

IRAQ

**ASSESSMENT ON  
EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING  
CONDITIONS OF CONFLICT-  
AFFECTED WOMEN ACROSS  
KEY SECTORS**

FINAL REPORT

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**REACH**

Informing  
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## SUMMARY

As Iraq enters a new recovery phase in 2019, the country now faces the challenge of addressing the short- and long-term consequences of conflict and mass population displacement. These consequences have had a tangible impact on livelihoods in Iraq for both displaced and non-displaced populations. Women's labour force participation in Iraq is low: as of 2018, only 12.3% of women of working age in Iraq were either employed or looking for work. Of these women who are in the labour force, 12% were unemployed (looking for work) in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Conflict-affected women, specifically, face numerous challenges in accessing employment, including limited economic opportunities, individual- and community-level barriers, legal restrictions, and exacerbated vulnerability, particularly for displaced people and female-headed households.<sup>2</sup> In the Iraqi context, the nature of these challenges for specific groups of women (i.e. refugee, internally displaced, returnee and host community women) are not yet fully understood and addressed, especially since the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)-related displacement crisis began in 2014.

Based on discussions with representatives from UN Women, UN Women plans to work with the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSA) to promote decent work opportunities for conflict-affected women in 2019 and beyond. To inform this work, REACH conducted a qualitative assessment on behalf of UN Women to provide an indicative, evidence-based understanding of the challenges faced in accessing employment and the current working conditions in key employment sectors among women in Iraq, specifically female Syrian refugees and IDPs both in and out of camps, returnees, and host community women. For each of the groups of women, the research focused on three sub-groups: (1) women who are employed in target sectors (i.e., agriculture, education, health); (2) women who are unemployed (i.e., not currently employed but actively seeking employment); and (3) women who are out of the labour force (i.e., not currently employed and not seeking employment). Target sectors were chosen based on the relatively high number of women working in each sector and corresponding prospects for economic growth.

REACH carried out qualitative data collection between 22 January and 10 March 2019. In total, 655 women and 46 men participated in this assessment. Specifically, individual interviews (IIs) were conducted with 614 conflict-affected women (IDPs, Syrian refugees, returnees, and host community women) living in seven governorates in Iraq: Anbar, Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Sulaymaniyah. These women were selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling using REACH and UN Women networks; findings from these interviews are therefore indicative only and cannot be generalised to the populations of interest. Also, due to the challenges in accessing certain groups of women during data collection, some groups may be over- or underrepresented in the final sample for this assessment.

Women from the populations of interest and male family members of women from these groups also participated in 12 sex-disaggregated focus group discussions (FGDs) to contextualise and provide further insight into the findings from the IIs (Six FGDs were conducted with 32 women, while the remaining six FGDs were conducted with 32 men). Finally, REACH conducted 20 key informant interviews (KIIs) with 23 individuals from government ministries, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private employers. These provided a more thorough understanding of the legal frameworks that shape how women access and engage in employment, as well as existing strategies to promote and facilitate women's employment.

This report first reviews the policies and strategies that the government and non-governmental organisations have implemented to support women's access to employment and develop employment opportunities in Iraq. The individual- and community-level factors that enable women to work, including motivations for seeking employment, decision-making capacity, and perceptions of appropriate jobs for women are then explored, before assessing why some women do not work, and the challenges faced in getting a job by women who are seeking employment. Finally, it assesses the working conditions and risks for currently employed women, including awareness of labour laws and policies, and issues related to contracts, transportation, discrimination, and harassment, with a focus on the agriculture, education, and healthcare sectors.

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organisation, "World Employment and Social Outlook," accessed October 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/wesodata/>

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economics, Realizing Rights." 2015, [http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW\\_progressreport.pdf](http://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf); Jayasinghe, D, "Choices, changes, and safety in crisis: A model for women's economic empowerment," January 2019, International Rescue Committee, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/choiceschancesandsafetyincrisis2019final.pdf>

## Key Findings

**What are the current labour laws and policies that affect women's engagement in the labour force? What strategies and projects are relevant actors implementing to foster women's employment?**

- There are several government **policies and strategies aimed at promoting and protecting women's employment and economic empowerment** (such as the National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (NAP 1325)<sup>3</sup>, the 2014-2018 National Strategy for the Advancement of the Status of Iraqi Women<sup>4</sup>, and the **Iraq Labour Law of 2015**). These laws provide paid maternity leave, prohibit discrimination against women during recruitment and in the workplace, and increase female participation in the public sphere. However, findings from the present assessment indicate that the implementation and enforcement of these policies is inconsistent, particularly in the private sector.
- The secondary data review highlighted several governmental **reconstruction and poverty reduction strategies** (such as the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022<sup>5</sup> and the Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018-2022<sup>6</sup>) **that aim to rebuild the sectors of agriculture, education, and health**, each of which have faced setbacks as a result of the recent conflict.
- The NGOs who participated in KIIs are implementing a range of programmes to support women's employment and economic empowerment. In general, these organisations tend to focus on **short-term livelihoods opportunities, job training, entrepreneurship, psychosocial support, and legal services** as the context in Iraq shifts from a humanitarian one to a focus on recovery and development.

**What are the enabling factors that drive women's access to employment? In what ways do women's experiences vary based on their displacement status and governorate of residence?**

- The primary factors that IIs respondents reported as enabling women who were seeking employment to successfully get a job include **work experience and expertise** (281 out of 416 respondents who were currently or previously employed), **educational attainment** (195 out of 416 respondents), and **technical training** (85 out of 416 respondents).
- Respondents from the IIs based in Baghdad more frequently listed educational attainment as a factor enabling them to get a job (27 out of 35 respondents listed educational attainment, and 16 out of 35 respondents listed work experience and expertise). **This may reflect that the jobs available in this mostly urban governorate could require higher levels of education compared to more rural areas, therefore making education qualifications more relevant.**
- Most respondents who were currently employed or who had ever sought employment reported that the **need for additional income was the primary motivation for them to seek employment** (475 out of 499 respondents). FGD participants commented that families' financial challenges were exacerbated by displacement and increased costs of living.
- A much **higher proportion of women who were the heads of household reported being the only household member able to work compared to those who were not heads of household** (110 out of 161 respondents who were heads of household versus 81 out of 338 who were not).
- **IDPs and refugee women living in camp most frequently reported needing additional income because they were the only household member able to work** (61 out of 95 and 30 out of 57 respondents, respectively).
- **Personal satisfaction** also motivated respondents to work (166 out of 499 respondents from the IIs who were ever employed or sought employment), indicating that the desire for work goes beyond economic necessity.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Security Council, "[Resolution 1325](#)," 31 October 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Vilardo, V. and Bittar, S., "[Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq](#)," Oxfam and UN Women, December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, "[National Development Plan, 2018-2022](#)," June 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, High Committee for Poverty Reduction Strategy, "[Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty in Iraq 2018-2022, Executive Summary](#)."

- The majority of II respondents reported that they believe there are certain jobs and sectors that are more suitable for women (317 out of 614 respondents). These include education, health, sewing and textiles, local or international community-based organisations (CBOs) or NGOs, cosmetology, and agriculture. Permanent, part-time employment is also considered by the respondents from the IIs to be more suited for women to allow them to balance domestic responsibilities (271 out of 317 respondents).
- Respondents also reported that they used connections of family and friends to find a job (407 out of 499 respondents who were employed or ever sought employment), while both male and female FGD participants commented that connections were a critical enabling factor in securing employment.

