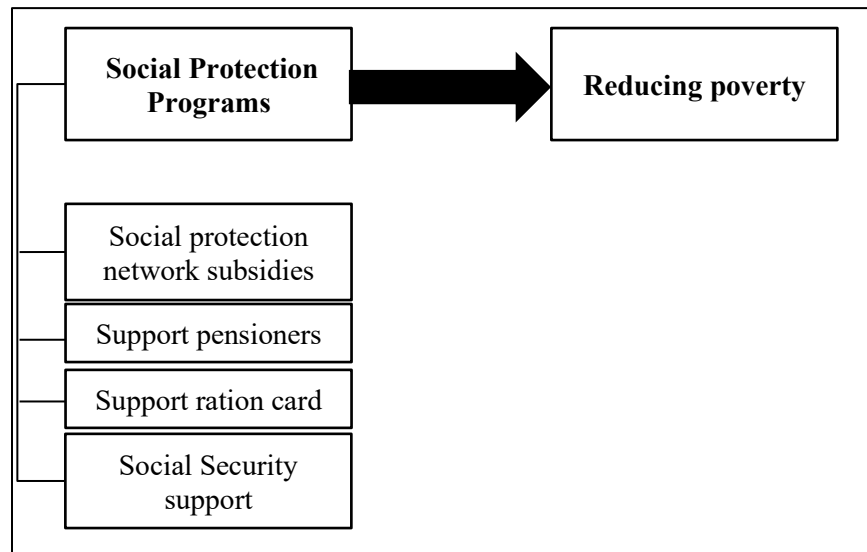


Figure 1: Research Model

Source: Prepared by the Researcher.

4. Results:

4.1 Social Protection Network Subsidies:

A draft law was prepared for the Social Protection Network project after 2003, and it started to be implemented in early 2006. In order to combat the effects of poverty, assist the most fragile populations, lessen social inequality, promote labor, offer training, and job opportunities, and enhance the quality of life for families facing challenging financial circumstances, the government, represented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, adopted it. Expanding coverage for the impoverished, which surpassed one million families, was the dominant trend. By funding this project from the general budget, the government decided to help the impoverished groups avoid becoming even more impoverished. However, we find that social protection network subsidies have lost their real value, and low-income families have continued to search for other sources of income to cover their basic needs, such as (borrowing and asking for help from others, working in homes, begging, zakat boxes from mosques, etc.). Since every person or family living below the poverty line has the right to receive cash subsidies and social services and raise the level of services provided to alleviate poverty, the government has increased social protection allocations and increased the number of those covered by social protection subsidies, in addition to rehabilitation and providing job, education and training opportunities. Table (1) shows the number of subsidies provided to specific segments of society and those registered with the Ministry of Labor after 2006 and according to the number of individuals and the gender of the breadwinner, according to Resolution (153) of 2021:

Table (1): Income ceiling for social benefits

Monthly allowance amount	No family members	1	2	3	4 and more
male headed household		125.000	175.000	225.000	275.000
Female-headed household		125.000	200.000	275.000	325.000

Source: Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Department of Social Welfare, Social Protection Network Inclusion Controls, 2021, Table (1) shows that:

1- The individual's share of the aid amounted to (125) thousand dinars per month, i.e. (1,500,000) million dinars annually, and the share of a family consisting of (4) individuals or more amounted to (275) thousand dinars per month if the breadwinner is a man and (325) thousand dinars per month if the breadwinner is a woman. This amount does not meet the necessary living requirements and leads to individuals falling below the poverty line. If the number of family members increases, the amount of aid will decrease since its main goal is to provide living requirements for individuals.

2- The amount of aid provided to families supported by a woman is more than the amounts granted to families supported by a man, and this is evidence of the feminization of poverty, i.e. the increase in the number of families supported by a woman and requires the government to provide many programs that help empower women economically to support all family members.

3- The social protection network salary according to the number of family members is not commensurate with the average family spending in Iraq, as the average individual spending is (253.3) dinars per month, and the average family spending is (1503.3) dinars per month, which shows the gap with the social protection network salary due to the high cost of housing, food, medicine, electricity and other education expenses, which despite the role of the network, did not significantly reduce the severity of poverty, and the more the number of family members increases, the lower the average individual spending and leads to an increase in the gap in individual income.

