

Kuwait

Global Philanthropy Tracker

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Definitions

PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS (POS): A form of non-market, non-state organizations outside of the family that provide services for the public good. It includes, but is not limited to, the following: foundations (grant-making, operating, corporate, community, or government sponsored/created), community-based organizations and village associations, professional associations, environmental groups, advocacy groups, co-operatives, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, mutual entities, labor unions, societies, research institutes, diasporic organizations, online social-purpose portals, and transnational and cross-sectoral coalitions.

PHILANTHROPIC ACTIVITIES: Philanthropic activities are extremely diverse when considered at the global level. They include, but are not limited to, financial contributions, volunteering, collective action, advocacy, grassroots and direct giving and helping, and new methods such as crowdfunding and hybrid philanthropic activities (i.e., social impact bonds and social enterprises).

CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPY: Philanthropic activities in which the donor (individuals, foundations, corporations, or religious organizations) and the beneficiary (individuals, foreign POs, foreign intermediary organizations) are located in different countries. The term includes donations to domestic POs in a given country that focus on broad categories of international causes, such as foreign affairs, humanitarian assistance, international relations, promotion of international understanding, and international solidarity.

Brief information

The Number of registered philanthropic organizations:

- There are about 50 philanthropic organizations and 88 charities (Aljarida, 2019), operating under the umbrella of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor (MOSAL), along with two government bodies: the General Secretariat of Endowments and the

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Zakat House; an independent agency which is the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO);¹ and 300 volunteer teams (Al-Dabbas & Al-Zahi, 2018).

The number of philanthropic organizations that are not officially registered:

- In order to preserve order and national unity, the law prohibits the establishment of unofficial associations. However, there are some unofficial charitable bodies that are not advertised by the media, and some of them coordinate with registered associations. These activities take the following forms:
 - **Regional leagues** are concerned with directing assistance to the destitute who belong to a specific region, regardless of the families to whom they belong. These leagues number between 15 and 20, according to the estimation of one of the charity leaders.²
 - **Al-Diwaniyat** is a regular gathering of men—usually in a tent or a separate room of the main house—that collects donations, at the initiative of the owner of the Diwaniyyah or its members, to implement charitable projects through the official charities. There are around 100 Diwaniyas operating in this way.
 - **Mosques:** An estimated 100 mosques, under the guidance of some individuals or some charitable societies, collect donations to implement annual or seasonal charitable projects, inside and outside Kuwait.
 - **Families:** Some families build mosques, centers and dispensaries, either as an act of charity for a deceased person, or to instill a spirit of donation in the family, and this activity abounds in the death of a family member, or in the presence of a disaster, or in a religious season such as Ramadan, but there are no official estimates for such an activity.
 - **Non-Kuwaiti Communities:** Community members collect donations to provide assistance to the needy of the community’s people inside and outside Kuwait. For example, one expatriate community coordinated with other residents in the Gulf and elsewhere to cover the costs of COVID-19 tests in its country of origin.

¹ The IICO is one of the largest humanitarian organizations in the Muslim world. It is an independent, multi-faceted charity that provides humanitarian services to those in need in the world without discrimination, intolerance, or interference in politics or ethnic conflicts. The founding of IICO dates back to 1984 when a number of Muslim scholars called for raising a billion dollars to invest and spend from revenues to combat the “triad of danger” (poverty, ignorance, and disease) and meet the increasing needs of poor communities, after the rise of disease, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment rates in most Muslim countries. His Highness Late Sheikh Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah issued an Amiri Decree in 1986 establishing the IICO. It states that IICO shall have a legal personality with headquarters based in Kuwait and may establish branches outside Kuwait. <https://www.iico.org/ar/about/us.html>

² To produce this report, the authors interviewed six experts in charitable work in Kuwait who work as specialists or hold positions in the Kuwaiti Ministries like Foreign Affairs or Social Affairs and Labor, as well as those who work in charitable institutions and international philanthropic organizations.