**What challenges and barriers do women face in accessing employment? In what ways do women's experiences vary based on their displacement status and governorate of residence?**

- Out of the II respondents who decided to search for employment and reported facing challenges in doing so (212 respondents), overall increased competition for jobs (127 out of 212 respondents), a lack of jobs relevant to their previous experience (57 out of 212 respondents), and insufficient education (51 out of 212 respondents) were reported to be the primary barriers to accessing employment. For those II respondents who had only completed primary education and reported challenges, insufficient education emerged as the most commonly reported issue (28 out of 60 respondents), though increased competition remained the most commonly reported challenge for those who had completed more than primary education.
- The proportion of II respondents from Anbar and Salah al-Din who reported insufficient education as a barrier was higher than in other governorates (13 out of 28 and 16 out of 41 respondents who reported challenges, compared to 22 out of 143 respondents).
- With respect to accessing education necessary for desired jobs, being able to complete primary and middle school (44 out of 89 respondents who had ever sought employment and reported challenges in accessing education and training necessary to get a job) as well as having access to and being able to afford additional job training (29 out of 89 respondents) were the two most commonly reported challenges by II respondents.
- Many II respondents and female FGD participants commented that there were multiple reasons which disincentivised women from engaging in the labour force, including the demands of domestic responsibilities and being the perceived primary caregivers for children, as well as a lack of education.
- Over half of II respondents (262 out of 416 currently or previously employed women) reported they believed their chances of being hired were the same as men. However, FGD participants commented that hiring discrimination based on gender, age, and physical appearance were common, particularly in the private sector. FGD participants and government KIs theorised that discrimination was higher in the private sector due to less stringent enforcement of labour laws.
- Some refugee respondents in and out of camps felt that they were denied jobs because of their status as refugees (4 out of 17 refugees in camps who reported challenges in finding employment, and 12 out of 27 refugees out of camps who reported challenges), though Syrian refugees have the legal right to work in the KR-I.<sup>7</sup> IDPs and refugees out of camps, specifically, reported language barriers as a challenge (4 out of 39 IDPs out of camps and 9 out of 27 refugees out of camps who reported challenges in finding employment). This is particularly relevant for IDPs and Syrian refugees displaced into the KR-I, as they may speak Arabic rather than Kurdish, the predominant languages in the KR-I.

**What conditions and risks do women face in accessing employment in key employment sectors? In what ways do women's experiences vary based on their displacement status and governorate of residence?**

- A notable proportion of respondents who were currently or had previously been employed indicated a lack of awareness about labour laws and policies relevant to employment in Iraq: 167 out of 416 respondents reported not being aware of any labour laws or policies.

<sup>7</sup> Sadek, G., "[Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq](#)," December 2013, The Law Library of Congress Global Legal Research Center.

- In parallel, while several respondents were aware of their rights related to maternity leave and retirement (165 and 135 out of 249 respondents who reported being aware of any labour laws, respectively), **only four respondents reported that they were aware of laws related to discrimination or harassment. This highlights a noticeable knowledge gap about rights among working women.**
- **Slightly more than half of currently employed respondents reported having an employment agreement** (178 out of 330 respondents): most women in health (93 out of 113 respondents) and education (66 out of 115 respondents) had an agreement, compared to those in agriculture (19 out of 102 respondents). Of those with an agreement, **most had a written contract** (169 out of 178 respondents).
- Of those working in agriculture, **respondents in Ninewa, Erbil, and Salah al-Din reported the fewest employment agreements** (2 out of 52 respondents from these governorates); of those working in health, more **respondents in Anbar and Ninewa reported not having contracts than those who reported having contracts** (9 out of 16 respondents in Anbar, including IDPs and non-displaced women; and 9 out of 17 respondents in Ninewa, all of whom were IDPs).
- Respondents most commonly reported **walking as their form of transportation to work** (124 out of 330 currently employed respondents), though IDPs living out of camps and non-displaced respondents most often reported **carpooling** (29 out of 79 and 32 out of 40 respondents, respectively). Some FGD participants using taxis in Erbil and Baghdad reported harassment from taxi drivers.
- **A small proportion of women reported that they or someone they knew had experienced issues related to both verbal and sexual harassment at work** (17 out of 614 respondents). However, due to the sensitivity of this question, there is likely underreporting on this topic; indeed, FGD participants indicated that this was a much wider issue.
- **Of those who had or knew someone who had experienced harassment, most reported that the harassed person quit her job or moved to another job** (8 out of 17 respondents), while 5 out of 17 respondents commented that **there was no follow-up.**
- Women employed in all three sectors of interest (agriculture, education, and health) reported facing several challenges as a result of conflict and the economic crisis in Iraq. **II respondents employed in agriculture reported the most sector-specific challenges** as well as the most health and safety issues. As indicated in FGDs and KIIs, women employed in education and health will likely continue to face challenges in finding work until the government and private sector are able to scale up investment in and reconstruction of schools and healthcare centres.

## Recommendations

Validation workshops were held in both Erbil and Baghdad on 28 April 2019 and 2 May 2019, respectively, with government, NGO, and private employer representatives. The aim was to present the analysis and indicative findings and facilitate a collaborative discussion on ways forward and recommendations. Based on the findings of this assessment, participants developed policy and programmatic recommendations targeted to government actors, NGOs, and private sector employers. These recommendations are summarised below.

### Government and Policymakers

At the policy level, validation workshop participants agreed that the government should ensure that labour laws reflect gender equality, and revise laws as necessary. They also recommended that the government enforce compulsory education and laws against child labour, perhaps expanding the required years of compulsory education, to enable more girls to access education and training. It was also discussed that the government could play a key role in offering training for unskilled women, in addition to providing licenses to vocational training centres. With respect to increasing access to childcare for women in or hoping to access employment, participants commented that the government could do so by opening more free or low-cost nurseries and kindergartens and encouraging and enabling families to use them.

It was also recommended that the government should continue to prioritise investment in the reconstruction of the agriculture, education, and healthcare sectors, as well as developing private-public partnerships to increase employment in these sectors. The education sector in particular represents a key point of intervention: workshop participants endorsed a dual-pronged strategy of increasing school enrolment while hiring more teachers, which would address both barriers to education and a lack of job opportunities in education. Regarding private sector development, validation workshop participants commented that the government could simplify the procedures required to create formal private businesses, including small- and medium-sized enterprises, while increasing enforcement of licensure laws, particularly with respect to agricultural processing.

Finally, participants agreed that raising awareness among women from all population groups on their rights to and at work is a key recommendation, and that the government should aim to prioritise enforcement of labour laws and protections in the private sector. They affirmed that government-led feedback and accountability mechanisms, tied to legal services and psychosocial support, are critical to ensuring that employers are held accountable to protect women's rights and create a safe, equal opportunity, harassment-free working environment for women.

### Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Validation workshop participants recommended that NGOs develop advocacy strategies to promote enforcement of labour laws and compulsory education, and host capacity building workshops for government ministries, private sector employers, and women on ensuring gender balance in the workplace and adhering to labour laws. NGOs could also offer trainings for women focused on language skills, computer skills, and sector-specific topics, and small business grants or short-term livelihoods programming that prioritises rehabilitation of agricultural, education, and health infrastructure in conflict-affected areas. Such programmes should include opportunities for men or sensitise men to women working to mitigate intra-household tensions. Participants also commented that NGOs can play a valuable role in providing technical support for government feedback and accountability mechanisms and provide legal and psychosocial services while the government builds its capacity to do so.

### Private Sector Employers

To mitigate the challenges that women face in balancing work and domestic responsibilities, it was recommended that private sector employers should focus on the development of policies that allow for part-time opportunities or flexible working hours for women. Validation workshop participants also recommended that private agriculture, education, and healthcare companies should implement hiring practices that prioritise opportunities for women. Such practices might involve affirmative action, as they may need to support women who have historically faced barriers to gaining the necessary education and experience to qualify for some jobs. It was also recommended that, as with the government and NGOs, private sector employers should develop policies to provide affordable and quality childcare and safe transportation to working women to address these barriers. Finally, workshop participants and key informants recommended that private sector companies should be required to host educational sessions for employees on their labour rights. Companies could potentially also develop their own internal reporting and accountability mechanisms to complement government mechanisms.

## CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b> .....	<b>2</b>
Key Findings .....	3
Recommendations .....	5
Government and Policymakers .....	5
Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) .....	6
Private Sector Employers .....	6
List of Acronyms .....	8
Geographical Classifications.....	8
List of Figures, Tables and Maps.....	8
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Research Objectives .....	10
Methodology Overview .....	11
Populations of Interest.....	11
Geographic Coverage .....	12
Sampling Strategy .....	13
Data Collection and Processing .....	14
Validation Workshops.....	15
Challenges and Limitations .....	15
<b>FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Policies and Strategies to Promote and Protect Women’s Engagement in the Labour Force .....	16
Demographics of Individual Interview Respondents .....	18
Enabling Factors that Drive Women’s Employment.....	20
Reasons for Seeking Employment .....	20
Decision Making in Women’s Employment .....	21
Perceptions of Appropriate Jobs for Women.....	22
Relevant Experience and Education .....	25
Connections: Politicians, Family, and Friends.....	26
Challenges to Women’s Employment .....	26
Reasons Why Women Do Not Seek Employment .....	26
Managing Childcare and Domestic Responsibilities.....	27
Challenges Faced by Women Seeking Employment.....	28
Working Conditions and Risks for Employed Women.....	32
Awareness of Labour Laws and Policies.....	32
Contracts and Formal Employment Agreements.....	32
Transportation .....	33
Wage Discrimination .....	35
Harassment .....	35
Working Conditions in the Agricultural Sector .....	36
Working Conditions in the Education Sector .....	37
Working Conditions in the Health Sector .....	39
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>40</b>
Recommendations .....	42
Recommendations for Government and Policymakers .....	42
Recommendations for NGOs .....	44
Recommendations for Private Sector Employers.....	45
<b>ANNEX A: WOMEN INTERVIEWED BY GOVERNORATE, POPULATION GROUP, AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, BY NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS.....</b>	<b>46</b>

## List of Acronyms

CCCM	Camp Coordination Camp Management
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSTF	Cross Sector Task Force on UNSCR 1325
DTM	Displacement Tracking Matrix
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDP	Gross domestic product
Gol	Government of Iraq
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
IDP	Internally displaced person
II	Individual interview
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
KI	Key informant
KII	Key informant interview
KR-I	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MoLSA	Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
NAP 1325	National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODK	Open Data Kit
SDR	Secondary data review
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

## Geographical Classifications

Governorate	Highest form of governance below the national level.
District	Second highest administrative boundary. Each governorate is comprised of districts.

## List of Figures, Tables and Maps

Table 1. Number of FGD Participants by Population Group and Gender.....	14
Table 2. Demographic Information, by Population Group.....	18
Table 3. Current and Previous Employment and Employment Seeking Status of II Respondents.....	19
Table 4. Respondent Levels of Education by Employment Status.....	19
Table 5. Respondent Levels of Education by Population Group.....	20
Table 6. Jobs Perceived as More Appropriate for Women, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group.....	22
Table 7. Jobs Perceived as More Appropriate for Women, by Number of Respondents from Each Employment Status.....	23
Table 8. Sectors in Which Women Would Most Like to Work, by Number of Respondents from Each Employment Status.....	24
Table 9. Challenges to Gaining Employment, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group.....	28
Table 10. Type of Sector-Specific Training that Employed Respondents are Interested in Receiving, by Number of Respondents per Sector.....	30
Table 11. Number of Employed II Respondents who Reported Having an Employment Agreement, by Population Group.....	32
Table 12. Most Commonly Reported Methods of Transportation to Work, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group Who Are Currently Employed.....	34
Table 13. Number of Employed Refugees Living in Camps Who Reported Using Various Methods of Transportation to Work.....	34
Table 14. Number of Employed IDPs Living in Camps Who Reported Using Various Methods of Transportation to Work.....	35
Table 15. Subsector of Employment for Women Currently Employed in the Agriculture Sector, by Population Group.....	36
Table 16. Breakdown of Women Currently Employed in the Education Sector, by Population Group.....	38
Table 17. Subsector of Employment for Women Currently Employed in the Health Sector, by Population Group.....	39
Figure 1. Respondent Employment Status, by Number of Respondents.....	13
Figure 2. Previous Employment Status of Unemployed Women and Women Not in the Labour Force,.....	19
Map 1. Data Collection Coverage for All Individual Interview Respondents.....	12

## INTRODUCTION

The Iraq crisis entered a new recovery phase in 2019.<sup>8</sup> The country now faces the challenge of addressing both the short- and long-term consequences of conflict and mass population displacement as people either return to their homes or attempt to establish themselves in new locations. As of 31 August 2019, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) reported over 1.52 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq, primarily concentrated in Ninewa, Duhok, and Erbil, as well as 4.35 million returnees in Ninewa, Anbar, and Salah Al-Din.<sup>9</sup> A REACH and Camp Coordination Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster assessment conducted in August 2018 found that the majority of IDPs did not intend to return to their area of origin within the next year;<sup>10</sup> these individuals may need continued support as they adjust to living in a new area. In addition, the country remains host to numerous refugees due to ongoing insecurity in neighbouring countries. As of December 2018, over 253,000 Syrian refugees lived in Iraq,<sup>11</sup> the vast majority of which live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I) governorates of Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>12</sup>

The protracted crisis and widespread displacement of uncertain duration have impacted employment and livelihoods in myriad ways, which in turn affect vulnerability, protection needs, and food insecurity. In its efforts to combat the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), the Iraqi government increased military spending from 2014, while correspondingly instituting a partial hiring freeze in 2016.<sup>13</sup> A global decline in oil prices, the largest contributing factor to the Iraqi economy, from 2015 to 2017 also contracted government revenues.<sup>14</sup> Given that the public sector provides an estimated 40% of all employment and up to 94% of women's employment in Iraq,<sup>15</sup> these changes in government spending and funding allocations have drastically altered job opportunities. Private sector investment has also declined as a result of insecurity.<sup>16</sup> These developments have constrained employment options and present challenges to livelihoods. IDPs noted that the availability of livelihoods or lack thereof was a key factor in their intention to return to their area of origin or remain displaced,<sup>17</sup> while the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) cites job opportunities as the main recovery need for IDPs.<sup>18</sup> Though the economy is beginning to recover, continued government efforts to reduce reliance on public sector employment<sup>19</sup> mean that job prospects may remain limited.