Iraq's commitment to social protection is clearly demonstrated in the Second Poverty Reduction Strategy (2018-2022), in which the establishment of an effective social protection system was recognized as a strategic priority and an important milestone in Iraq's journey to achieve social protection was the enactment of Social Protection Law No. (11) of 2014. In addition, a roadmap for a social protection strategy in Iraq (2015-2019) was developed to support the implementation of the 2014 law, as its vision was to have a comprehensive social protection system in Iraq covering three main pillars: social safety nets, social insurance, and labor market policies.

Despite the wide coverage, a total of (5.393 million Iraqis) (2.604 males) and (2.789 females) benefited from the various social protection networks, which represents about (13%) of Iraqis in 2020, excluding the Kurdistan Region, despite the region hosting a huge number of displaced persons, including (62 thousand families) and (80 thousand) people with disabilities, and (5) million individuals in the food basket in 2023. Table (2) shows the development of the size of transfer expenditures (Human Development Department Report, 2023)

Table (2): Development of social transfer expenditures and their impact on the poverty rate in Iraq for the period (2009-2020)

Years	Current expenditures billion (IQ D)	Social protection expenditures (social transfers)	Social welfare expenditure as a percentage of current expenditure	Poverty rate
	1	2	3	4
2009	42.053.620	5.482.086	13.03	21.21
2010	54.003.334	5.050.831	9.35	20.41
2011	60.925.554	5.893.670	9.67	19.64
2012	75.788.623	7.415.600	9.78	18.9
2013	78.746.806	6.744.198	8.56	19.09
2014	77.986.199	14.363.878	18.41	19.28
2015	51.832.839	11.447.912	22.08	19.47
2016	51.173.428	10.350.617	20.22	19.66
2017	59.025.709	14.822.563	25.11	20.05
2018	67.052.700	15.166.803	22.61	22.05
2019	87.300.933	19.696.020	22.61	19.26
2020	72.873.538	16.427.871	22.54	31.7
2021	89.526.700	18.979.3	21.20	31.7
2022	10.494.110	24.783.5	23.60	20.5

Source based on:

- Central Bank of Iraq, Department of Statistics and Research, Annual Economic Report for various years.
- Ministry of Planning, Statistics and Geographic Information Systems Authority, various economic reports, and surveys.

Through Table (2), we notice a decrease in social welfare expenditures from 2009 to 2013 to reach (6,744,198) billion dinars, as a result of the decrease in the poverty rate to (18.9%), in addition to the decrease in the number of families included in previous years, as a result of some violations that led to the inclusion of undeserving families, so that Through table (2), we notice a decrease in social welfare expenditures from 2009 to 2013 to reach (6,744,198) billion dinars, as a result of the decrease in the poverty rate to (18.9%), in addition to the decrease in the number of families included in previous years, as a result of some violations that led to the inclusion of undeserving families, so that social welfare expenditures rose again in 2014 to reach (14,363,878) billion dinars, which is double the expenditures of the previous year, as a result of the security

events and the accompanying displacement of (3,035,592) civilians within the country during the period (2014-2015), which led to an expansion in spending because the majority of the displaced became below the poverty line, and the percentage continued to fluctuate between high and low until 2019, as the poverty rate reached (19.26%) despite the continued increase in social welfare expenditures, which reached in the same year (19,696,020) billion dinars, which amounted to (22.56%) of current expenditures (Ibrahim, 2022: 82), while in 2020, expenditures decreased to (16,427,871) billion dinars, while the poverty rate rose to (31.7%), as a result of the double crisis of the decline in oil prices in global markets and the health crisis (Covid-19) that affected the global economy.

Accordingly, social protection systems did not contribute to creating positive effects that coincide with policies and procedures, i.e., measures aimed at alleviating poverty rates and reducing dependency rates, which increased to (70) per 100 individuals as a result of the high rates of unemployment in finding regular job opportunities, whether in the public or private sector, which requires procedures and programs for economic empowerment, including adopting commercial, industrial and agricultural policies and restructuring the labor market on the labor supply side, which should keep pace with the changes witnessed by the demand for labor. Welfare expenditures rose again in 2014 to reach (14,363,878) billion dinars, which is double the expenditures of the previous year, as a result of the security events and the accompanying displacement of (3,035,592) civilians within the country during the period (2014-2015), which led to an expansion in spending because the majority of the displaced became below the poverty line. The percentage continued to fluctuate between high and low until 2019, as the poverty rate reached (19.26%) despite the continued increase in social welfare expenditures, which reached the same year (19,696,020) billion dinars, which amounted to (22.56%) of current expenditures (Ibrahim, 2022: 82), while in 2020, expenditures decreased to (16,427,871) billion dinars, while the poverty rate rose to (31.7%), as a result of the double crisis of the decline in oil prices in global markets and the health crisis (Covid-19) that affected the global economy.

