



ASSESSMENT OF KIRKUK'S CONSTRUCTION MARKET'S LABOR NEEDS AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING IMPROVEMENT ASPECTS

*Employment Promotion through Building Vocational Skills in the
Construction Sector in Kirkuk City, Kirkuk Governorate.*

DRAFT REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of Kirkuk, a shift has occurred from an emergency situation to one of recovery and stabilization. The focus now lies on facilitating the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs), restoring key public services to support sustainable returns, and ensuring equitable rebuilding of Kirkuk city for its residents.¹

The city's households have confronted substantial challenges due to widespread destruction caused by recent conflicts. Houses, infrastructure, and equipment have suffered severe damage or complete destruction. These damages have left the residents grappling not only with the consequences of destruction but also with financial constraints hindering their ability to repair, access services, and restore income-generating activities. This financial scarcity presents a significant barrier to healthcare and education access, and it prevents the revival of businesses due to the inability to replace stolen or damaged equipment, as well as rebuild structures. Moreover, residents face escalated expenses triggered by rising commodity prices and the necessity to pay fees at checkpoints for goods transportation. The interplay of limited financial means, increased expenses, and restricted livelihood opportunities creates a challenging cycle that is hard to break without external support.²

Among these challenges, specific groups like women and individuals with disabilities face added obstacles in entering the job market. Women's employment rates are notably lower than men's. Similarly, individuals with disabilities encounter challenges in accessing healthcare, education, and employment.³

With high unemployment rates, the population typically engages in small businesses, vocational work, construction, government, and the service industry. Challenges to securing employment include heightened competition, lack of available jobs, geographical distance, and limited networks.⁴

In that context, the Government of Iraq's "Iraq Vision 2030" emphasizes governance reforms, human capital development, and job creation.⁵ Similarly, the United Nations advocates for robust support to IDPs, returnees, and vulnerable host communities, where economic empowerment plays a central role. Moreover, the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions underscores the significance of secure livelihoods and skills development for comprehensive sustainable development.⁶ Overall, these initiatives aim to enhance employability and productive engagement, thereby contributing to economic recovery and livelihood improvement in the community.

It is precisely within that framework that the current project comes into play. Through the organization of a training program, we intend to promote employment among young men and women aged 18-29 by providing them with vocational skills in the construction sector.

Focused on Kirkuk city, the project aims to enhance the employability of 200 young jobseekers, enabling active participation in economic and local recovery efforts. By addressing the shortage

¹ [Iraq Humanitarian Transition Overview 2023](#).

² Idem.

³ Idem.

⁴ [Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021](#).

⁵ [Iraq Vision 2030](#).

⁶ [IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons](#).

of skilled workers, fostering financial self-dependence, and promoting social cohesion, the program seeks to achieve sustainable, long-term recovery while creating job opportunities and boosting infrastructure development, ultimately leading to improved well-being and increased resilience within the local community.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the market needs assessment is to lay the foundation for a well-informed and effective livelihood intervention within the Kirkuk community. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the local market dynamics and the distinctive attributes of the community, this assessment aims to identify key requirements, emerging trends, and untapped opportunities that can guide the program's strategies and actions.

Through this assessment, the project seeks to bridge the existing gap between the demands of the construction market and the available workforce in Kirkuk. By pinpointing the specific skills that are currently in demand but lacking within the local workforce, the assessment will contribute to the development of targeted training programs that empower individuals with the skills they need to succeed in the construction sector. This alignment between training and market needs will not only enhance the employability of participants but also bolster the overall productivity and competitiveness of the local construction industry.

Furthermore, the market needs assessment recognizes the unique challenges that women and persons with disabilities often encounter when pursuing job opportunities or engaging in training initiatives within the sector. By highlighting these barriers and understanding their underlying causes, the assessment will facilitate the design of inclusive strategies that promote equal access to training, employment, and economic participation. In doing so, the project aims to foster a more diverse and inclusive workforce, promoting social equity and tapping into the potential of all members of the community.

Ultimately, the market needs assessment serves as the cornerstone for informed decision-making, ensuring that the livelihood intervention program aligns with the evolving demands of the local construction market while catering to the needs and aspirations of the Kirkuk community. By strategically addressing skill gaps, promoting inclusivity, and seizing emerging opportunities, the assessment will pave the way for a program that not only transforms individual lives but also contributes to the sustainable growth and development of the region.

METHODOLOGY

Research questions

The assessment has been designed to investigate the following questions:

1. Skill gaps:
 - a. Identify the specific technical, vocational, and soft skills in demand within the construction sector.
 - b. Determine the skills prioritized by local employers in the construction industry.
 - c. Analyze the disparities between the skills possessed by youth and those required by the construction industry.
 - d. Categorize the skill gaps that can be addressed by women and those that can be addressed by persons with disabilities.
2. Industry trends:
 - a. Examine the current and future trends in the construction sector.
 - b. Assess the adoption of new technologies within the construction industry.
 - c. Evaluate changes in job roles anticipated within the construction sector.
 - d. Explore the evolving inclusion of women in the construction labor market.
 - e. Identify emerging opportunities and areas for skill development within the construction sector.
3. Barriers to youth employment:
 - a. Investigate the barriers preventing young individuals, especially women, from accessing job opportunities in the construction sector.
 - b. Analyze the impact of limited access to education and training on youth employment in construction.
 - c. Examine the role of discrimination in hindering youth employment in the construction industry.
 - d. Assess the level of awareness among youth about available job openings in construction.
4. Unique job-seeking challenges among specific demographic groups:
 - a. Identify the obstacles faced by specific demographic groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, displaced individuals, and returnees, in seeking employment within the construction sector.
5. Training and education programs:
 - a. Evaluate the effectiveness of existing training and education programs related to the construction sector.
 - b. Assess the alignment of current programs with the skill demands of the construction industry.
 - c. Determine the adequacy of current programs in preparing young individuals for job opportunities in construction.
6. Entrepreneurial opportunities:
 - a. Explore the potential for youth entrepreneurship within the construction sector.
 - b. Assess the viability of youth-led construction businesses.
 - c. Identify the support or resources required to facilitate the establishment of youth-led construction businesses.
7. Policy and regulatory environment:
 - a. Analyze the impact of government policies, regulations, and incentives on the construction job market for youth.
 - b. Identify policy gaps that hinder the participation of youth in the construction sector.

8. Opportunities in green construction:
 - a. Assess the demand for sustainable construction practices and green building technologies.
 - b. Identify potential job opportunities for youth in the field of eco-friendly construction.
9. Employers and professionals' engagement:
 - a. Understand the perspectives of employers and professionals on hiring young workers, including women, in the construction sector.
 - b. Assess the willingness of employers and professionals to offer skill development opportunities to young individuals in the sector.

Desk review

An initial desk review was conducted to incorporate existing studies and reports into the assessment. The focus of the desk review was on the most demanded occupations within the construction sector, the skill gaps of the workforce, the factors that lead employers to take hiring decisions, the socio-economic context affecting employment and the situation of female workers within the construction market. The desk review was mainly based on two reports: the "Assessment of Agriculture and Housing Sectors in Five Liberated Governorates of Iraq", conducted by CLIC and UNDP during the years 2022/2023, and the "Assessment of the Labour Market & Skills Analysis. Iraq and Kurdistan Region-Iraq. Construction"⁷ published by UNESCO in 2019. The data obtained in these reports was used to inform the development of the methodology of the needs assessment, as well as to triangulate and give consistency to the data obtained.

Data collection methods

The market needs assessment has been successfully conducted, employing a combination of Questionnaires, key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary data collection tools. These methods were thoughtfully chosen to gain comprehensive and nuanced insights from a diverse range of stakeholders involved in the construction industry and the community of Kirkuk, including the target youth demographic. The data collection process encompassed the following components:

Questionnaires

Representatives from the private sector within Kirkuk's construction industry were engaged through questionnaires. These questionnaires collected both quantitative and qualitative data regarding sought-after job profiles, valued skills, hiring preferences, and industry prospects in the near future. Two types of questionnaires were designed with the aim of obtaining more in-depth and accurate information from each private stakeholder. The first model was used for company owners and the second one for independent professionals.

Detailed notes were meticulously taken during the meetings. A total of 16 questionnaires were administered featuring diverse private entities and self-employed workers operating in Kirkuk's construction market.

⁷ [*Assessment of the Labour Market & Skills Analysis. Iraq and Kurdistan Region-Iraq. Construction.*](#)

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Key informants representing public stakeholders were actively involved in this phase. These informants included carefully selected professionals from diverse governmental departments and vocational training institutions from Kirkuk. A total of 11 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Through them qualitative data was collected concerning topics such as the existing vocational trainings in Kirkuk and their margin for improvement, the entry barriers that the youth face when finding a job in the sector, and the particular obstacles experienced by women, PWDs and other vulnerable groups. The interviews were carried out in-person. Detailed notes were diligently taken during these sessions.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Distinct focus groups discussions were organized to engage various segments of the youth population pertinent to the assessment. Participants included diverse young workers within the construction sector and young job seekers in Kirkuk. Specialized sessions were held for women and PWDs. A total of four FGDs were conducted, each accommodating 9-13 participants. Facilitators adeptly guided the FGDs using open-ended questions, fostering an environment where participants comfortably shared their experiences, challenges, aspirations, and recommendations related to the construction job market and skills enhancement. FGDs were orchestrated in a secure and welcoming setting to encourage open dialogue among participants. Detailed notes were diligently taken during these discussions in order to extract the corresponding qualitative data.

Stakeholders Mapping

In order to include a comprehensive perspective of the construction sector of Kirkuk, the assessment has included different kinds of stakeholders relevant for the project.