Women in particular face substantial challenges in accessing employment due to a combination of limited economic opportunities and individual- and community-level factors. In 2017, the labour force participation rate<sup>20</sup> for women overall in Iraq was 12.3%, compared to 72.6% for men; of women in the labour force (women of working age who are either employed or seeking employment), 12% were unemployed.<sup>21</sup> A 2018 assessment found that only 4% of Syrian refugee women respondents in the KR-I were employed, though 24% indicated a desire to work.<sup>22</sup> Conflict-affected women can face additional barriers such as legal restrictions, a lack of social support, exacerbated vulnerability, and increased levels of unpaid work, particularly for displaced and female-headed households<sup>23</sup>. In the Iraqi context, the nature of these challenges for specific groups of women (i.e. refugee, IDP, returnee and host community women) is not yet fully understood and addressed, especially since the ISIL-related displacement crisis began in 2014.

<sup>8</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq," November 2018.

<sup>9</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#), accessed May 2019.

<sup>10</sup> REACH Initiative, "[Iraq Intentions Survey: National IDP Camps | Informal Sites | Out-of-Camp Locations](#)," August 2018.

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, "[Fact Sheet: Iraq](#)," December 2018.

<sup>12</sup> 3RP, "[Iraq: Syrian Refugee Statistics](#)," February 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Mawlawi, Ali, "[Analysing Growth Trends in Public Sector Employment in Iraq](#)," July 2018.

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, "[Iraq Economic Monitor: Toward Reconstruction, Economic Recovery and Fostering Social Cohesion](#)," Fall 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Vilardo, V. and Bittar, S., "[Gender Profile – Iraq: A situation analysis on gender equality and women's empowerment in Iraq](#)," Oxfam and UN Women, December 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> REACH Initiative, August 2018.

<sup>18</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq," November 2018

<sup>19</sup> Al-Mawlawi, July 2018

<sup>20</sup> The labour force participation rate is "a measure of the proportion of a country's working-age population that engages actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for work." International Labour Organisation, "[Labour Force Participation Rate](#)," accessed March 2019.

<sup>21</sup> International Labour Organisation, "[World Employment and Social Outlook](#)," accessed May 2019,

<sup>22</sup> IPSOS Group SA, "[Unpacking Gendered Realities in Displacement: the Status of Syrian Refugee Women in Iraq](#)," 2018, UN Women; IOM-Iraq, "[IOM-Iraq Special Report: Female-Headed Households](#)," October 2011.

<sup>23</sup> UN Women, "[Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economics, Realizing Rights](#)," 2015; Jayasinghe, D, "[Choices, changes, and safety in crisis: A model for women's economic empowerment](#)," International Rescue Committee, January 2019.

Based on discussions with representatives from UN Women, UN Women plans to work with the Ministry of Labour and Social Services (MoLSA) to promote decent work opportunities for conflict-affected women in 2019 and beyond. To inform this work, REACH conducted a qualitative assessment on behalf of UN Women to provide an indicative, evidence-based understanding of the challenges faced in accessing employment opportunities and current working conditions among conflict-affected women in Iraq.

This report first describes the methodology used in this assessment, and then present findings, organised into the following sections:

- Policies and Strategies to Support Women's Employment in Iraq
- Demographics of Assessment Participants
- Enabling Factors that Drive Women's Employment
- Challenges to Women's Employment
- Working Conditions and Risks for Employed Women

In sum, the report first reviews the policies and strategies that the government and non-governmental organisations have implemented to support women's access to employment and develop employment opportunities in Iraq. The report then discusses the individual- and community-level factors that enable women to work, including motivations for seeking employment, decision-making capacity, perceptions of appropriate jobs for women, and the importance of relevant experience and education as well as connections in securing employment. The report then reviews why some women do not work, and the challenges faced in getting a job by women who are seeking employment. Finally, it assesses the working conditions and risks for currently employed women, including awareness of labour laws and policies, and issues related to contracts, transportation, discrimination, and harassment. Given the importance of the agriculture, education, and healthcare sectors in providing employment to women in Iraq, the assessment also addresses the working conditions faced by women employed in these sectors.

The report then concludes with policy and programmatic recommendations for key institutional actors on enabling and encouraging women to find and access decent employment in Iraq, developed by participants in two validation workshops in Erbil and Baghdad and endorsed by UN Women.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives

The objectives and scope of this assessment were developed in collaboration with UN Women after a thorough secondary data review (SDR) of existing research related to women's employment in Iraq and elsewhere in the region. Overall, the assessment aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of employment in Iraq for conflict-affected women?
2. What are the enabling factors, both at the individual and community level, that drive women's access to decent employment in key employment sectors?
3. What challenges and barriers do women face in accessing decent employment in key employment sectors?
4. What conditions and risks do women face within the identified labour sectors, specifically with respect to protection, health and safety, equal participation, compensation, harassment, etc.?
5. What are the current labour laws and policies that affect women's engagement in the labour force?
6. In what ways do women's experiences and challenges related to employment vary based on their displacement status (refugee, IDP, returnee, host community) and governorate of residence?
7. What strategies and projects, if any, are relevant actors (e.g., government bodies, employers, civil society actors, etc.) implementing to foster women's employment?

The key employment sectors targeted for this assessment were agriculture, education, and health. These sectors were chosen based on the relatively high number of women working in each sector and the corresponding prospects

for economic growth. For example, agriculture employs 24% of the female workforce,<sup>24</sup> compared to 18% of the male workforce.<sup>25</sup> According to recent economic profiles, education and health employ a significant portion of women not working in agriculture; data on how many women work in these sectors are not available.<sup>26</sup> Though government spending in agriculture, health, and education declined during the conflict, the most recent Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2018-2022 focuses on improving health and education for impoverished families,<sup>27</sup> while the National Development Plan targets increasing the agricultural sector share of gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the World Bank has expanded its Emergency Operation for Development Project in Iraq to specifically support reconstruction in the agriculture and education sectors, focusing on women in conflict-affected areas.<sup>29</sup>

## Methodology Overview

This assessment took a semi-structured, qualitative approach at the individual level through individual interviews (IIs), gender-disaggregated focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs).

In total, 655 women and 46 men participated in this assessment. Specifically, 614 women participated in the phone-based IIs. These interviews sought to develop a general understanding of women's experiences with employment, their perceptions of the factors that enable them to find employment and the challenges that inhibit them, and, for women who have been employed, their working conditions and sector-specific challenges.

To better understand the findings of the IIs, REACH also conducted 12 FGDs in Erbil, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Mosul, and Shirqat: six with only women, disaggregated by employment status; and six with only male family members of women from each employment status group (in total, 32 female and male participants, respectively). The FGDs with women delved into the aggregated II responses in order to contextualise those findings. The FGDs with men were conducted to provide insight into men's perceptions of women working and decision-making power, which in many cases can significantly influence women's employment opportunities. Those who participated in IIs did not also participate in FGDs.