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4.2 Support pensioners:

All state and public sector employees, temporary workers, public servants, and state employees in the mixed sector who retired because of illness, disability, old age, or death are covered by the most recent retirement law's provisions. The law's two most significant improvements were raising the minimum retirement age by twofold and giving working mothers additional benefits. The number of retirees by sector for 2020 is displayed in Table (3):

Table (3): Number of retirees by sector, type of retirement and gender for the year 2020

sector	old-age retirement		Retirement heirs		Disability retirement		Grand total		
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	total
Private	5505	995	7006	97	1397	193	13908	1285	15193
Mixed	1227	274	613	16	70	26	316	316	2226
Cooperative	125	69	56	2	20	10	81	81	291
Total	6857	1338	7675	115	1487	229	1682	1682	17710

Source: Ministry of Planning, Human Development Department, National Development Plan Report (2023-2027), Social Protection and Poverty Alleviation Axis in 2023.

The social safety net is primarily concerned with the poor, and the retirees have a special status in that they are among the poor if the minimum salary they receive does not meet their needs considering the high cost of living. Retirees suffer from problems and neglect in various aspects, including the absence of health care due to their lack of financial ability to provide them with the necessary treatment, especially since most of them suffer from chronic diseases that require permanent treatment, and do not own land or residential homes, etc., which forces them to continue working after retirement age to secure their financial needs for themselves and their families. Here, dependency rates will increase, and poverty will increase.

4.3 Support Ration Card:

The system was established in 1990 in response to food shortages resulting from sanctions imposed by the United Nations and played a key role in meeting the minimum food needs of the Iraqi population during the period of international economic sanctions. However, it quickly turned into the largest distribution system in the world, through which an entire people obtains its basic needs, which, when the system was implemented, constituted the tool that prevented a major famine in the country, as the nutritional value of the system constituted (30%) of food spending and (16%) of the total spending of the poorest segment.

During the previous period, the system was intended to be an immediate means for an emergency, but it was not expected that it would continue until the present time. However, the government and the people got used to declaring their commitment to it, considering that it has several advantages. It is a system that achieves absolute justice because it treats all Iraqis equally. The ration card constitutes an important part of the government's expenditures, and it has become the direction of the movement of food prices in the market. The failure to distribute one or more of the card's goods is reflected in a dramatic increase in the prices of that good in the local market. In addition, the government's commitment to providing its components contributed to reducing market prices below the general price level in neighboring countries. However, it was not the result of policies capable of reducing poverty but rather came in response to the circumstances of the economic blockade that the country went through.

At the beginning of the implementation of this system, it faced some problems, especially the repeated registration of families more than once, and the forgery of civil ID cards, which increased the number of beneficiaries. This created a dependence among middle and low-income families on its components. Considering the increasing level of poverty in the country, the continuation of this system was necessitated. To determine the nature of the ration card allocations and the development of the structure of expenditure provided to these categories, Table (4) for the period (2009-2022) can be used.

Table (4): Government support allocations and their percentage of public expenditures for the period (2009-2022)

Years	Ration card allocations: 1 billion (IQ. D)	Total expenditures	The percentage of food cards support from public expenditures (2/1)
	1	2	3
2009	4.200.000	52.567.000	7.9
2010	3.500.000	64.352.000	5.4
2011	4.000.000	69.640.000	5.7
2012	4.000.000	90.374.000	4.4
2013	4.916.750	106.873.000	4.6
2014	3.505.977	83.556.230	4.1
2015	2.500.000	70.397.520	3.5
2016	2.470.000	67.067.440	3.6
2017	1.693.000	75.490.120	2.2
2018	1.500.000	80.873.190	1.8
2019	1.500.000	111.723.523	1.3
2020	1.500.000	76.082.443	1.9
2021	794923	102.849.659	0.7
2022	794923	116.959.600	0.6

Source: Central Bank of Iraq, Department of Statistics and Research, Annual Statistical Bulletin for various years.