Public representatives

11 key public stakeholders from government agencies and departments have engaged in the assessment through KIIs. The informants were chosen on the basis of their knowledge regarding training opportunities in the construction sector, the particular characteristics of the young jobseekers or the situation of women or PWD when accessing the labor market and training opportunities. Therefore, the informants have included the following public professionals from Kirkuk: the Manager of the Vocational Training's Department at the Directorate of Labor and Social Affairs, the Head of the Directorate of Labor and Social Affairs in Kirkuk, the Head of the Survey Department at the Technical Institute, the Head of the Civil Engineering Department at the Technical Institute, the Dean of the Engineering College, the Director of the Chamber of Commerce, the HR Manager of the Municipality Directorate, the Director of the Vocational Training Center at the Directorate of Youth and Sports, the responsible for NGOs at the Directorate of Youth and Sports, the Head of the Women's Affairs Directorate, and the Head of the Directorate of People with Disabilities' Affairs.

Private entities

Amounting to a total of 16 informants, both company owners and individual professionals from Kirkuk's construction sector have participated in the assessment. Together they have provided

in-depth information concerning the existing skill gaps in the industry, the most demanded occupations, employers hiring criteria, and their perspectives in the future of the sector.

From the side of the companies, the owners and managers that have taken part in the assessment represented private entities such as: Construction contractors, engineering companies, designing and painting companies, decoration companies, internet providers, PVC-specialized companies, and companies specialized in solar energy and surveillance cameras.

The following Figures 1 and 2 showcase the size and area of operation of the participant companies, respectively.



From the side of the individual professionals, the informants included individuals from the following occupations: Carpenters, PVC carpenters, pipe manufacturers, blacksmiths, dyers, professionals specialized in air conditioning and electrical installations, firefighting equipment manufacturers, and professionals working in the decoration sector.

The following Figure 3 shows the participants' area of operation. Figure 4 showcases the interviewed professionals' frequency in hiring staff.



The decision to gather and present the data from private entities in a disaggregated manner (company owners and employers on one side and individual professionals on the other) seeks to obtain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the job market's demands and requirements. Company owners might focus on the broader skills, qualifications and roles required for their workforce. Their insights can help identify high-level skills and competencies that are important for the industry as a whole. Meanwhile, individual professionals can provide information about specific skills and new technologies or practices that are currently in demand.

The youth of Kirkuk.

A total of 41 individuals took part in the Focus Group Discussions aimed at gathering the views and concerns of Kirkuk's youth population. The participants were divided into four groups. The first group was mixed (13 participants). The second group was formed only by women (9 participants). The third group was only formed by men (10 participants). And the fourth group included only PWDs (9 participants).

Triangulation of the findings

To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation will be employed by cross-referencing information collected from questionnaires, KIIs and FGDs. This approach will validate the data and uncover common themes and patterns, ensuring a more robust and reliable assessment. Please see annexes 1, 2, 3 and 4 to find the tools that have been used to analyze and systematize the data.

Moreover, the data obtained through the questionnaires, the KIIs and FGDs has been complemented with relevant data from the desk review. This provides contextual information and statistical evidence to support the findings, further reinforcing the assessment's validity.

FINDINGS

Market needs

State of the construction market

A clear picture of the current state of the construction sector in Kirkuk is provided by the “Assessment of Agriculture and Housing Sectors in Five Liberated Governorates of Iraq”, conducted by CLIC and UNDP during the years 2022/2023. According to this report, Iraq's construction sector is currently facing a notable crisis. Growth between 2009 and 2013 was followed by a severe setback from ISIL's impact and oil price decline in 2014. Being the construction investment largely driven by public funds, the damage suffered by the government's fiscal balance had a clear impact on the sector. Short-term recovery relies on reconstruction needs, security normalization, political stability, improved fiscal balance via oil price recovery and reduced military spending, historical investments, and increased domestic demand. Long-term prospects highlight the sector's potential contribution to Iraq's economy. With energy advantages, Iraq is well-positioned for energy-intensive activities like construction material production and transport. Its growing population, sizable youth demographic, vast territory, urbanization, and housing deficits offer substantial opportunities for domestic and foreign investment (UNDP report; page 30).

Nevertheless, there are still some additional challenges that need to be tackled to allow for the development of the sector. Among others, these include corruption, financial certainty for constructors, availability of infrastructure, facilities and services for new construction, and access to transportation networks (UNDP report; page 32).

Moreover, the report highlights that employment in the construction sector is unstable and uncertain, lacking long-term job opportunities and consistent foreign company presence. This remarks the importance of fostering a diverse skill set and establishing safety nets for vulnerable workers exposed to sudden disruptions. Similarly, migration's impact on wages and employment is noteworthy. When job numbers remain constant, migration swiftly reduces wages, as the offer increases while the demand stagnates. Furthermore, adherence to labor laws by private sector employers is lax, particularly for semi-skilled and unskilled workers without contracts. While locals possess skills, foreign workers are often preferred due to Iraqi aversion to extended hours and low pay in the private sector (UNDP report; page 31).

Regarding the composition of the labor market, the UNDP report states that in 2014 the Iraqi construction sector officially had around 63,000 workers. Official figures indicated that there were 36,000 workers in private construction and 27,000 in the public sector.⁸ However, the private sector was estimated to account for 72% of construction workers when accounting for informal work.

Regarding the specific governorate, out of the 5 liberated ones, Kirkuk shows the highest proportion of self-employed professionals at 81.8%, while having the lowest representation of salaried employees in stable positions, accounting for just 5%. Although the sample used by the

⁸ The figures are likely to underestimate actual employment due to prevalent informal work arrangements, particularly in the private sector, where semi-skilled and unskilled laborers often work without contracts on short-term bases.

study is far from being big enough to represent the whole population of Kirkuk, we can gather that self-employment is more common in the governorate than salaried employees.

Most demanded occupations in Kirkuk's construction market

In 2019, UNESCO published a report titled "Assessment of the Labor Market & Skills Analysis. Iraq and Kurdistan Region-Iraq. Construction". After convening the Construction Sector Council in Iraq and conducting a thorough enterprise survey, this report reached the conclusion that the following are the most demanded construction-related occupations in Iraq: Civil engineers; construction managers; construction supervisors; mechanical engineers; mechanical engineering technicians; bricklayers, stonemasons, stone cutters, splitters, and carvers; building architects; landscape architects; building construction laborers; insulation workers; glaziers; air conditioning and refrigeration mechanics; welders and flame cutters; structural steel workers; riggers and cable splicers; crane, hoist and related plan operators; heavy truck and lorry drivers; earthmoving and related plant operators; electrical engineers; electrical engineering technicians; electricians (electrical machines and electrical circuit breaking); carpenters and joiners; town and traffic planners; cartographers and surveyors; and concrete workers and finishers (UNESCO report, pages 75-79).⁹

For the purpose of our needs assessment, we decided to test the validity of the results obtained by the UNESCO report in the specific area of Kirkuk City. In order to do that, we asked employers and individual professionals in Kirkuk to rate the level of demand that the market has for each of the mentioned occupations. That way, with all the aggregated data we can establish a hierarchy of the most demanded occupations in Kirkuk City. The results, shown in Figures 5 and 6 below, are divided into two datasets. First, the insights obtained from company owners and employers (Figure 5), and second, the insights belonging to individual professionals (Figure 6).

When we analyze both graphs it is clear that the occupations outlined by UNESCO as the most in-demand in Iraq also experience a high level of demand in Kirkuk city. All occupations, except for environmental engineers, score 3 or more (out of 5) in demand level in both datasets.

As for the occupations that obtained the highest scores, we can see some differences depending on which group of informants we take as a reference. However, with a score of 4 or more, the following five are among the ten most demanded occupations in both datasets: blacksmiths, electricians, electrical engineers, PVC installers/workers, and carpenters and joiners. Moreover, when we look at the aggregated data, the same five occupations are among the six most demanded by the construction market.

At the top of the most demanded occupations we can also find: building construction laborers, civil engineers, building architects, bricklayers and stonemasons, mechanical engineering technicians, and plumbers and pipe fitters.

⁹ The report warns about a likely over-representation of high-level professional occupations.