Finally, 20 interviews were conducted with 23 key informants (KIs) from government ministries, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and private employers. These key informants (9 female and 14 male KIs) provided a more thorough understanding of the legal frameworks that shape how women access and engage in employment. REACH also contacted private employers from the target sectors who employ women in order to provide further insight into issues surrounding demand for women's employment, institutional perceptions of women in the workplace, women's working conditions, the barriers and challenges employers face in hiring women, and how employers overcome these barriers. REACH likewise conducted KIIs with civil society stakeholders, including both local and international organisations, who are working on women's livelihoods to examine these stakeholders' strategies to promote and facilitate women's employment.

The following sections detail the populations of interest, geographic coverage, sampling strategy, and data collection and processing.

## Populations of Interest

The populations of interest for the II component of this assessment were female Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs living both in and out of camps, returnees, and host community women. Returnees are defined in accordance with the IOM DTM framework as Iraqis "previously displaced since 2014 who return to their sub-district of origin."<sup>30</sup> Host community women are women who had not been displaced as a result of the conflict.

<sup>24</sup> World Bank Data [International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database], "[Employment in agriculture, female \(% of female employment\)](#)," accessed September 2019.

<sup>25</sup> World Bank Data [International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database], "[Employment in agriculture, male \(% of male employment\)](#)," accessed September 2019.

<sup>26</sup> UN Women, "[Country Gender and Economic Profiles](#)," October 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, "[Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty in Iraq, 2018-2022: Executive Summary](#)," January 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, "[National Development Plan, 2018-2022](#)," June 2018.

<sup>29</sup> World Bank, "[Project Paper on a Proposed Additional Loan in the Amount of US\\$400 Million to the Republic of Iraq for the Emergency Operation for Development Project](#)," October 2017.

<sup>30</sup> IOM DTM, "[Methodology](#)," accessed January 2019.

For each of the six population groups, the research focused on three sub-groups:

- Women who are employed in target sectors (agriculture, health, education);
- Women who are unemployed (i.e., not currently employed but actively seeking employment);<sup>31</sup> and
- Women who are out of the labour force (i.e., not currently employed and not seeking employment).

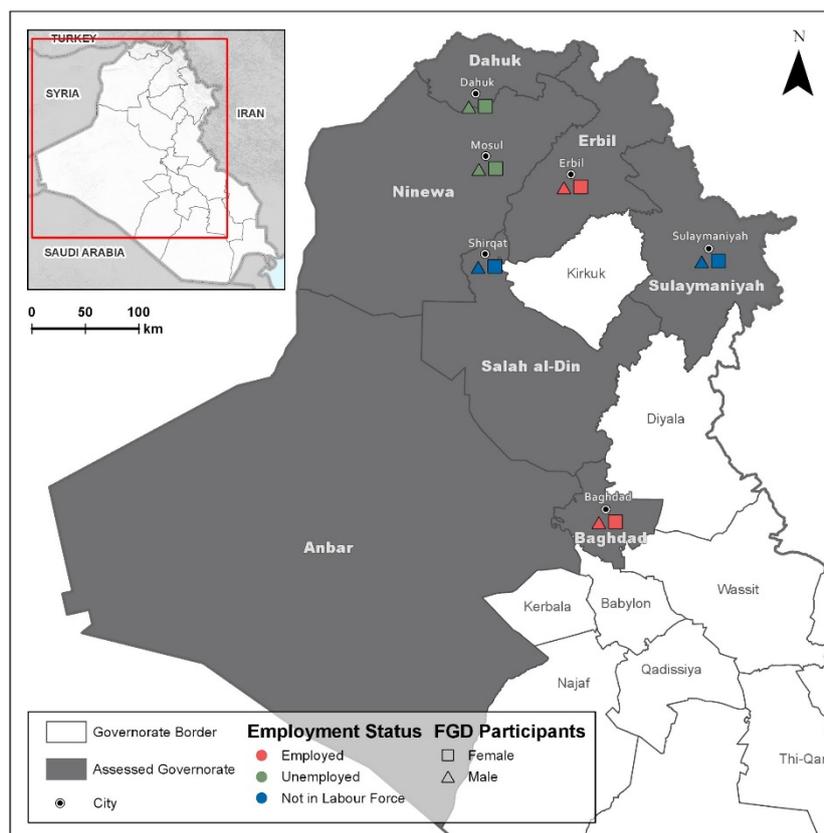
The FGDs were also comprised of these groups of women, as well as male family members of women from each of the three sub-groups.

For the KIIs, the assessment targeted representatives from MoLSA and the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, and Education in Erbil and Baghdad, as well as the High Council of Women Affairs in Erbil; civil society stakeholders, including local and international NGOs; and private employers in Erbil.

## Geographic Coverage

This assessment focused on the northern and central regions of Iraq. Geographic coverage of governorates was determined based on UN Women's areas of programmatic focus and concentrations of the populations of interest. These governorates were Anbar, Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Ninewa, Salah al-Din, and Sulaymaniyah (see Map 1). Women from each governorate were called for IIs, while FGDs were hosted in Duhok, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, Mosul, and Shirqat. Due to security and access restrictions, it was not possible to conduct FGDs in the governorate of Anbar.

Map 1. Data Collection Coverage



<sup>31</sup> Women currently looking for work in any sector were considered “unemployed women” in this assessment; this category was not limited to women looking for work in the three sectors of interest.

## Sampling Strategy

### Individual Interviews

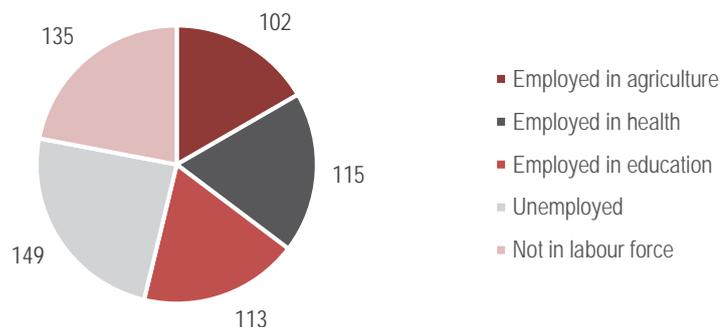
Women were selected for IIs through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling: REACH and UN Women networks provided initial contacts, and enumerators then asked each interviewee to refer additional contacts. IIs were stratified by the population of interest, employment status, sector of employment (for employed women only) and governorate. The study aimed to contact two to four women per stratum, given the time and resources available for this assessment.

The number of women from the populations of interest sought for an interview in each governorate varied based on the concentration of those populations. For example, at the time of research design, there were extremely few Syrian refugees hosted in Anbar, Baghdad, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din,<sup>32</sup> and minimal or no registered returnees in Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>33</sup> Fewer than 10% of the IDP population in Baghdad, Erbil, and Salah al-Din resided in camps, and few returnees were registered in Baghdad.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, fewer or no interviews were sought with these populations in those locations.

In total, 614 women consented to participate in the phone-based IIs (see Annex A for a full breakdown of women by governorate, population group, and employment status):

- **By population group:** 260 IDPs;<sup>35</sup> 124 Syrian refugees;<sup>36</sup> 80 returnees; and 150 host community women.
- **By governorate:** 78 women from Anbar; 54 women from Baghdad; 94 women in Duhok; 95 women in Erbil; 88 women from Ninewa; 106 women from Salah al-Din; and 99 women in Sulaymaniyah.
- **By employment status:** 330 employed women; 149 unemployed women; and 135 women not in the labour force (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Respondent Employment Status, by Number of Respondents



### Focus Group Discussions

REACH used its networks and partners in each governorate to purposively sample FGD participants, with a minimum of four and a maximum of six participants in each group. FGDs were disaggregated by location and employment status, with representation from each available population of interest in that area. Those who participated in IIs did not also participate in FGDs. FGDs took place in Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Mosul, Shirqat, and Sulaymaniyah.