- Ministry of Finance, Department of Accounting, Final Accounts for various years, website of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance, at the link (<http://www.mofa.gov.iq>).

4.4 Social Security Support:

Several laws covered the subject of social security in Iraq at different periods and gradually expanded it:

1. Social Security Law No. 27 of 1956.
2. Social Security Law No. 140 of 1964.
3. Social Security Law No. 112 of 1969 included workers in the public and private sectors and excluded workers in the informal sector.
4. Retirement and Social Security Law for Workers No. 39 of 1971, which expanded the scope of social security regardless of the number of workers in a particular institution.

This law provides legislative protection for workers in the formal sector through standards for coverage under health insurance, maternity benefits, old age/retirement benefits, work injury benefits, and other social security provisions for workers. However, this law suffered from several problems, the most important of which are the limited number of those covered by the insurance, the failure of workers and employers to pay contributions, the large size of the informal sector, and others.

Therefore, attempts appeared after 2015 to pass a new social security law for workers to replace this law, so the amended Social Security Law No. (18) of 2023 was issued, which is read with the Social Protection Law No. (11) of 2014. According to data from the Ministry of Planning, there are (180,528) workers in the private, mixed and cooperative sectors working on (46,239) projects that have social security in 2020, and there are about 284,000 insured workers in Iraq, including only (18,000) retirees who receive retirement benefits, and there are (140,000) workers who pay into the retirement fund for workers in the private sector in 2022, which is a very small number compared to the total workforce of about (6.5) million employees, excluding workers in the public sector of about (3.5) million employees.

The Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Finance supervise the joint social insurance system in Iraq, which covers (38%) of the total workforce, as the public sector represents (96%) of the covered segment for insured workers. There are old-age allowances, compensation for work injuries, and living allowances.

Table (5): No of workers and projects covered by social security for the year 2020

Numbers	Private sector			Mixed sector			Cooperative sector		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
	223590	21775	245365	4660	2032	6692	230	178	408
no of projects by ownership	Iraqi			Arabic			Foreign		Total
	69748			452			1576		71776

Source: Ministry of Planning, General Authority for Statistics and Geographic Information Systems, Statistics of People with Special Needs and the Social Protection Network for the year 2020.

5. Discussion of Results:

The results of this study shed important light on how social protection initiatives contribute to the decline of poverty in Iraq. Key elements of social protection are examined, such as social security programs, pension support, the ration card system, and social protection network subsidies. The success and shortcomings of these programs in tackling poverty and economic vulnerability are discussed.

5.1 Social Protection Network Subsidies:

To lessen the effects of poverty and assist fragile groups, the Social Protection Network was founded in 2003 and went into operation in 2006. Over a million families were initially covered by the program, which reduced financial hardship by providing cash transfers, training, and job opportunities. However, as time went on, a number of restrictions became apparent:

Inflation and growing living expenses have reduced the real value of cash transfers despite expansion, pushing families to look for other sources of income like charity, informal work, or borrowing. According to the data, households headed by women receive more financial assistance than households headed by men, suggesting that women bear a greater burden as the primary breadwinners and caregivers. This emphasizes the necessity of women's economic empowerment initiatives to lessen long-term reliance.

The social protection network's monthly allowance is much less than what people need to live on. The aid given is insufficient to lift families out of poverty because the average household expenses are far higher than the aid.

5.2 Support Pensioners:

The impact on reducing poverty varies, according to an analysis of government spending on social protection from 2009 to 2022.

Since 2009, allocations have been declining, and they started to fluctuate gradually until 2022, when they were reduced by 794,923.0 million dinars. This represents the lowest percentage of public expenditure, at 0.6%. In the framework of the Iraqi agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which includes among its conditions the cancellation of government support for the ration card, this is attributed to the government's expansionary financial policy, which aims to raise the standard of living of individuals by increasing wages and salaries for workers in various economic sectors. This is because it is a key recipe for international institutions to address the main macroeconomic imbalances, particularly the state's general budget deficit and the balance of payments deficit.

between 2014 and 2015. Spending on social welfare increased dramatically because of the displacement crisis brought on by military and security conflicts. Since more than 3 million internally displaced people (IDPs) were pushed below the poverty line, this resulted in a brief rise in poverty.