Figure 5: Most in-demand occupations according to company owners

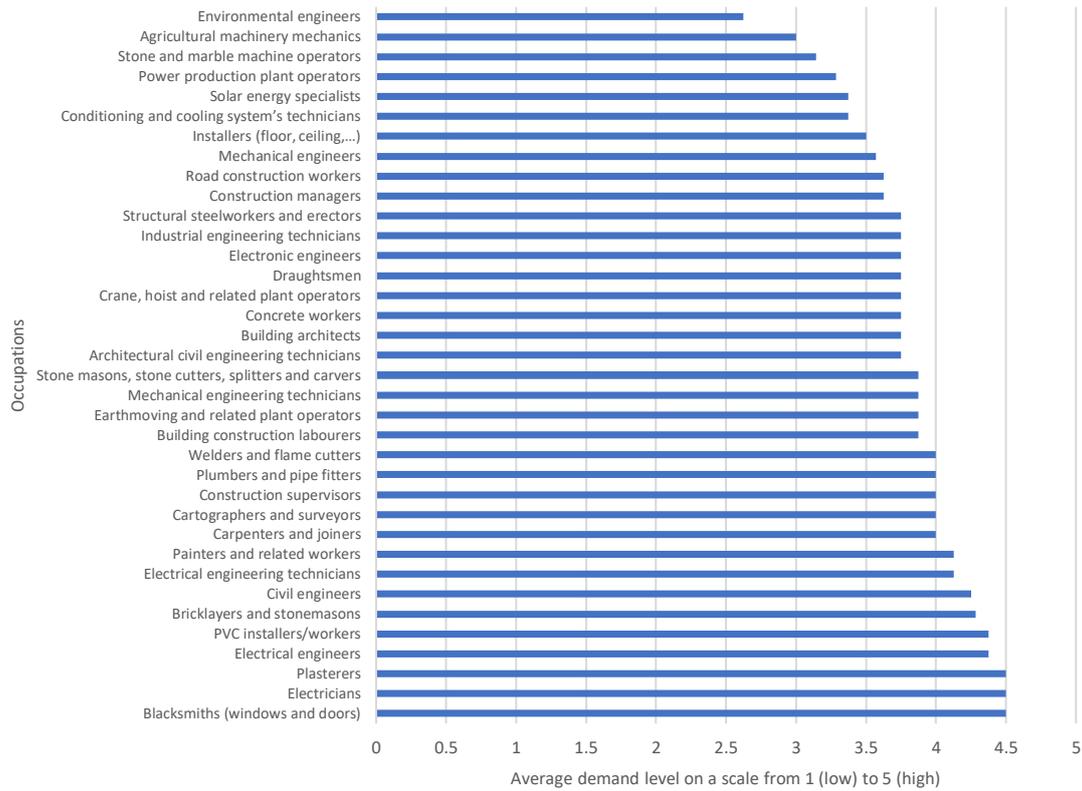
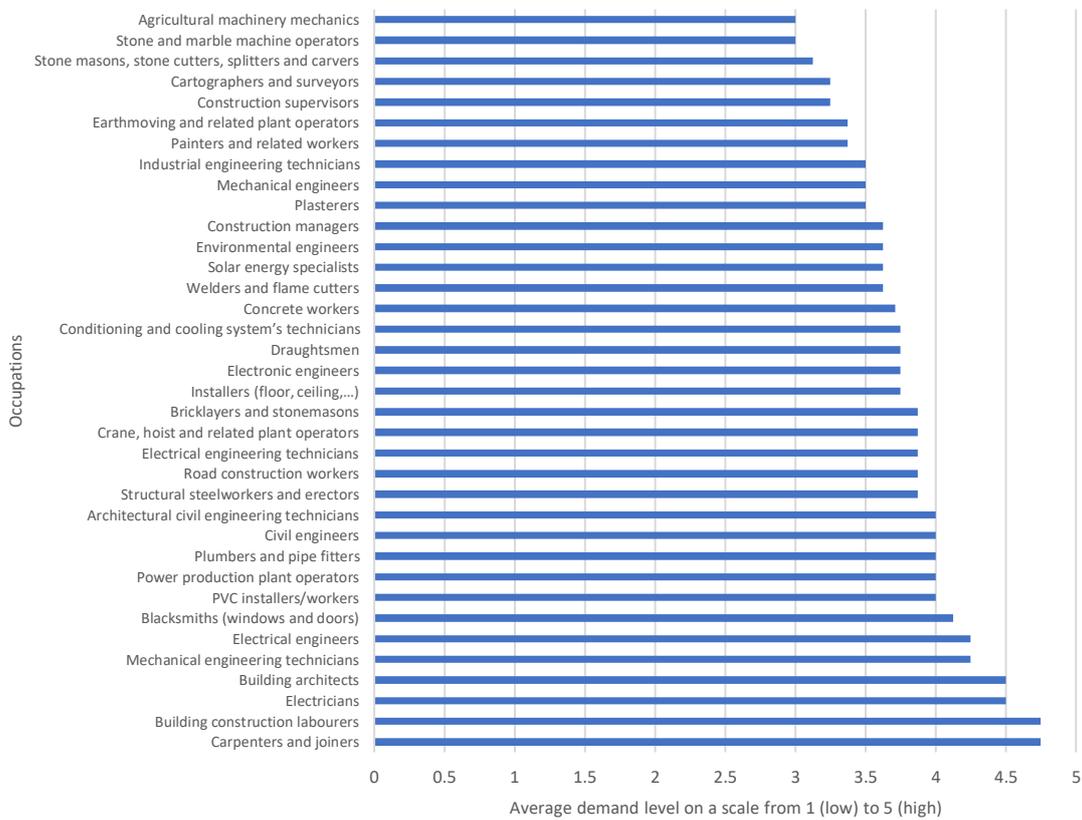
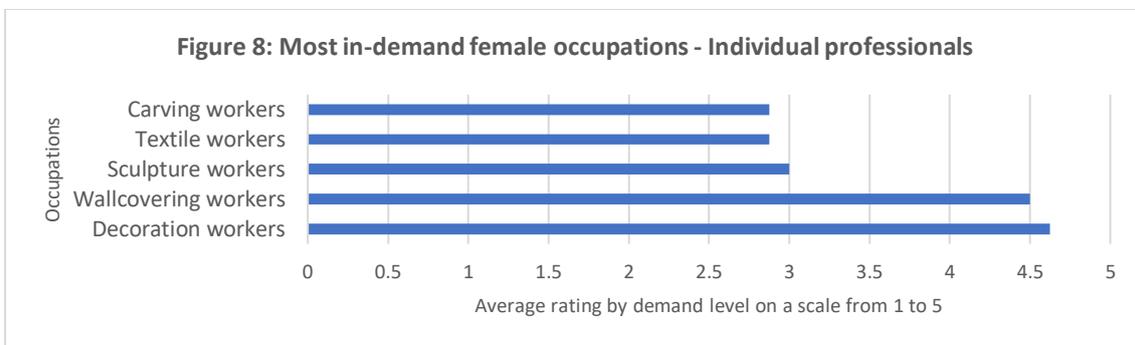
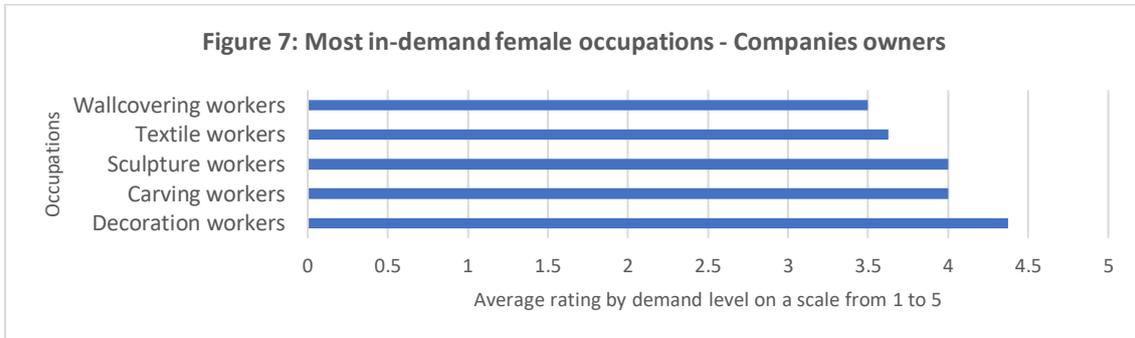


Figure 6: Most in-demand construction-related occupations according to individual professionals



When it comes to the most in-demand female occupations, the results are shown in Figures 7 and 8. Decoration workers are clearly perceived by the market as the most demanded female occupation. Moreover, when asked whether they would hire women, employers and individual professionals repeatedly mentioned that they would be willing to do that for roles related to decoration and design.

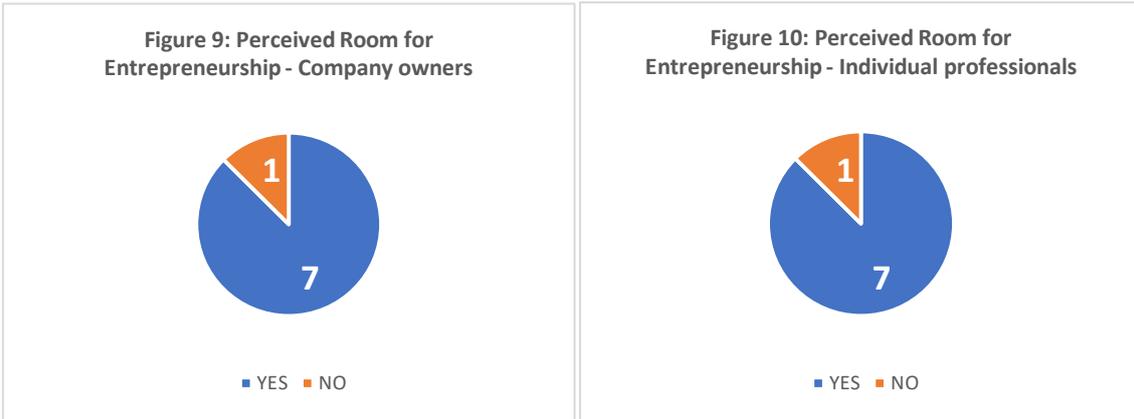


Additionally, out of the eleven participants that mentioned their willingness to hire female workers, eight of them outlined that they would hire them for positions related to “office work”, “administrative work” or “work with computers/laptops”. Among other roles, this would include software development, project management, customer service, marketing, sales, and human resources. Sectors like electricity and refrigeration and air conditioning also seem to be opened to incorporate women.

Room for entrepreneurship

Regarding the capacity of the market to incorporate new companies, the great majority of both the private entities’ representatives and the individual professionals affirmed that there is room for newly established entrepreneurship projects to flourish in the sector (see Figures 9 and 10 below).

A wide range of sub-sectors were mentioned to be suitable for entrepreneurial endeavours: Carpentry, Plywood, Moroccan ceilings, cement board, architecture and designing, residential construction, production of building materials, building cleaning and maintenance, carpentry, blacksmithing, AC maintenance, and electrical installations. However, the most repeated sub-sectors were park and recreation infrastructure and building construction (residential construction, schools, hospitals, etc.).



See the section titled “Construction Industry Trends” for more information on the sectors that will present the highest opportunities for business growth in the near future.

Skills gap

The aforementioned UNESCO report identified the following 12 key professional skills: General knowledge (basic knowledge in the field of work), Advanced knowledge (understanding of theories on the field of work), specialized knowledge (as a basis for research in the field of work), technical skills (know-how to perform their function), literacy (reading and writing), computational skills (understand and apply mathematical concepts), communication skills, teamwork, creative thinking (problem-solving, decision making,...), digital technology (ability with digital systems, applications and information), continuous learning, foreign language (UNESCO report, page 103).