In total, 64 people participated in FGDs: 32 women and 32 men.

- **By population group:** 11 IDPs; 12 refugees; 15 returnees; and 26 host community members (see Table 1 for the breakdown of each group by gender).
- **By governorate:** 10 participants from Baghdad (4 women; 6 men); 11 participants from Duhok (6 women; 5 men); 9 participants from Erbil (4 women; 5 men); 10 participants from Ninewa (6 women; 4 men); 12

<sup>32</sup> UNHCR, "Fact Sheet: Iraq," November 2018.

<sup>33</sup> International Organisation for Migration (IOM) [Displacement Tracking Matrix](#), accessed December 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Of the IDPs interviewed, 118 were living in camps and 142 were living out of camps.

<sup>36</sup> Of the refugees interviewed, 67 were living in camps and 57 were living out of camps.

participants from Salah al-Din (6 women; 6 men); and 12 participants from Sulaymaniyah (6 women; 6 men).

- **By employment status:** 8 employed women and 11 male family members of employed women; 12 employed women and 9 male family members of unemployed women; and 12 women who were not in the labour force and 12 male family members of women who were not in the labour force.

Table 1. Number of FGD Participants by Population Group and Gender

Population Group	IDPs		Refugees		Returnees		Host Community		Total	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Participants	6	5	6	6	7	8	13	13	32	32

## Key Informant Interviews

Individuals were selected for KIIs with the assistance of UN Women and REACH networks based on their previous engagement with women from the populations of interest and specialist knowledge related to women's livelihoods. These KIIs included:

- Representatives from the MOLSA in Erbil (1) and Baghdad (1);
- Representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture (2), Health (2), and Education (2) in Erbil and Baghdad;
- Representative from the High Council of Women's Affairs in Erbil (1);
- Representatives of four employers in Erbil: two private schools (3) and two private hospitals (2); and
- Several local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), including the Baghdad Women's Association (3), the Women Leadership Institute in Baghdad (1), Women's Empowerment Organisation (WEO) in Erbil (1), Tajdid Iraq Foundation for Economic Development (1), Oxfam (1), the International Rescue Committee (IRC) (1), and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) (1).

## Data Collection and Processing

### Individual Interviews

IIs were conducted with women from the populations of interest in each of the seven governorates over the phone between 22 January and 25 February 2019. Overall, 652 women were contacted for an interview; of those, 614 women were reached and consented to participate. Female enumerators used a Kobo form containing a semi-structured questionnaire translated into Arabic to streamline data collection. Enumerators entered any additional information from open-ended questions directly into a separate debriefing form. The questionnaire was based on similar tools developed for REACH projects in other contexts<sup>37</sup> and information derived from the SDR. Enumerators called women from each stratum until the pre-specified target for interviews was reached or no further numbers were available. During data collection, the REACH Assessment Officer monitored the data inputted by enumerators and followed up as necessary. Quantitative data from these questionnaires were analysed using Excel, while responses to open-ended questions were analysed using thematic content analysis.

### Focus Group Discussions

FGDs took place between 8 February and 5 March 2019 in Baghdad, Duhok, Erbil, Mosul, Shirqat, and Sulaymaniyah. Overall, 64 women and men participated in FGDs: 32 women and 32 men. All FGDs were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire translated into Arabic. These questionnaires were also developed based on similar tools used by REACH in other contexts, as well as findings from the SDR and IIs. FGDs were conducted in Arabic or Kurdish, depending on participants' preference. For the female FGDs, a female facilitator led the discussion, with another female enumerator acting as a scribe. A female REACH Assessment Officer sat in on the FGDs when possible, depending on time and security constraints, to take notes based on real-time interpretation and ask further probing questions. Male enumerators led the men's FGDs to reduce any potential bias that may have arisen as a result of having women present for discussions about sensitive gender-based questions. REACH assessment staff debriefed with FGD facilitators after each session. Notes from the FGD sessions and debriefs were then organised into a matrix reflecting key research themes and analysed using thematic content analysis.

<sup>37</sup> Specifically, the "UN Women: Enhancing Livelihoods Opportunities for Jordanian and Syrian Refugee Women in Jordan" assessment currently ongoing in Jordan.

## Key Informant Interviews

KIIs were conducted in person or over Skype from 7 February 2019 to 10 March 2019 by a REACH Assessment Officer using tailored semi-structured questionnaires, with the help of a translator as necessary. In total, 23 individuals from 20 organisations participated in the KIIs: six governmental bodies, seven NGOs, and four private employers in Erbil. Responses from the KIIs were organised into a matrix reflecting key research themes and analysed using thematic content analysis.

## Validation Workshops

Validation workshops were held in both Erbil and Baghdad on 28 April 2019 and 2 May 2019, respectively. The aim of these workshops was to present the analysis and initial, indicative findings from the assessment to stakeholders for discussion. Participants included representatives from government ministries, national and international NGOs who participated in KIIs, a private employer in the healthcare sector, and other relevant actors. These individuals were asked to provide feedback on the findings before working collaboratively to develop recommendations specific to the capacity of various actors in Iraq, including the government, NGOs, and the private sector. Feedback from the validation workshops was integrated into the final report, and the recommendations presented in the conclusion are derived from those proffered by workshop participants.

## Challenges and Limitations

- The limited availability of secondary data on employment statuses among targeted population groups precluded the use of a statistically representative survey using random sampling techniques. **Therefore, the findings presented in this report are intended to provide an indicative understanding of the issues related to employment faced by conflict-affected women and cannot be generalized to the populations of interest.** However, the use of information from FGDs and KIIs to triangulate data provided from the IIs help to validate the indicative findings.
- **Furthermore, self-reported findings from the IIs are subject to a degree of bias.** Respondents may have given answers that they believed were socially acceptable rather than sharing their true opinions and experiences. It is also possible that respondents misreported or did not report all relevant historic incidents, as retrospective self-reported data is subject to the limitations of respondents' memories.
- **During data collection, enumerators faced several challenges in reaching the target number of interviews for some groups.** For example, displaced populations are highly mobile; consequently, information about the presence of particular groups in a given location that was used to determine the target number of interviews quickly became outdated. Also, women working in agriculture were particularly difficult to locate and interview. This could potentially be attributed to the remoteness of where they reside, the challenge of continuing to work in agriculture after displacement, or the influence of more conservative values that would prevent women from being willing to participate in a phone survey.
- The number of women sought for interviews was adjusted based on available information<sup>38</sup> about how many women from each group reside in the specified governorates. **However, due to the challenges in accessing certain groups of women during data collection, some groups may be over- or underrepresented in the final sample for this assessment.**

<sup>38</sup> UNHCR, November 2018, IOM DTM, December 2018.