Overview of Cross-Border Philanthropy in Kuwait

CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPIC GIVING ENVIRONMENT

There is great encouragement from the Kuwaiti government to give outside the State of Kuwait, which is also the case in domestic giving. This encouragement by the state has helped to give Kuwaiti charitable work its signature creativity, as it differs from the policy of other countries; this is evidenced by many societies that determine their scope of work and activities abroad, such as The International Islamic Charity Organization and Mercy International.³ These societies are operating in addition to the Kuwaiti embassies' support for Philanthropic work, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' representation as a member of grant committees in some charitable bodies.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HERITAGE MOTIVATING CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPIC GIVING

The cultural and religious heritage that motivates cross-border philanthropic giving is not different from that for domestic giving, as Islamic culture is considered one of the most important incentives for external charitable work. Political leadership has also paid great attention to charitable work abroad, considering it as a humanitarian message. Leaders are supportive of Kuwaiti political and diplomatic action, which led to the designation of Kuwait as a humanitarian international center, and its Amir's designation as a humanitarian leader, on September 9, 2014 (United Nations, 2014).

Regulatory environment for cross-border giving

SENDING CROSS-BORDER CONTRIBUTIONS

Private philanthropic organizations can send contributions to philanthropic organizations abroad, but only if the latter is accredited by the Kuwaiti Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Not only this, but the Kuwaiti philanthropic Society should submit a report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs illustrating the size and details of the contributions that will be sent abroad. For individuals, the law prohibits them from sending direct contributions across borders, except donations through electronic links (such as when an individual clicks "give now" on the website of an organization based in another country).

There are several procedures that should be followed in the case of sending charitable contributions abroad, such as getting the approval of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor for the projects and transferring the funds to the charitable body. The applications are audited to ensure that the organization receiving the contributions is accredited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Approval is then issued to transfer the funds, either from the Kuwaiti charity account to the organization's account outside Kuwait, through the account of the Ministry of

³ Mercy International at the Social Reform Society is a charity based in Kuwait that works in 42 countries around the world through administrative offices or through partnership and cooperation with local organizations and associations in Asia, Africa, and Europe. For more information, please see the following link: https://www.khaironline.net/Rhtml/who_we_are.aspx.

Foreign Affairs, or through money exchange offices. These procedures exist to protect charitable work from concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing.

There are no restrictions on sending charitable funds abroad from the Kuwaiti side, but some restrictions may arise because of situations of the receiving country, such as crises and conflicts, which may cause banks to close and prevent money transfers, for example. If this happens, the Ministry of Affairs issues an approval letter to transfer the funds through money exchange offices instead of bank transfers. Some countries that receive Kuwaiti charitable contributions may also incur some taxes or fees.

RECEIVING CROSS-BORDER CONTRIBUTIONS

Kuwaiti private philanthropic organizations can receive contributions from individuals from abroad electronically via the links available to each association. In contrast, Kuwaiti philanthropic organizations cannot receive direct contributions from philanthropic organizations outside Kuwait except in the form of formal transfers, and with official approval from the Kuwaiti authorities.

However, this pattern of receiving donations from abroad is not common due to financial abundance; the extent of restrictions on philanthropic inflows is unclear due to lack of data.

CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPIC CONTRIBUTIONS: MAIN TRENDS

Philanthropic outflows from Kuwait amounted to approximately USD \$1 billion (Al-Dabbas & Al-Zahi, 2018).⁴ The sources of external giving are similar to those for internal giving: individuals, companies, cooperative societies, and government commercial bodies such as Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), in addition to some diaspora residents who donate specifically to their origin countries. Despite the multiple sources, there is no central body or entity for collecting cross-border charitable data. However, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs carry out a large part of that mission.

Uses of philanthropic resources sent across borders include economic empowerment, setting up productive projects, and education, such as the educational complex built by the Kuwaiti Zakat House in Somalia, and the Mercy International Educational Society in Djibouti. Despite the diversity of charitable projects that have been accomplished, there is no linkage to their compatibility with the SDGs in the reports issued by charities. Linking projects and SDGs remains limited.

The large amounts directed toward cross-border giving appear to be the result of a number of social and cultural backgrounds, the most important of which is the Kuwaiti neutrality in foreign policy. This neutrality gives Kuwait global acceptance in humanitarian work and has had a positive impact on its charitable work. Kuwaiti citizens also donate across borders, taking

⁴ In 2018, in an interview with Al-Jazeera, Dr. Khaled Al-Shatti stated that Kuwaiti foreign aid annually exceeds 200 million Kuwaiti dinars (about \$ 650 million) through philanthropic societies (Al-Dabbas & Al-Zahi, 2018) .And in 2020, some experts in Kuwaiti philanthropic work estimated that the volume of cross-border philanthropic flows may reach nearly one billion US dollars, among them: Abdullah Al-Haidar, Dr. Abdullah Al-Sumait.

into account the cultural specificity of countries and the appropriateness of the projects proposed to them.