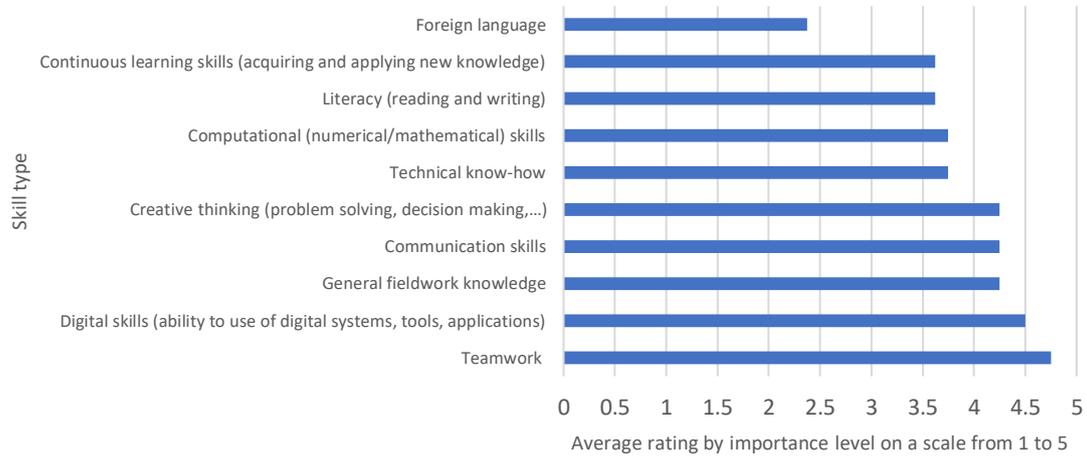
Based on that scheme, we asked the informants representing Kirkuk’s construction market to rate the importance of each skill for the most in-demand positions (results are shown in Figures 11 and 12 below).

Scoring more than 3.5 in both datasets, all the skills [except for “foreign language”] are considered of great importance. Nevertheless, technical know-how, digital skills, teamwork, communication skills, and creative thinking stand out among the rest. While technical know-how might seem basic for an appropriate performance of the workers at their respective roles, employers and individual professionals insisted on the necessity for workers to be able to adequately communicate with their colleagues in order to collaborate in an efficient manner and avoid conflicts. Furthermore, they repeatedly highlighted the fact that workers need to develop problem-solving skills to be more autonomous and able to work independently. The results are consistent when we look at the aggregated data.

Figure 11: Importance of workers' skills - Company owners



Figure 12: Importance of workers' skills - Individual professionals



Construction industry trends

Growth perspectives

When asked about the prospects for growth in Kirkuk's construction sector, only one among the sixteen informants from private entities showed pessimism. Nine were very optimistic, four showed some degree of optimism, and two expressed hesitation or did not answer (see disaggregated data in Figures 13 and 14 below).

Figure 13: "The Construction Sector in Kirkuk will experience sustained growth" - Company owners

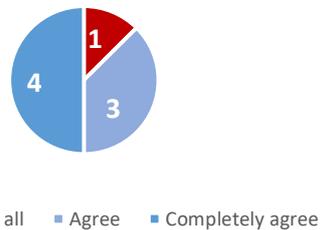
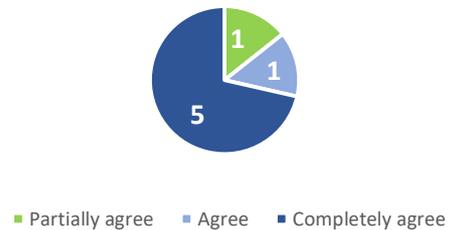


Figure 14: "The construction sector in Kirkuk will experience sustained growth" - Individual professionals

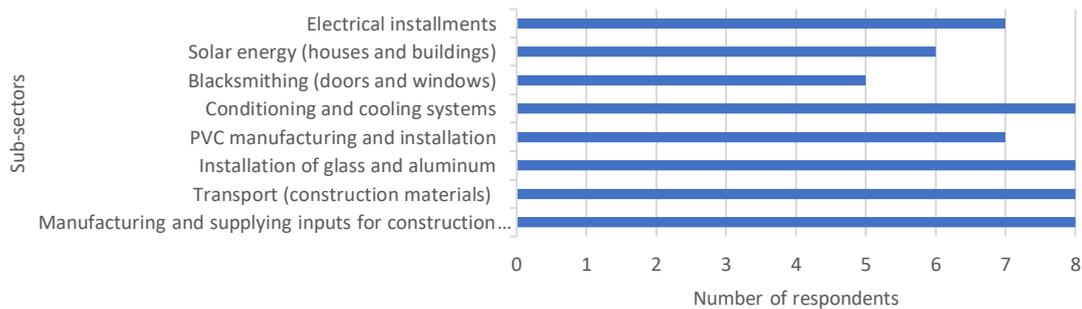


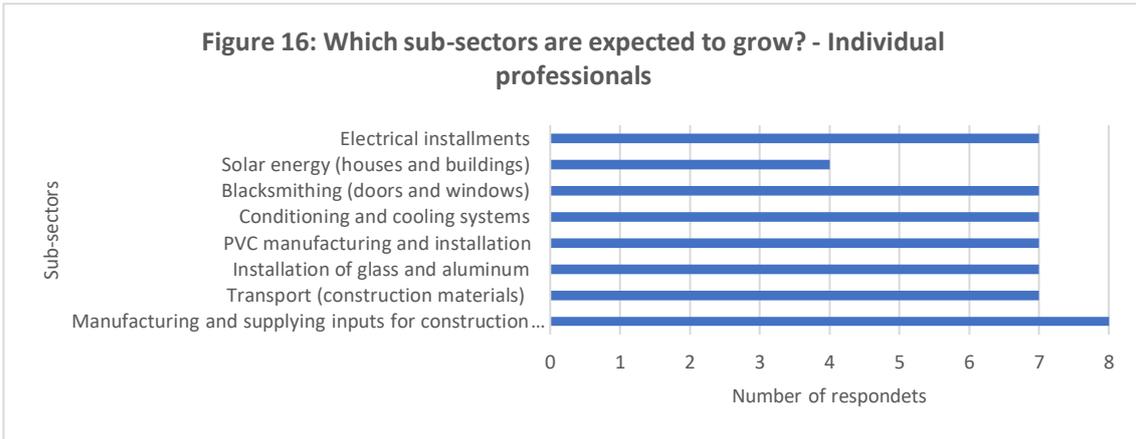
Concerning the specific subsectors where growth will be the highest, the report conducted by UNDP between 2022 and 2023 found that the biggest opportunities for business growth and employment in the near future in Kirkuk's construction sector will be in manufacturing and supplying inputs for construction (such as cement or iron), transport for materials, and installation of glass and aluminum (UNDP report, pages 56-57).

After asking our informants at the private sector we can see how the results align with those of the UNDP report (see Figures 15 and 16). Manufacturing and supplying inputs for construction deserves to be particularly highlighted, as 100% of the participants affirmed that this sector would experience growth in the coming years.

Moreover, we found that conditioning and cooling systems, installation of glass and aluminum, PVC manufacturing and installation, and electrical installments are also seen as sub-sectors with a high growth prospect. Similarly, although not included among the options given to the informants, it is worth noting that when given the possibility to mention other sub-sectors that will experience growth, five participants referred to carpentry and painting.

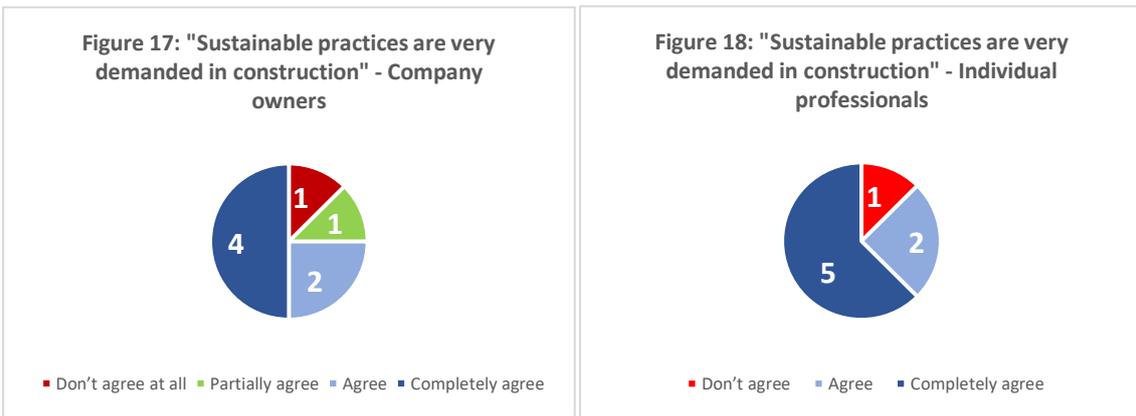
Figure 15: Which sub-sectors are expected to grow? - Company owners