Period 2019–2020: The COVID-19 pandemic and the global oil price collapse, which had a significant impact on Iraq's economic stability, caused the poverty rate to rise to 31.7% despite higher social protection spending. Period 2021–2022 Poverty has decreased to 20.5% thanks to increased social protection funding, but structural flaws still exist and call for longer-term fixes rather than temporary financial assistance.

5.3 Support Ration Card:

One of the main mechanisms for ensuring food security in Iraq is the ration card system, which was first put in place in 1990 to deal with food shortages. Millions of Iraqis receive food assistance through the system, which is essential for maintaining basic nutrition and stabilizing food prices. Despite its significance, the program's efficacy has been undermined by budget cuts and inefficiencies. The ration card system's capacity to meet demand was impacted by a decline in government support between 2009 and 2022. The program's capacity to efficiently target individuals in need has been weakened by issues like fraudulent claims, duplicate registrations, and supply chain inefficiencies.

5.4 Social Security Support:

The low number of people covered and their contributions, the lack of seriousness on the part of private sector institutions in enforcing the current law's provisions, and the fact that most workers in the private, cooperative, and mixed sectors choose not to have insurance to the extent that it is optional for them are just a few of the issues plaguing the workers' social security system.

In addition to the lack of awareness and education programs regarding the work of the social security and retirement departments, this could be because of the educational level. Additionally, we discover that a large number of them would rather forgo their retirement benefits because they are insignificant and instead receive social welfare payments. This puts a strain on the Social Protection Authority and causes them to oppose any reforms that would force them to use the worker social security system. When the Ministry of Labor started to exclude the benefits that people receive, this opposition became evident, and as more voices were raised, the Ministry of Labor loosened the restrictions on inclusion.

6. Conclusion:

Complex economic issues and significant social contradictions have resulted from poverty in Iraq, including the high unemployment rate of 16.7% among working-age individuals, which reaches 34.5% among those aged 29 to 22; child labor as a result of their dropping out of school and working to support their families; the growth of the informal sector; a notable increase in unsafe informal housing, where the overcrowding rate has reached 34% of the population; and new pockets of poverty that have contributed to the spread of drug use and trafficking, domestic violence, and other issues.

By examining essential elements like social protection network subsidies, pension support, the ration card system, and social security programs, this study has investigated the contribution of SPP to the reduction of poverty in Iraq. The results show both achievements and difficulties in putting these programs into practice, emphasizing their ability to offer short-term financial support while exposing systemic barriers that prevent long-term poverty reduction.

Although subsidies have given fragile families financial support, their actual value has decreased due to inflation and growing living expenses, forcing many recipients to look for other sources of income.

Many retirees struggle to meet their basic needs because of low pension payments and insufficient healthcare coverage, indicating that pension support is still insufficient.

Although the Ration Card System has been essential to food security, administrative inefficiencies, and budget cuts have hampered its ability to combat poverty.

Due to low participation rates and lax enforcement of current regulations, Social Security coverage is low, especially in the private and unorganized sectors.

Iraq's SPPs have significantly reduced poverty, but structural issues and inefficiencies still hampered their full potential. To guarantee long-term poverty reduction and social welfare enhancement, a thorough, long-term plan that incorporates economic empowerment, legislative changes, and effective governance is required.

The future vision for social protection in Iraq on creating a sustainable, inclusive, and efficient system that effectively reduces poverty and promotes economic stability. This requires comprehensive reforms, including improved targeting mechanisms to ensure aid reaches the most vulnerable populations, such as women, displaced persons, and rural communities. Digital transformation and transparency measures should be implemented to minimize corruption and administrative inefficiencies. Additionally, shifting from short-term assistance to long-term empowerment strategies, such as job creation programs, vocational training, and financial inclusion initiatives, is essential for reducing dependency on aid. Strengthening public-private partnerships can also enhance the reach and effectiveness of social protection programs.

By integrating these reforms, Iraq can establish a resilient social protection framework that alleviates poverty and fosters economic independence, social equity, and national development, improving the quality of life for all citizens.

Authors Declaration:

Conflicts of Interest: None

-We Hereby Confirm That All The Figures and Tables In The Manuscript Are Mine and Ours. Besides, The Figures and Images, which are Not Mine, Have Been Permitted Republication and Attached to The Manuscript.

- Ethical Clearance: The Research Was Approved by The Local Ethical Committee in The University.

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