## FINDINGS

This section of the report details findings from the IIs, FGDs, and KIIs. It first reviews the policies and strategies implemented by government and civil society stakeholders to promote women's employment in Iraq, with a focus on the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, based on SDR and references from KIIs with government ministries. It then presents an overview of those who participated in the assessment, including key demographic statistics. Women's experiences through the cycle of work are then traced from motivations to pursue a job to factors that either facilitate or challenge employment, and finally to the working conditions of women employed in agriculture, education, and health.

### Policies and Strategies to Promote and Protect Women's Engagement in the Labour Force

Both the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have developed strategies and plans with the aim of increasing women's economic empowerment. Given the plethora of policies and strategies developed on this topic, it is not possible to provide a summary of all relevant documents and legislation. This section will therefore review selected documents recommended by UN Women and in KIIs with the goal of offering a general overview of the political and legal contexts in which women are seeking employment and working. This includes strategies to increase the protection of women's rights and engagement in the labour force as well as government efforts related to the three sectors of interest in this assessment: agriculture, education, and health.

There are several governmental strategies specifically related to gender. The **2013-2017 National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women** outlined a plan to reduce discrimination against women as well as reinforcing women's rights in society and in the workplace, while the **2014-2018 National Strategy for the Advancement of the Status of Iraqi Women** set out a goal to encourage women's participation in government at multiple levels.<sup>39</sup> A new '**National Strategy to Combat Gender Based Violence**' (2018-2030) was also announced in December 2018 by the government of Iraq with the support of UNFPA to combat violence against women. The **2016-2026 National Strategy for the Development of Women in the Kurdistan Region** also lays out legislative opportunities and social indicator targets to improve women's empowerment and quality of life, including the promotion of women's engagement in the labour force.

Iraq also developed a **National Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (NAP 1325)**<sup>40</sup> in 2014, which is overseen by the Iraq Cross Sector Task Force (CSTF) on UNSCR 1325. The NAP includes goals related to participation, protection, social and economic empowerment, legislation and enforcement, resource mobilisation, and monitoring and evaluation.<sup>41</sup> The proposed action steps to support women's social and economic empowerment recommend the revision of laws to eliminate discrimination against women in the workplace, provide financial resources to female-headed households and other vulnerable groups, and bring women out of poverty. A 2018 report on the implementation of the NAP highlights multiple government ministries' efforts to make gains related to each of these goals, and emphasises support from CSOs.<sup>42</sup> It also pointed out challenges related to the ISIL conflict, economic crises, and continued cultural perceptions of women's roles, in addition to limitations in making and measuring progress towards the pre-specified goals.

The **Iraq Labour Law of 2015**, the first updated labour law since 1987, explicitly supports gender equality and prohibits discrimination and harassment in the workplace. The Law penalises sexual harassment at the workplace, increases the length of paid maternity leave (from 72 to 98 days) and creates legal guarantees of equal pay for equal work.<sup>43</sup> The Law also lays out limits on working hours, protections for termination of employment, guarantees of paid leave, and other protections. However, despite the steps taken through this law towards securing women's rights and protection at the workplace, some legislative and enforcement gaps remain. The Law does not mandate

<sup>39</sup> Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations Security Council, "[Resolution 1325](#)," 31 October 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Swaine, A., "[Balancing Priorities: Lessons and Good Practices from Iraq, Jordan and Palestine for NAP-1325 Drafting Teams](#)," 2018, UN Women.

<sup>42</sup> Cross Sector Task Force 1325, "[Report: Implementation of Iraq National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325, 2014-2018](#)," July 2018.

<sup>43</sup> Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018

employers to allow for flexible work arrangements to employees, which is an important consideration for mothers, and there are restrictions on women's ability to work at night and in certain positions perceived as "arduous or harmful."<sup>44</sup> In addition, though the Iraq government instituted this law in 2015, the KRG has not yet ratified the new labour law as of early 2019. Nevertheless, according to the "Women, Business and the Law 2019" report by the World Bank, Iraq has made the most progress on gender equality from a legal perspective out of all countries in the Middle East and North Africa region in the last decade.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore, in 2018 the Gol released several strategies promoting economic development and recovery after years of conflict with so-called ISIL. These, notably, each highlight the three sectors of interest in this report – agriculture, education, and health – as key areas of investment. The **National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2022**<sup>46</sup> outlines efforts to reduce corruption and improve productivity, stimulate investment, diversify the economy and promote economic growth, improve social development indicators, and address environmental challenges. Relevant to the present assessment, the government intends to promote a growth rate of 8.4% in the agricultural sector by 2022 through the NDP, the second highest of any targeted sector, and increase the agricultural sector share of GDP for non-oil activities. The plan also lays out targets for increasing school enrolment for both girls and boys, as well as improving the health system and reconstructing educational and health infrastructure.

The **Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2018-2022**<sup>47</sup> outlines the government's plans to reduce poverty over the next five years, particularly in rural and recently liberated areas. This includes goals of improving employment and increasing access to healthcare and education. Both of these frameworks align with the **Iraq Vision 2030**, a strategy developed with the support of the World Bank that identifies short- and long-term development efforts that align with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>48</sup> The **Reconstruction and Development Framework**,<sup>49</sup> instituted in early 2018, builds on these plans and strategies to target recovery efforts, including an emphasis on restoring the agricultural sector and rehabilitating the primary health care system. Finally, a **Private Sector Development Strategy (2014-2030)**<sup>50</sup> aims to strengthen the private sector by developing policies and strategies to support the sector, enforce existing laws and policies, provide financing for national businesses, improve productivity of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and reduce unemployment.

Regarding international actors' engagement with development and women's economic empowerment more broadly, the Gol has also collaborated with the World Bank to implement several development projects, including the **Emergency Operation for Development Project**, mentioned above, and the **Emergency Social Stabilization and Resilience Project, 2018-2021**.<sup>51</sup> The latter project aims to increase livelihood opportunities in liberated areas, and improve access to psychosocial services and social safety nets. Suggested livelihood opportunities for women include training of trainers for nurses, handicrafts, agriculture, cooking and baking, and managing child day care centres. Furthermore, the **2019-2020 3RP Regional Strategic Overview** prioritises development of economic opportunities for Syrian refugees in Iraq, particularly for women, and calls on national and international actors to address barriers related to residency permits, mobility, government capacity, security, and access to credit.<sup>52</sup>

KIIs with international and local NGOs also brought forth a range of activities currently underway to support women's livelihood opportunities. This selection is by no means comprehensive, as a complete mapping exercise was outside the scope of the current assessment. A KI reported that Oxfam, for example, was implementing a range of emergency livelihoods projects, including support for women in developing small businesses, facilitating savings and loan programmes, providing vocational training, and rehabilitating livelihoods infrastructure. A KI from DRC reported programmes related to business development training and grants in Anbar, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Ninewa; though these programmes did not exclusively target women, women are actively engaged with a certain percentage reserved for their participation. Among other programmes, a KI noted that IRC is running a range of

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> World Bank, "[Women, Business and the Law 2019: A Decade of Reform](#)," 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, June 2018

<sup>47</sup> The Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning, High Committee for Poverty Reduction Strategy, "[Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty in Iraq 2018-2022, Executive Summary](#)."