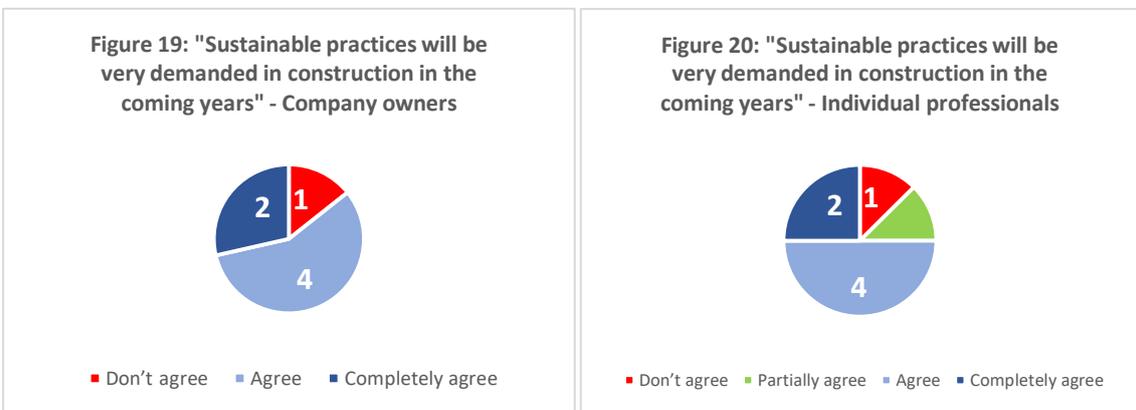


Demand for environmental sustainability

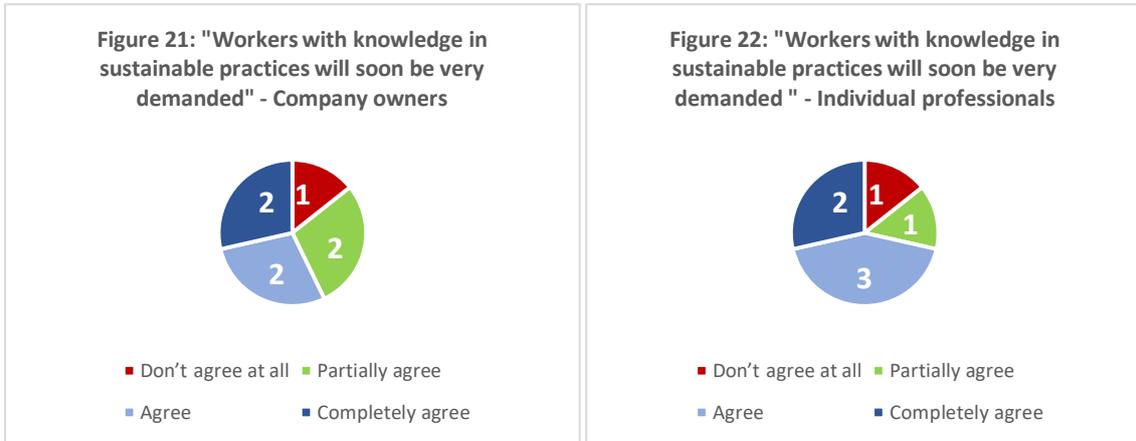
When questioned about the demand level of green technologies and sustainable practices in Kirkuk's construction sector, we find that thirteen out of the sixteen respondents of the questionnaires consider that those technologies and practices are very demanded in the market. See specific disaggregated results in Figures 17 and 18.



Surprisingly enough, when asked the same question but referring to the future, that is, whether sustainable practices and green technologies will be demanded in the coming years, the results are slightly different. Although twelve out of the sixteen respondents still think that sustainable practices will be very demanded, they do not seem to be as confident. See Figures 19 and 20.



Finally, when asked about whether workers with knowledge in sustainable and green practices will be demanded by Kirkuk's construction labor market in the near future, nine participants answered affirmatively, three were hesitant, two answered in the negative, and 2 did not answer. See Figures 21 and 22.



Overall, from the results obtained we can extract that environmentally sustainable practices and green technologies are perceived as an element that needs to be considered when addressing the construction market. It is therefore an aspect that cannot be disregarded in the designing phase of any training program in the sector.

The results prove to be consistent between the two different groups of informants from the public sector.

Vocational Trainings

Training options

Regarding the existing construction-related vocational trainings in the Governorate of Kirkuk, it must be noted that it is certainly difficult to find detailed information about them. However, through the KIIs with the heads of governmental departments and training centers we have identified the following.

At the technical institute, in addition to the long-term specialized professional programs, vocational trainings are offered in:

- Dimensional area measurement.
- Construction of floors, walls, and ceilings.
- Carpentry, electrical installations, plumbing and welding.
- Operating machinery such as excavators and cranes.

At the Technical institute women mostly participate in trainings related to AutoCAD and building projection systems, where they learn how to draw digital plans for different kind of constructions.

Similarly, the Deputy Director at Kirkuk's Chamber of Commerce mentioned that in the Department for Decoration and Design women participate in courses related to floor design, heat-insulating ceilings, and heat-insulating wall cladding.

Design and decoration, sculpture and drawing, and small business's management trainings are also provided by the Department of Women Affairs in Kirkuk.

Moreover, trainings related to street paving, municipal works, and installation of water pipes are held in cooperation with the Kirkuk Sewage Directorate.

Furthermore, the Vocational Training Center in Kirkuk offers trainings in the following areas:

- Building and construction.
- Plumbing.
- Electrical installations.
- Conditioning and cooling systems.
- Blacksmithing, specialized on doors and windows.
- Carpentry, specialized on doors and other building accessories.
- PVC and aluminum.

According to DOLSA's Director, women's participation in trainings related to electrical installations and air conditioning and cooling systems reached 30% or more.

Finally, regarding support to entrepreneurship, DOLSA provides financial assistance to participants through Iraqi banks that successfully complete vocational trainings and develop a plan to start their own business. That support is given through a certificate that allows and increase the trainee's chance the trainee to borrow between twenty and fifty million IQD from the government's banks in order to make the necessary investments for their business. The amount of money received depends on the number of participants that are involved in the entrepreneurial project, receiving twenty million if there is only one participant, thirty if there are two participants and fifty million if there are three or more participants. The sum has to be reimbursed after 8 years without interest.

Criticism

During the KII and FGD, several issues have been raised with regard to the quality and effectiveness of the existing trainings as such. The following are the most relevant aspects to take into consideration:

1. The training programs only admit a small number of participants, therefore having a very limited impact.
2. The courses lack a comprehensive approach. They tend to focus on specific parts of training but disregarding others that are equally relevant in the process of finding a job. Moreover, some informants argue that there is no follow-up of the trainees once they finish the courses.
3. There is a lack of communication between the training centers and the private sector. This factor causes a breach between the skillsets needed by companies and the trainings provided. Furthermore, training programs do not facilitate connections between employers and trainees, which makes it difficult for trainees to find a job.
4. For the cases where there is a possibility of starting their own project, Kirkuk's youth are not aware of the possibility of obtaining financial loans of between twenty and fifty million IQD with DOLSA's approval after successful completion of a vocational training program. That makes it very difficult for them to fund the first investments required to start the business. Kirkuk's youth should be made aware of this opportunity.

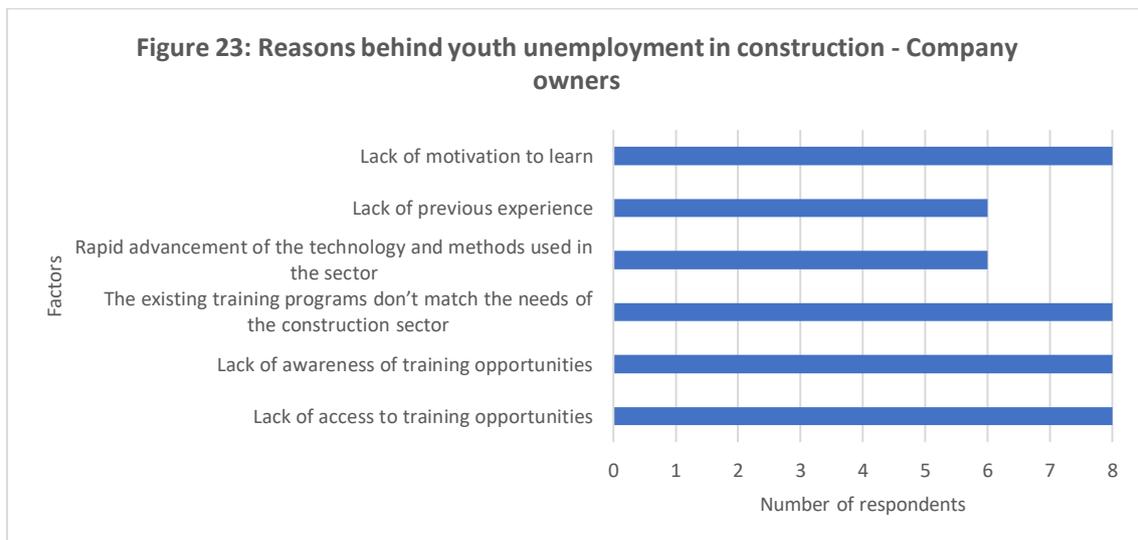
5. The methods taught and the tools used in these training programs are usually obsolete. Therefore, trainees are not instructed in the latest technological developments of the industry. Moreover, training halls are considered not appropriate or suitable to host such technical trainings.
6. Programs for women are not effective. They focus on a theoretical approach and disregard the practical side. Thus, women have great difficulties finding a job after the trainings.

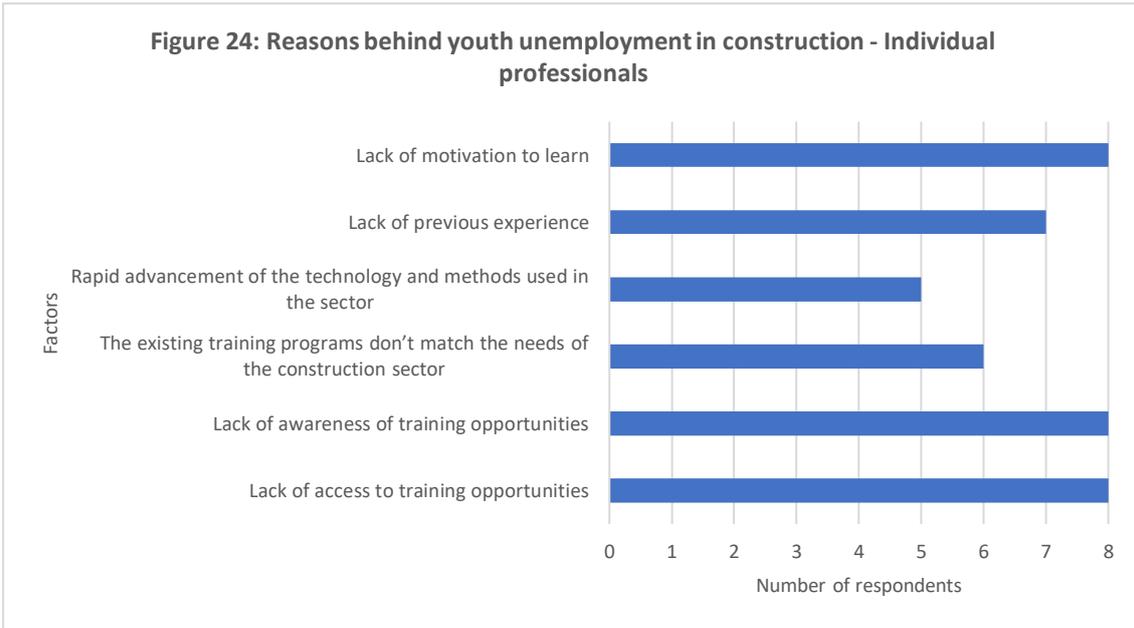
Obstacles to enter the construction sector

Youth unemployment

Kirkuk has a labor force participation rate of only 35% and an unemployment rate of 15% (Iraq Labour Force Survey 2021). In the city, people mainly work in small businesses, vocational work, construction, government, and the service industry. In general, the main obstacles to finding employment are increased competition for jobs, insufficient jobs being available, workplaces being too far away, and a lack of connections of jobseekers with potential employers.