Volunteering in Kuwait

Volunteering is one of the important philanthropic human resources in the State of Kuwait, and there are about 300 volunteer teams (Al-Dabbas & Al-Zahi, 2018). About half of these teams are specialized in philanthropic work, and some philanthropic organizations have their own volunteer teams; and the largest example is the International Islamic Charity Organization (IICO), with more than 30 teams. There are also a number of institutions and centers concerned with volunteering, such as the "Voluntary Work Center,"⁵ which is concerned mainly with organizing volunteer work in the State. In addition, charities encourage large donors and elites to volunteer in the community. Discussion is currently underway about the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor seeking to register volunteer teams and organize volunteer work, which further highlights its role within the State.

As for volunteering across borders, most charities have volunteer teams under their umbrella, and participants volunteer in "foreign trips" for relief. Some of this work includes specialized volunteering, such as when physicians perform surgeries, and other specialists assist in documenting, photographing, and providing psychological support for refugees, the injured, and women. The "Safe Traveler" program of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs informs the Kuwaiti embassy about the whereabouts of individuals in a foreign country and the planned period of their presence. In 2018 the Direct Aid Society began to monitor the number of volunteers in relation to the number of employees, and ultimately it developed a method to monitor volunteer hours and their value.

Voluntary work has become one of the pillars of charitable work for the State of Kuwait. It is a result of a number of motives, including religious motivation, as many religious texts insist to help the poor and orphans and extend a helping hand to others. Psychological motivation also plays a role, with a view to feeling happy and improving overall satisfaction with life. The social motivation involves compensating for feelings of inferiority or lack of achievement.

CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPIC GIVING: NEW VEHICLES AND TECHNOLOGIES

Regulatory, political, and social developments have affected charitable work across borders. The most important one is the increased desire to cooperate with international organizations to implement charitable projects in areas that Kuwaiti charities cannot reach. There are also joint activities with some international organizations, such as the training program organized by the World Islamic Charitable Organization in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross in September 2019. This program included the participation of representatives of

⁵ The Voluntary Work Center establishes and implements volunteer projects and coordinates volunteer efforts. His Highness the Amir of the country, may God preserve and sponsor him, issued a decree establishing the Kuwait Center for Voluntary Work to crown the achievements in this field; the head of the center is Sheikha Amthal Al Ahmad. For more information please see <https://www.kuwaitvolunteers.org/>

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Social Affairs and Labor as well as Kuwaiti charities (Kuwait News Agency, 2019).

Furthermore, geopolitical developments have had a negative impact on domestic philanthropic giving, such as the Iraqi invasion in 1990, the events of September 11, 2001, the global financial crisis of 2008–2010. More recently, the International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq 2018 was formed because of the negative experiences that Kuwaitis endured as a result of the Iraq invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990.⁶ This development also had a negative impact on domestic giving.

NEW STYLES OF CROSS-BORDER PHILANTHROPIC GIVING

A new set of tools has emerged in cross-border philanthropic giving; the most important include:

Impact investment, as a number of Kuwaiti philanthropic organizations have experience in this regard, including the experiences of the Mercy International Society and Direct Aid Society that were able to achieve profit of 20% on their investments. This means the investment covered the costs and provided an extra amount to finance other activities. However, on the other hand, there are some external factors that prevent charities from engaging in this type of philanthropic work. For example, conflicts and wars in some countries may make them an inappropriate environment for investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT FOR CROSS-BORDER GIVING

Three recommendations can be formulated as follows:

- Establish a specialized unit in each association that collects information about the situation of the countries in which it intends to work and documenting cross-border charitable activities, including volunteering. Internally in the State, create a special system for financial auditing of the international organizations working in Kuwait, and especially the Kuwaiti charities working abroad. Such a system could reside in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- Ensure effective communication, externally with the governments of the countries in which the societies operate through memoranda of understanding, in addition to internally with the various ministries concerned with the areas in which charities operate. Transparency in presentation of the allocated budgets and the areas in which they will be spent is key to making government agencies feel that Kuwaiti charities are a true partner in achieving Kuwait's humanitarian goals. This will lead the government to consider the charities' success and achievement as a success for everyone. Charities should also inform the Kuwaiti government supervisory bodies about the extent of their success, excellence, and accomplishments achieved in their work, and not limit communication to addressing them when problems arise.
- Increase work with international organizations while avoiding any discriminatory agenda. This will increase the effectiveness of Kuwaiti charities in international forums, and in turn

⁶ A conference launched on February 12, 2018, targeting the reconstruction and development of Iraq, was held in Kuwait with the participation of more than 40 countries and hundreds of international companies in various sectors.

give them greater ability to direct the path of international organizations' programs, and to have a clear opinion on them.

