

Promoting inclusive employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in Iraq

Creating employment prospects for refugees, internally displaced persons and host communities

The context

Many young people in Iraq are looking for jobs. Especially for people affected by conflict and displacement, it is challenging to attend technical and vocational training classes and secure a job. Refugees are excluded from the labour market or exploited, and women are underrepresented in the workforce.

Yet, having an income is the basis for building a livelihood and peaceful and stable societies. With the right skillsets, jobseekers and future entrepreneurs can boost economic growth. Nearly 60 percent of the country's 45.4 million population is under the age of 25. They are ambitious and motivated to find dignified jobs or start their own businesses.

Although the government has intensified efforts to enhance access to education and skills development, increased efforts are needed to address the access to training opportunities and to adapt curricula to the labour market needs. To allow everyone to access and participate in the labour market, inclusive labour market policies are needed.

Our approach

The project takes an integrated approach to promote training and employment opportunities. It focuses on four key areas:

- 1) **Policy advocacy:** At macro-level, the project raises awareness among state actors to improve the integration of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and marginalised groups in host communities into labour market policy. This is done through evidence-based formats.
- 2) **Skills for employment:** At meso level, project partners develop technical and vocational training curricula that allow participants to gain market-relevant skills.

Project name	Employment Prospects for Socio-economic Integration of Refugees, IDPs and Host Communities in Iraq (EPSI)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Anbar, Erbil, Halabja, Sulaymaniyah, Nineveh
Lead executing agency	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA)
Duration	01.06.2023–31.05.2026

These skills enhance the employability of graduates. Teachers at vocational training and career development centres participate in trainings to understand and apply the new curricula.

- 3) **Fit for business:** The project supports (future) entrepreneurs with training courses and grants. Building and developing entrepreneurial and business skills helps creating an income for the business owners themselves and potentially employees. Thus, the project leverages its contribution to job creation and overall private sector growth.
- 4) **Short-term employment opportunities:** at micro level, temporary employment opportunities, such as Cash for Work, support 1,100 people. These opportunities address the immediate financial needs of jobseekers, especially persons in vulnerable situations who face difficulties in the labour market.

Monitoring the recent flow of IDPs to their places of origin, the project works in close coordination with relevant international organisations and local authorities to monitor and determine the needs of the marginalised group with regards to income generation opportunities after their basic and immediate needs are addressed. Concurrently, within the host communities, the project is continuing and expanding its measures to support the integration efforts of IDPs. Thus, these complementary measures contribute to the implementation of the Iraqi National Plan to Resolve Displacement.

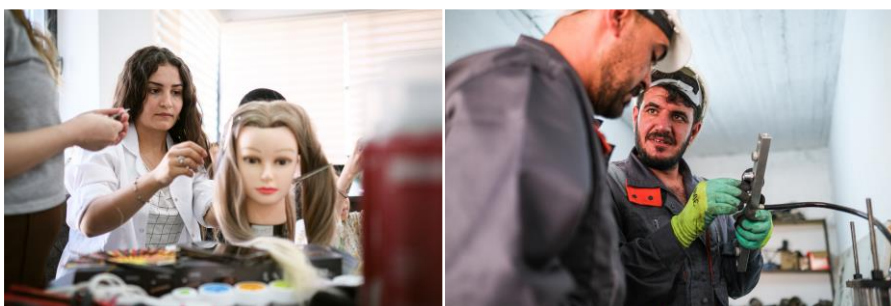


Photo left: a Yezidi woman takes part in a hair-dressing vocational training in Sinjar, Nineveh governorate (2024)

Photo right: a trainer explains a car part to a participant of vocational training in mechanics in Zakho, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (2024)



Photo left: a woman makes a presentation at a business management training in Zakho, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (2024)

Photo right: participants of social media training discuss a graphic design (2024)

The benefits

As Iraq’s needs shift from short-term stabilisation to long-term sustainable employment creation, the project supports relevant government actors through sensitisation and facilitation of discussions to promote the inclusion of marginalised groups into the labour market. Understanding the bigger role that private sector and other relevant actors have, the project gives a special attention to increasing the collaboration between relevant actors in working towards a more inclusive employment policy.

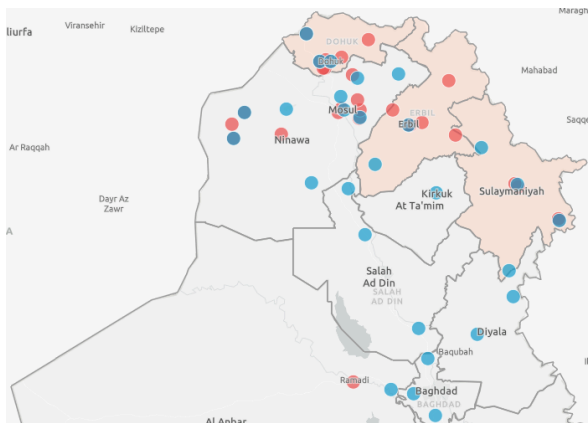
To support participants in gaining practical knowledge, the project offers a minimum of two months of-internship following market-relevant vocational training. Moreover, to create sustainable income generation, the project similarly supports MSMEs to provide employment opportunities in various fields, including but not limited to agriculture, digital and green sector. Business management

training courses, covering financial management, marketing and customer service are provided along with business grants. The project provides business grants to start, expand or reactivate enterprises that are mainly led by women, IDPs and refugees. Through market-linkage events, graduates of vocational training and supported business owners are provided with networking opportunities to connect with private sector and small and medium-sized enterprises. This approach helps participants to acquire the much-needed experience to find sustainable employment opportunities.

An example from the field

More than 1,100 participants have taken part in business management training so far. More than 800 business owners have received business grants to start up, expand or reactivate their enterprises. One of them is Sima Saman, a young woman from Halabja in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. She established Gula Hero, an organic compost producer and seller. Seeing tons of methane-emitting organic waste such as pomegranate peels and olive pomace, thrown to trash every day, made her to think of turning the waste into non-chemical compost. With the help of GIZ, she bought a compost grinder machine to process the organic waste that she sources from olive-oil-producing factories as well as households. This allowed her to develop and introduce new products. After packaging, she sells them directly to nurseries as well as landscaping companies. “I have been working hard to get my project started. It makes me very happy when I see small successes. Despite the hard work and sometimes discouraging comments, I will not give up,” Sima said.

“My next endeavor is to expand my business by producing a diverse range of products,” she added.



Blue circles on the map show IDP movement while the red circles indicate EPSI project’s ongoing measures in response to the changes. ©GIZ

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