In order to complement that information, we asked employers and professionals from the construction industry about the particular reasons why the youth have difficulties in finding a job within the sector. All the factors shown in Figures 23 and 24 below were considered relevant by at least eleven out of the sixteen respondents.





First of all, it must be highlighted that 'lack of motivation to learn', 'lack of awareness of training opportunities' and 'lack of access to training opportunities' were considered relevant factors by 100% of both groups of participants. On the one hand, concerning the 'lack of motivation to learn', qualitative data suggests that the construction sector is seen negatively considered by the youth, who seek government employment in order to have a good salary and social benefits for them and for their families. Jobs in construction, however, are considered to have poor working conditions. On the other hand, the lack of awareness and lack of access to training opportunities is a factor that was also repeatedly raised during the FGDs as well as by some of the Key Informants from the public sector. Young jobseekers in Kirkuk have very limited trainings available in the construction industry, and even when opportunities are offered, the information about them does not reach the population.

Another relevant factor outlined by 100% of employers and 75% of individual professionals is the fact that the existing training opportunities do not match the needs of the construction sector. This factor is also remarked by 6 out of the 11 key informants from the public sector. As mentioned in the previous section, training programs lack a connection in the private sector. This causes a dissociation between the skills needed and the skills imparted, as well as the use of outdated tools, methods, and technology.

The remaining two factors, the lack of previous experience and the rapid advancement of technology, are also linked to the missing role of the private sector in training programs. Several informants argue that, by including companies and employers in designing the curricula, and by providing work placement opportunities for the trainees, these factors would be successfully addressed.

Moreover, the Head of the Survey Department at the Technical Institute argues that the lack of motivation for young people to participate in trainings and join the construction sector (which is the most highlighted factor in our survey) is linked to the mismatch between trainings and the construction labor market. He explains that knowing that the skills acquired will not be what employers demand discourages the youth from participating in those trainings.

Hiring factors

Among the sixteen representatives from the private sector that answered the questionnaires, all of them affirmed being willing to employ young workers in different sectors. When asked which aspects they consider relevant when deciding to hire a new worker the results were the following (see Figures 25 and 26 below):



Although not all the factors considered relevant for employers can be addressed through training programs, we can observe in both datasets that professionalism and ethics, practical experience, and skills and qualifications are among the topmost important. These three aspects can be improved by increasing the availability, awareness, and quality of trainings.

Difficulties accessing the labor market

When asking the youth about the main challenges they face when trying to find a job in the construction sector, the main issues raised are the following:

- Lack of job opportunities.
- Lack of the previous experience sought for by employers.
- Lack of training opportunities that can provide with the necessary skills and qualifications.
- Unsuitable working conditions in the construction market.
- Political corruption and interference of political parties in the labor market.

- Language barriers due to the three coexisting languages in Kirkuk.

Similarly, when it comes to setting up their own project the youth expressed the following additional obstacles:

- Strong competition between companies.
- Lack of capital to make the first investments for the business (such as equipment, materials, and operational expenses). Young entrepreneurs may struggle to secure the necessary capital due to limited personal savings or a lack of established credit history. They are generally unaware of DOLSA's option to provide them support in borrowing between twenty and fifty million IQD from the government's bank to start their own business after completing a vocational training program.
- High risk due to the necessary high investment in the construction industry.
- High costs of renting a space.
- Difficulty in dealing with companies and business owners. Young people may face difficulties in establishing connections and partnerships with experienced professionals and potential clients.

In addition to those obstacles, public representatives also mentioned the following:

- The construction industry's demanding work hours are often incompatible with other responsibilities like childcare or education.
- Lack of economic stability of the market.
- Lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to successfully manage new projects, including project management skills, proficiency in marketing and advertising, and relationships with potential customers.
- Difficulties in obtaining the necessary licenses and permits.
- Not being a member of trade unions or chamber of commerce.

Difficulties accessing training opportunities

When facing the gap existing between their professional profiles and the ones sought by employers, jobseekers often find themselves in a situation where there are no real and accessible training opportunities to help them bridge that gap. The following are the most relevant aspects outlined by the youth of Kirkuk that make accessibility to trainings very challenging:

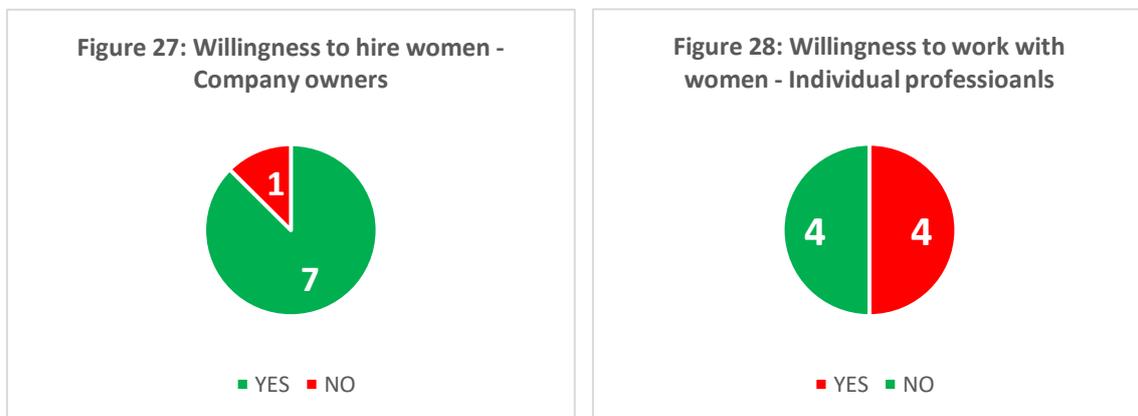
- General lack of awareness of the existence of any trainings in the construction sector.
- Limited flexibility and accessibility in terms of training schedules and its compatibility with educational or family obligations.
- Lack of financial incentives to support participation in trainings.
- Small number of participants accepted in each training course due to resource and space constraints.
- Transportation challenges to the area of training.

Challenges suffered by vulnerable groups

Women-specific challenges

The labor market study carried out by the aforementioned UNDP report shows how the percentage of female employment is significantly lower than that of male employment in the Iraqi liberated governorates. Hence, although Kirkuk was the governorate with the best ratios of female employment, the sample still showed that two out of every three employed individuals were men. The study reveals restricted women's income sources due to cultural norms. Exceptions are services with female clients (like sewing, hairdressing) as well as jobs in the government or in the education sector. The construction sector, however, is male dominated, with few roles for women (e.g. architectural design) (UNDP report, pages 42-43).

In order to analyze the market agents' willingness to employ women, we asked our pool of employers and professionals whether they would be willing to hire women. Results are shown in Figures 27 and 28.



We can see a clear difference between the answers obtained from individual professionals and from employers. While most of the company owners seem willing to hire female workers, individual half of the professionals refuse to work with them. Furthermore, when queried about whether they would provide on-the-job training to young jobseekers, out of the five individual professionals that expressed their desire to participate in these trainings, only one would be willing to train female jobseekers. Among company owners, however, five out of the six participants that would train jobseekers would include women. Nevertheless, the sample is not big enough to draw solid conclusions in this regard.

What this data does clearly reflect is the rejection women face when trying to work in construction. The reasons behind this systematic rejection were brought up during the Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions:

- Negative view of society towards women who work, according to customs, traditions, and religious beliefs.
- Not considering women capable or suitable to carry out the physically demanding jobs existing in the construction sector.
- The idea that women should stay at home and stick to their roles as housewives.
- General discrimination against women for being considered incapable or naturally less skilled.

Furthermore, according to the informants, women also face the following obstacles when finding a job in the industry:

- Given the mentioned cultural beliefs, the important role that women’s own families play in deterring them from pursuing a professional career.
- Criticism from the community.
- The fact that it is a male-dominated sector and the lack of female role-models or mentors.
- Fear of sexual harassment, abuse or exploitation.
- Lack of flexible working options and incompatibility with childcare or house tasks.
- Women’s own lack of interest in the construction sector as jobs are considered dirty and physically demanding.
- Lack of equipment designed for women.
- Lack of awareness concerning their rights and opportunities.

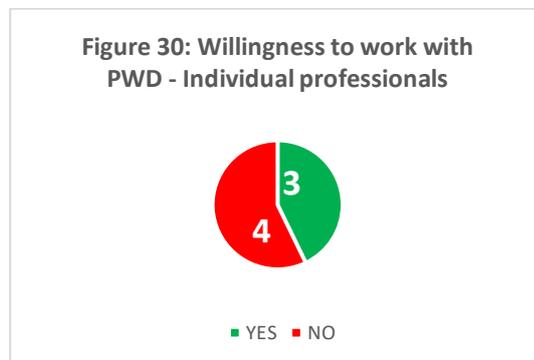
The same factors come into play to deter women from accessing training opportunities in the sector. Moreover, in addition to those factors, and the practical obstacles faced by the youth in general, informants expressed transportation-related challenges. That is, women usually struggle to find the way to reach the training centers, which are often located within a long distance from their homes.

On a different note, the employers and professionals that were willing to hire or work with women expressed that female workers could be considered for roles related to administrative work, electricity, refrigeration and air conditioning, ceiling and wall decoration, or design.

PWD-specific challenges

People with disabilities find their own challenges when trying to enter the labor market. Apart from facing the limitations caused by their disability, society in general, and the labor market in particular, are not adapted to their needs. Moreover, although being capable of carrying out a wide range of jobs, they are usually rejected as disabled and incapable.