The Philanthropic Landscape in Kuwait

DOMESTIC GIVING ENVIRONMENT

The Kuwaiti government provides substantial encouragement to donate money for philanthropic work inside the country, as it considers philanthropy to be a key part of its development plan. In addition, it does not exert any pressure on philanthropic organizations at home compared with other countries of the region, despite the fact that all details of philanthropic work are under its control (Al Shayji, 2020).⁷

The government's interest in philanthropy work is reflected by the presence of government agencies among the top donors to domestic philanthropic causes; among the most prominent is the "Zakat House" that contributed more than 31 million Kuwaiti dinars in 2017,⁸ in addition to proposing a new law Organizing Philanthropy work.⁹

ESTABLISHING PHILANTHROPIC ORGANIZATIONS

The establishment of philanthropic organizations in the State of Kuwait began in the early twentieth century, particularly with the spread of pandemics, to provide a helping hand to those needing health care who were financially incapable of paying for it. The aid remained unofficial until the first charity was established in the year 1913 under the name "Arab Charitable Society" to specialize in health support, and the establishment of charitable societies continued thereafter.

Individuals also sometimes collect donations, depending on their personal relationships and their friendships and family ties. This process, which can be called "philanthropic custom," is not announced, because the law does not allow individuals to collect donations unless they are representatives of registered philanthropic organizations approved by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor.

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS MOTIVATIONS

A deeply rooted cultural and religious heritage stimulates philanthropic work inside Kuwait. Several interwoven factors need to be understood; the most important include Islamic faith,

⁷ The Kuwaiti government has recently intervened to direct philanthropic societies. This occurred when the Kuwaiti Council of Ministers, asked the Ministry of Social Affairs to direct philanthropic societies and committees to limit the distribution of sacrificial animals outside Kuwait and intensify their internal distribution. The government also intervened with the mobilization of efforts to confront the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. See "Localizing Kuwaiti philanthropic work ... and the black market," Dr. Abdul Razzaq Al Shayji, <https://www.sabr.cc/2020/07/20/443306/>.

⁸ Zakat House spending statistics for the past years are available through https://www.zakathouse.org.kw/zakat_statx2.aspx

⁹ The new philanthropy organization law is being prepared by the Ministry of Social Affairs in consultation with several parties, pending its follow-up and discussion in the Parliament. The date of its expected approval has not yet been specified.

which is considered the main driver for philanthropy work, and the history of the State of Kuwait. Kuwait's social structure is based on the historic communities featuring close houses and adjacent alleys, in which the social solidarity between members of the tribe was founded. The emergence of the value of social solidarity among the individuals themselves, which is known in Kuwaiti society as "FAZAA,"¹⁰ also motivated domestic philanthropic giving.

DOMESTIC PHILANTHROPY GIVING: MAIN TRENDS

The estimated total amount of domestic giving in 2019 was KWD 53.6 million, equivalent to USD 175.4 million. This amount includes Zakat House (KWD 31 million) and the General Secretariat of Endowments, and the major bodies operating locally, such as Nama¹¹ and others.¹²

Sources of domestic giving include individuals, companies, cooperative societies, commercial governmental bodies such as Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC), the Amiri Diwan, and others. Despite the diversity of the sources, there is no single central agency responsible for collecting data on domestic philanthropic giving. However, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor perform a large part of this mission.

Most domestic philanthropy is directed to provide food baskets, cash assistance to needy families, tuition fees for students, paying late rents, health care fees, residency fees, and providing in-kind assistance. Some associations also provide aid to the Bidoon, who are stateless.¹³

Factors that explain the enormous resources for domestic philanthropy include the growth of philanthropic societies and charities, which have contributed greatly to help the donor with the groups that he wishes to support, in addition to the impact of the technological boom, which has increased wealth and therefore also increased the size of donations.

¹⁰ Slang, meaning community members provide support and assistance to the needy, be it relative, friend or neighbor, whether it is done with the explicit request of the needy or without it.