The pool of employers and professionals that participated in this study expressed their own perspective concerning giving work opportunities to PWD. See Figures 29 and 30 to find the results.



From this data we can clearly extract that PWD face difficult challenges when trying to enter the construction labor market. Even being the question formulated in a way that took for granted that the PWD in question would be capable of doing the respective tasks for the hypothetical job, half of the sixteen respondents rejected the idea of working with PWD precisely arguing that they are not capable. This shows a clear discrimination bias consisting in denying any

opportunity, regardless of the actual requirements of the job and the real capabilities of the person, to anyone with the 'disabled' label.

As in the case of female workers, we see again that the employer's willingness to hire PWD is higher than the professionals' willingness to work with them. Furthermore, in this case, while half of the company owners would, none of the individual professionals consulted who are willing to train young workers would accept any PWD among the trainees. This could have to do with the fact that the bias is stronger when having a more practical day-to-day approach [held by professionals] in comparison to a more conceptual one [held by employers]. However, the sample is not big enough to draw solid conclusions in that regard.

Apart from the hindrance that comes from the general bias or discrimination, every PWD faces specific obstacles according to their type of disability and its degree. However, the main common aspects brought up during the FGDs and KIIs are the following:

- Lack of accessibility to construction sites.
- Difficulties in transportation to workplaces.
- Lack of adaptation of workplaces, methodologies, and equipment to their specific needs.
- Psychological barriers that prevent them from trying to enter the labor market.

Additionally, together with a lack of resources to cover the necessary expenses for the courses, PWD suffer the same obstacles when trying to access training programs that could improve their chances of being hired.

Finally, regarding the roles for which some employers would consider hiring PWD, they specially mentioned different kinds of office and administrative work, such as accounting or computer work in general.

Displaced, returnees and relatives of ISIS affiliated individuals

The issues and tensions among the IDPs, returnees, host communities, politically affiliated families are transversal and have effects on to the whole society of Iraq, with a special incidence in the liberated governorates. Therefore, these issues also have an impact on the labor market, including on that of the construction sector. In that sense, the aspects raised in the KIIs and FGDs as the main issues suffered by these groups are the following:

- Displaced people and returnees usually lack the necessary personal documentation to find formal jobs, which push them to find informal jobs where they are easily exploited.
- Employers distrust non-local individuals.
- Displaced people accept very low-paid jobs with poor working conditions. This puts themselves in a situation of exploitation and disrupts the labor market for local communities, which, consequently, also struggle to find jobs with decent conditions.
- Communities do not accept relatives of ISIS affiliated people. They are therefore either excluded from any opportunity or exploited.

What is more, Kirkuk's population is composed of Kurds, Turkmens, and Arabs. In that regard, the participants in the FGDs highlighted the systemic discrimination between members belonging to the different ethnicities, being the different languages spoken by every group a key factor that limits job opportunities for individuals from one group or another.

Training improvement

This section has the purpose of gathering all the relevant suggestions made by all the informants (through questionnaires, KIIs, and FGDs) for the improvement of existing training programs or the establishment of effective new ones. There is another section below that features the final recommendations based on a thorough analysis of all the findings presented on this report.

Participants suggestions

Regarding accessibility, and how to make it easy for individuals to join training courses, the informants that participated in this assessment brought up the following suggestions to make training within everyone's reach:

- Make trainings affordable to anyone.
- Financial support to enhance and help people's participation in training programs.
- Provide transportation, specially for women and PWD.
- Offering flexible training options that can accommodate individuals with different schedules and commitments.
- Raising awareness among the youth regarding the employment possibilities of the construction sector.
- Focus on jobseekers when selecting the participants for training sections, rather than people that already have stable jobs.

Moreover, regarding the quality of the training as such, participants mentioned the following actions as means to make trainings more effective and useful for trainees:

- Reactivate construction sectoral committees to include different representatives of the construction industry in order to coordinate the training efforts and align them with market needs.
- Create comprehensive programs that give trainees all the necessary skills (technical and non-technical) and guide jobseekers until they find a job or establish a successful business.
- Create a follow-up and mentoring system to support and guide previous trainees in their endeavor to find a job in the construction industry.
- Keep training curricula up to date. Follow the latest methodological and technological developments of the sector. Include members of the construction's private sector in the design committee of training courses. Ensure trainers' competence and knowledge to Overall, ensure that the skills provided in trainings are aligned with the skills demanded by companies and employers.
- Develop soft skills in addition to technical skills, emphasis should be placed on skills such as communication, leadership, problem-solving, and customer service.
- Establish partnerships with companies to provide trainees with real-life practical experience and foster a platform to connect employers and jobseekers.
- Carry out continuous assessment of the results of the training in order to adapt the program and guarantee it's success.
- Give more importance to entrepreneurship. Provide young individuals willing to start their own business with comprehensive entrepreneurial and business management knowledge. Young entrepreneurs should be made aware of the possibility to borrow between twenty and fifty million IQD from the government in order to start their business after completion of vocational training programs.

With regard to female accessibility to the construction labor market, the following suggestions were gathered:

- Design trainings for women that will provide a real chance of finding employment according to society's culture and traditions.
- Provide flexible trainings that allow women to attend trainings without disregarding other commitments. Provide childcare support.
- Evaluate periodically in which roles women are more and more accepted in order to include new trainings suitable for those roles.
- Raise community awareness regarding women's capabilities and the importance of accepting women in diverse roles within the labor market.
- Raise awareness among women about the employment opportunities they have in the construction sector.
- Providing leadership development opportunities specifically tailored for women. This can help them develop the skills and confidence needed to thrive in leadership roles within the construction industry. That can include workshops, seminars, and networking events focused on leadership and professional growth.
- Offering mentorship and sponsorship programs can provide women with guidance, support, and networking opportunities. Mentors can help navigate the challenges and provide insight into the industry, while sponsors can advocate for women's career advancement and provide access to influential networks.
- Women could benefit from learning software appliances and applications such as AutoCAD or SAP design software.

When it comes to the inclusion of PWD in trainings, we collected the following suggestions:

- Transportation needs to be provided. Training centers must be accessible and adapted to their needs.
- The tools, technology and methods used must also be adapted to PWD's characteristics.
- Trainings must be tailored according to the type and degree of disability.

Finally, with the aim of addressing the tensions and discrimination existing between different groups of people in Kirkuk (also affecting the labor market), participants raised the following issues as means to boost peace and harmony:

- Educating the community about the need to attract skilled workers and provide them with job opportunities, regardless of their social or cultural background and the state of displacement.
- Providing support for displaced people to obtain legal documentation.
- Raising awareness against racism among the different ethnicities in Kirkuk through mosques, churches, schools and government departments.
- Trainings programs should play a role in fostering peaceful coexistence by bringing together individuals from different nationalities existing in Kirkuk and thus promoting cooperation among them.

Partnership opportunities

Numerous informants, from public officials to employers and jobseekers, have mentioned partnerships between training institutions and construction companies as a key component for the success of vocational trainings in the sector. However, when inquiring about the existing

partnerships we found out that there is currently no significant collaboration between the two parties.

According to our key informants, the reason why there are no partnerships is because of a poor communication between training centers and companies. The latter would be unaware of the existence of vocational trainings and would not demand this kind of collaborations.

However, through our study we also learnt that there were central committees or sector councils that used to gather representatives from the construction's private and public sectors to enhance cooperation and common understanding and to work together in pursuing shared goals. Those committees are now inactive.

In order to get an idea of the private sector's willingness to establish collaborations with training centers, we asked our informant employers and professionals whether they would host trainees in their companies with the aim of teaching them the necessary skills for the job. In return, they would have a pool of specifically trained candidates to hire personnel from. The results are shown in Figures 31 and 32.



These results show that there is an overall openness to the idea of collaborating with training providers among the agents of the construction sector. When asked about the number of trainees that they would be willing to host, the numbers ranged from 3 to 25, showing a notable willingness to contribute to trainings.

Regarding female trainees, while only one of the individual professionals showed willingness to train female workers, five out of the six company owners that presented a positive attitude towards hosting trainees expressed their willingness to also train women.

Similarly, no individual professionals showed willingness to train PWD. However, four company owners would include them among the individuals they are willing to train.

In general, these data show that there is room and potential for partnerships.

Concerning how these partnerships could be shaped, we obtained specially interesting insights from the Head of Survey Department at the Technical institute. She expressed the following ideas:

- Vocational training institutions can collaborate with construction companies to develop apprenticeship programs. These programs would allow students to gain practical on-the-job training while receiving classroom instruction. Construction companies can provide

apprenticeship opportunities, mentoring, and job placement assistance to trainees, thus enhancing their employability.

- Vocational training institutions can form industry advisory boards comprising representatives from construction companies. These boards can provide guidance on curriculum development, ensuring that the training programs align with industry needs and standards. They can also assist in identifying job opportunities and internships for students.
- Vocational training institutions can establish partnerships with construction companies to facilitate job placements for their graduates. This can involve sharing job openings, organizing recruitment events, and providing career counseling and support services to students.

Moreover, she added that some apprenticeship programs can be specifically designed for women, establishing training courses in sectors such as carpentry, plumbing, electrical work, and masonry, and including soft skills development programs focusing on communication and leadership skills, as well as mentorship programs connecting women with experienced professionals in the industry. She argued that, by partnering together, these organizations can create comprehensive training opportunities that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in the construction sector.

Similarly, PWD could be included in those programs by finding the employers that would be willing to participate in their training.