¹¹ <https://www.namaakw.net/>

¹² Government donor snapshot for 2019 Available at:

<https://fts.unocha.org/donors/4849/summary/2019>

¹³ Bidoon are known by this name because they are "stateless," and the history of the name dates back to the period between 1960 and 1979. There is an estimated 85,000 Bidoon in Kuwait in 2019. They are people who reside in Kuwait but do not hold Kuwaiti citizenship. The government classifies them as illegal residents—that is, they have no evidence of their belonging to a specific country, including Kuwait. The door for obtaining Kuwaiti citizenship was opened in the early sixties and closed in 1966, and many of these people or their grandparents did not obtain citizenship due to either their lack of acceptance or their lack of awareness of the importance of seeking to obtain citizenship. Those who did not obtain citizenship during that period are not able to easily obtain it now. For more information, see "Bidoon is the new old problem of Kuwait":

https://arabic.sputniknews.com/arab_world/20191121043392513-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9/

DOMESTIC PHILANTHROPY: NEW VEHICLES OR TECHNOLOGIES

One of the most prominent developments is the spread of social media, which has had a dual impact: it has been used as an effective and widespread tool for the skeptics of philanthropic organizations, as confirmed by several studies such as "Confidence in the Face of Skepticism" carried out by the Global Center for Charitable Studies in the IICO. Results indicated that (90%) of the respondents were aware of and followed the waves of skepticism, but only (13%) of them indicated that these campaigns negatively affected their view toward philanthropic organizations (IICO, 2019, p. 55). On the other hand, social media was also an effective tool for philanthropic societies to facilitate and increase donations (IICO, 2019, p. 11). In addition, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor started to automate its processes in 2018; after the Ministry's transactions were converted to electronic format, a central platform was adopted to receive donations and establish electronic communication between charities and ministries, such as social and foreign affairs, which had a role in facilitating procedures for philanthropic projects.

NEW STYLES OF DOMESTIC PHILANTHROPY

In general, the Kuwaiti environment does not seem to support impact investing in philanthropic work, although experience reveals the existence of this type of philanthropic work does occur in a limited manner, such as investments made in the education sector. Examples include investments made by the Alnajat Society and the IICO, and the experience of Revival of Islamic Heritage Society¹⁴ to establish an endowment company for livestock and others. The cost of this investment seems high in Kuwait compared to elsewhere, and the current law does not encourage investment in philanthropic bodies, contrary to what was confirmed by the new drafted law, which is still waiting for the approval of the parliament.

Social enterprises or other types of hybrid bodies do not exist in the philanthropic sector in Kuwait, but there are non-profit companies that provide various social or humanitarian services (Tadros, 2019).

Mobile giving is not found in the State of Kuwait.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE ENVIRONMENT FOR PHILANTHROPY

The three main recommendations can be formulated as follows:

- Increase the coordination, cooperation, and exchange of experience among philanthropic societies, the General Endowment and Zakat House, which will lead to an increase in the area of support to meet the humanitarian needs required in Kuwait. Furthermore, establish social alliances between societies and NGOs in order to manage urgent humanitarian issues inside Kuwait. Accelerate communication between charities and official institutions in order to speed up the provision of timely support in case of emergency and disasters, as governmental actions might sometimes cause lack of timely support. Moreover, it is also important to establish a central media agency concerned with advocating for charitable work, to display its true accomplishments and provide media coverage of the activities of charitable societies.

¹⁴ Alnajat Society, <https://alnajat.org.kw/%d8%a3%d9%8a%d9%86-%d9%86%d8%b9%d9%85%d9%84/>; The International Islamic Charity Organization, International Center for Quality Education <https://www.iico.org/ar/initiatives/students/>

- Pay attention to setting real strategic plans for managing and activating charitable societies, along with directing charitable projects to train and employ of needy families in order to enable them economically. This will allow them to help themselves in a sustainable manner instead of relying on cash aid, and will qualify them to occupy a place in the various Kuwaiti factories and agencies, which are entirely dependent on expats.

- Propose a code of conduct that is agreed upon by Kuwaiti societies that qualifies managerial employees in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and the philanthropic organizations. Establish a center specialized in training the workers of every charity organization. An example is the "Tamkeen" initiative launched by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor with the International Islamic Charity Organization for training workers in Kuwaiti charitable bodies (IICO, 2018).

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