If maintained in the long run, these partnerships could create positive dynamics for Kirkuk's construction industry as well as for its population. While construction companies would count on a well-trained workforce with the required skills and trained in the latest technological and methodological developments, the city's youth would have a good opportunity to acquire expertise and increase their chances of finding employment in the sector.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing all the data collected from the different stakeholders of the project, the following are the most relevant conclusions to be drawn:

- Although there are several challenges that need to be addressed; such as political stability, improved fiscal balance, corruption, financial certainty for constructors, availability of infrastructure or access to transportation networks; the construction sector has a strong potential for growth in Kirkuk in the medium and long term. Its growing young population, vast territory, urbanization, and housing deficits leave a sizable margin for investment and growth.
- Although with growth perspectives for the future, the construction sector currently remains unstable and uncertain. Moreover, migration flows have disrupted the labor market, with a significant impact on salaries. These factors make necessary to foster a diverse skillset for vulnerable workers.
- The most demanded occupations in Kirkuk city are the following: blacksmiths, electricians, electrical engineers, PVC installers/workers, and carpenters and joiners. Additionally, building construction laborers, civil engineers, building architects, bricklayers and stonemasons, mechanical engineering technicians, and plumbers and pipe fitters also show an elevated level of demand in Kirkuk's construction labor market.
- The most in-demand female occupations in the construction industry are in the decoration and design sectors. Moreover, women are very demanded for positions related to office and administrative work, including customer service, marketing, sales, human resources, project management and software development.
- There is room for entrepreneurship in Kirkuk's construction industry. Although there seem to be entrepreneurial opportunities in different sectors, park and recreation infrastructure and building construction (residential construction, schools, hospitals, etc.) are the ones that present the biggest chances for emerging businesses.
- Manufacturing and supplying inputs for construction stands out as the sub-sector that is perceived to have the biggest growth prospects. Conditioning and cooling systems, installation of glass and aluminum, PVC manufacturing and installation, and electrical installments are also seen as sub-sectors with a high growth prospect.
- Technical know-how, digital skills, teamwork, communication skills, and creative thinking (problem-solving skills) are the most demanded skills by employers from different sub-sectors.
- Although there is not a clear consensus on whether green practices and technologies will be demanded by the construction industry, there seems to be a tendency towards incorporating them in the sector. Therefore, future workers would benefit from acquiring some notions in that regard.
- Although there are a number of trainings offered in the construction sector by different public institutions, trainings only admit small numbers of participants and remain unknown or inaccessible for the youth. These courses usually lack a comprehensive approach, use obsolete tools and methodologies, and do not follow-up on trainees. Additionally, they are not aligned with the technical demands of the labor market and are overall ineffective.
- Regarding the reasons behind youth's unemployment in the sector, lack of interest in the construction industry, lack of awareness and/or access to training opportunities, and the lack of experience in the sector seem to be the most crucial factors. The lack of training opportunities, the lack of participation of the private sector in the trainings'

design, and the mismatch between the skills offered in trainings and the ones demanded by the market are key elements causing youth's unemployment and disinterest in the construction industry.

- Professionalism and ethics, practical experience, and skills and qualifications are among the topmost crucial factors that employers take into consideration when deciding to hire new staff. All of these factors can be addressed in trainings by increasing their availability and their quality. Trainings need to be constantly adapted to market demands. Improving their awareness and accessibility is also key for youth participation.
- When considering starting their own business, the obstacles include: strong competition between companies, lack of capital to make the first investments, lack of awareness that they can obtain financial support from the government, high risk in the construction industry, lack of experience in dealing with company and business owners, lack of entrepreneurial and business management skills, difficulty in obtaining the necessary licenses and permits. The typical long and demanding working hours in the construction sector and the difficult compatibility with personal and family responsibilities, together with the current lack of stability in the sector, are also relevant factors.
- When it comes to accessing trainings, the main problems suffered by young people in Kirkuk are: the general lack of awareness of the existence of these trainings, the difficulty in combining trainings with other responsibilities, lack of financial support for participating in the trainings, and the challenges in transportation to the area of training from their locations.
- Women face additional gender-specific challenges when considering a career in the construction sector. Among other issues, these challenges have to do with customs and traditions, family and social pressure to follow the established gender-roles, the conception of women as physically incapable of conducting the job, the lack of female role-models due to the fact that the industry is male-dominated, the fear of sexual harassment or exploitation, the lack of equipment designed for women, and lack of flexible working hours that make the job compatible with childcare and house tasks.
- PWD also face specific challenges to access the labor market. Namely, the lack of accessibility to construction sites; difficulties in transportation to workplaces; lack of adaptation of workplaces, methodologies, and equipment to their specific needs; and the psychological barriers that prevent them from trying to enter the labor market. PWD are more likely to be hired for office and administrative work, such as accounting or computer work in general.
- Regarding the displaced and returnees, one of the main problems they have when accessing the labor market is the lack of legal documentation. This pushes them to work in informal positions with poor conditions and low wages. At the same time, this factor disrupts the labor market as there is a substantial portion of the workforce willing to work in those conditions. Relatives of ISIS related individuals are often discriminated and exploited. Moreover, high tensions and discrimination exist between the different ethnicities in Kirkuk (Kurds, Turkmens, and Arabs), being the different languages also an important factor limiting job opportunities for individuals.
- We gathered numerous suggestions for training improvements from the participants in this assessment. Most of their suggestions have been incorporated to the recommendations for training design included in the following and last section.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though training programs alone cannot solve all the problems existing in Kirkuk's construction labor market, they can certainly provide individuals with better chances to find stable income sources. The following are some recommendations based on all the data and information gathered during the assessment. Although it can be very challenging to include all of them, they need to act as a reference frame to guide and inform the design and implementation of the training program.

Training areas

Based on the results of the assessment, the most appropriate sub-sectors on which to conduct the trainings are blacksmithing, electricity, PVC manufacturing and installation, and carpentry. This recommendation has different foundations:

First, occupations related to these specific sub-sectors are currently the most demanded ones in Kirkuk's construction labor market. Moreover, those sub-sectors are among the ones that are perceived to be about to experience the highest growth within the construction industry.

Another positive aspect is that electricity is among the sectors where women are being more and more accepted.

Furthermore, when establishing trainings on these sub-sectors Mercy Hands can work hand in hand with the Department of Labor and Social Affairs, as this governmental institution already has a certain training capacity on those topics. This factor would make the training program align with the Durable Solutions mechanism coordinated by the United Nations, which consists in supporting the government in implementing initiatives destined at fostering sustainable answers to Iraq's most pressing social, economic, and political issues. Mercy Hands' role should therefore lie in increasing the quality of the trainings, their accessibility to the youth, and their overall efficiency.

Concerning the trainings specifically designed for women, the most adequate sub-sectors to target are decoration and design. Additionally, it would be positive to establish trainings in office-related work (such as customer service, marketing, sales, human resources, and project management). These occupations are the ones for which women are most demanded in the construction labor market. Additionally, the employers and professionals that took part in this assessment repeatedly showed themselves open to training and hiring women for these positions.

The Department of Women's Affairs in Kirkuk already has training programs in decoration and design. As these programs have shown to be ineffective and deficient, Mercy Hands' role in that regard could again consist in increasing the quality of the training, providing the necessary tools and technology, and making the programs more practical and accessible.

Regarding the trainings on office-related work, they would have a double impact, as PWD are also mainly accepted in this kind of work. Therefore, the same training program could be addressed to women and PWD.

Training design

The results of the assessment clearly show that the key to success for vocational training programs is the inclusion of the private sector all along the training process. Among other issues, this would entail engaging with companies and professionals to include elements such as apprenticeships, mentorships, and after-training support. However, as the project at hand specifically centers on imparting knowledge and skills from training facilities, the focus must be on ensuring that trainees acquire relevant skills that are currently demanded by the construction market, and which would ultimately be useful for them to secure jobs and be valuable employees.

Therefore, when it comes to deciding about the specific content of the training programs, it is crucial that employers and specialized professionals are incorporated to provide their insights in the process of curricula development and to suggest which technologies and methods should be taught (including green practices and technologies). This will ensure that the trainings impart up-to-date and market demanded skills, guaranteeing the effectiveness of the program and boosting the interest of young people in these trainings. That incorporation of the private sector in the designing process of training programs could be done by establishing advisory boards that comprise representatives from companies specialized in the sub-sector that the training is targeting.

Moreover, the data gathered from employers and professionals suggested that training programs should also provide digital, teamwork, communication, and creative thinking or problem-solving skills. Special remarks were made to the fact that workers need to be able to work autonomously. These skills are considered very important by the market.

Access to training

The main problems regarding accessibility to trainings are general lack of awareness of the existence of trainings itself, the difficulty in combining trainings with other responsibilities, lack of financial support for participating in the trainings, and transportation challenges.

In this case, in order to select the candidates that can benefit the most from the training programs, the possibility of applying should be spread as widely as possible among the population of Kirkuk, specifically targeting young men and women, including PWD. To achieve that, social media, billboards, TV or radio advertisements, or any form of communication can be used.

With the aim of addressing the difficulty in combining trainings with other responsibilities, programs' schedules and calendars must be designed taking into consideration participants' obligations and responsibilities. Therefore, communication and feedback from participants is key when taking these decisions. That would help to guarantee their attendance and successful completion of the program.

Moreover, financial support is an important part of making programs accessible. Some participants need to stop working somewhere else in order to be able to attend the trainings. This means that they would only be able to participate in the programs if they receive some kind of financial assistance. Additionally, participants would need to travel from different areas to the site of the training, which would imply additional expenses for them.

When focusing specially on female participation, it is important that programs specially designed for them account for their other tasks and responsibilities. Programs must support women in finding the way to attend trainings while not disregarding those other obligations. This can include accommodating flexible schedules and calendars, providing childcare during training sessions, etc. Seeking to boost female participation, the programs' outreach campaign should also include an awareness component of women's possibilities within the sector.

As for PWD, following the suggestion provided by the participants in this study, training programs must be made accessible to them by: providing transportation, making training centers physically accessible and adapted to their needs, and providing tools, technology and methods adapted to their characteristics. Additionally, trainings must be tailored according to the type and degree of disability.

Lastly, training programs must include members of all the ethnicities existing in Kirkuk, this can contribute to creating a cooperation environment and to generating peace dynamics.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – Data analysis tool for Key Informant Interviews.

Annex 2 – Data analysis tool for Questionnaires (Individual professionals).

Annex 3 – Data analysis tool for Questionnaires (Company owners).

Annex 4 – Data analysis tool for Focus Group Discussions.

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