<sup>48</sup> UNDP Iraq, "[Promoting the alignment of development plans with the Sustainable Development Goals](#)," 29 October 2018; World Bank Group, "[Working for the People of Iraq](#)," September 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Government of Iraq, "[Iraq Reconstruction and Development](#)," February 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Republic of Iraq, Council of Ministers, Prime Minister's Advisory Commission, "[Private Sector Development Strategy 2014-2030](#)," April 2014.

<sup>51</sup> World Bank, "[Iraq Emergency Social Stabilization and Resilience Project](#)," March 2018.

<sup>52</sup> 3RP, "[Regional Strategic Overview 2019-2020](#)," December 2018.

Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE) programmes in camps in Salah al-Din, as well as supporting women and girls through the provision of legal assistance and psychosocial support.

From national NGOs, a KI reported that the Women's Leadership Institute in Baghdad runs a programme on legal protection and social and livelihoods support, including jobs training and small funds to start a business. A KI from Tajdid also reported that their organisation provides temporary job opportunities and small business grants to vulnerable women in Mosul and Salah al-Din. A KI from WEO commented that WEO launched the first business centre for female entrepreneurs in Kurdistan, provides employment training for women, and has developed an apprenticeship programme for women. Finally, a KI from Baghdad Women's Association reported that the organisation implements livelihoods projects specifically for women, provides job training to young women in the private sector, trains women on project management and how to start a business, offers small business grants, and supports women in Duhok through cash for work activities. These are just a few of many projects implemented by a range of local and international organisations to support women's livelihoods and economic empowerment.

Though these laws, strategies, and programmes lay the foundation for women's economic empowerment, there are still many gains to be made and challenges to overcome. These include both legal limitations and institutional barriers. For example, FGD participants, including returnees and host community individuals in Erbil, Baghdad, and Mosul, as well as KIs widely indicated that enforcement of labour laws in the private sector is particularly limited, and labour laws violations often go unreported or unpunished; these participants also alleged that this is less prevalent in the public sector due to stricter oversight.<sup>53</sup> These are issues to be addressed by the relevant government bodies and are discussed in further depth in the sections below and in the recommendations section.

## Demographics of Individual Interview Respondents

In total, IIs were conducted with 614 women. Table 2 shows further demographic details about the women interviewed. Overall, the majority of respondents had children under 18 (413 out of 614 respondents). Just over one out of four respondents were the heads of their household. A higher proportion of refugees both in and out of camps reported being the heads of household than all other groups, while host community women were the least likely to report being the heads of household. Furthermore, Syrian refugees in the KR-I require a residency permit in order to work;<sup>54</sup> all but one refugee respondent reported that they had acquired a permit.

Table 2. Demographic Information, by Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	Total
Total Number of Respondents	118	142	67	57	80	150	614
Number of Respondents Who are Heads of Household	44	37	49	44	39	26	177
Number of Respondents Who Have Children	80	100	46	42	57	88	413
Average Age of Respondent	33 years	34 years	34 years	32 years	39 years	36 years	35 years
Range of Respondent Ages	18-71 years	18-60 years	20-56 years	19-51 years	18-66 years	19-65 years	18-71 years

Of the 284 women who were either unemployed or not in the labour force, 86 respondents were previously employed (Figure 2). Women who were currently unemployed were more likely to have worked in the past than women who were not in the labour force. Considering differences between population groups, a higher proportion of unemployed Syrian refugees living in or out of camps reported having worked previously (23 out of 31 respondents, compared to 72 out of 149 respondents overall). Among women who were not in the labour force (135 respondents), 14 were previously employed while 6 had previously sought employment but had never been

<sup>53</sup>See also Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018.

<sup>54</sup>Sadek, G., "[Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq](#)," December 2013, The Law Library of Congress Global Legal Research Center.

employed. Furthermore, 97 out of the 135 respondents reported that they did not intend to work in the future. Table 3 provides a breakdown of women's current and previous employment status.

Figure 2. Previous Employment Status of Unemployed Women and Women Not in the Labour Force, by Number of Respondents

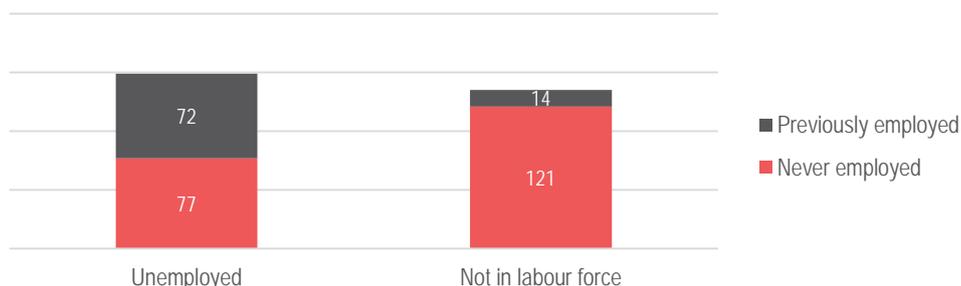


Table 3. Current and Previous Employment and Employment Seeking Status of II Respondents

Population Group	Employment Seeking Status	Currently Employed	Previously Employed	Never Employed	Total
Employed	N/A	330	N/A	N/A	330
Unemployed	Currently Seeking Employment	N/A	72	77	149
Not in Labour Force	Previously Sought Employment	N/A	14	6	135
	Never Sought Employment	N/A	0	115	

With respect to education levels, most respondents completed at least primary education (549 out of 614 respondents), while 59 respondents had not completed any education (Table 4). Overall, 175 respondents completed only primary education; conversely, 137 had completed university and 99 had completed study at a specialised institute. Currently employed respondents were more likely to have completed high school and above than those who were unemployed or not in the labour force (184 out of 330 employed respondents compared to 67 out of 149 unemployed and 18 out of 135 respondents who were not in the labour force). Perhaps unsurprisingly, those employed in education or health were most likely to have completed studies at an institute or university.

Table 4. Respondent Levels of Education by Employment Status

Level of Education Completed	Employed				Unemployed	Out of Labour Force	Total
	Agriculture	Education	Health	Total			
Total Respondents	102	113	115	330	149	135	614
None	19	0	1	20	12	27	59
Primary School	50	3	17	70	44	61	175
Middle School	6	7	9	22	14	18	54
Secondary School	4	8	17	29	12	10	51
High School	2	2	10	14	12	7	33
Institute	2	43	32	77	16	6	99
University	16	49	28	93	39	5	137
Other	0	1	1	2	0	1	3
Don't Know	3	0	0	3	0	0	3

As shown in Table 5, refugees living both in and out of camps and host community women were the two groups of respondents most likely to have completed high school or above (67 out of 124 refugee respondents and 84 out of 150 host community respondents). However, host community respondents also had a high proportion of respondents who had only completed primary education (46 out of 150). IDPs living in camps were most likely to report having completed only primary education or no education (48 and 20 out of 118 respondents, respectively), with IDPs living out of camps following closely behind (49 and 12 out of 142 respondents, respectively).

Table 5. Respondent Levels of Education by Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	Total
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>614</b>
None	20	12	11	4	8	4	59
Primary School	48	49	9	5	18	46	175
Middle School	10	14	6	5	11	8	54
Secondary School	7	13	5	9	9	8	51
High School	11	4	8	9	1	0	33
Institute	20	16	17	10	18	18	99
University	2	33	9	14	13	66	137
Other	0	1	0	0	2	0	3
Don't Know	0	0	2	1	0	0	3

## Enabling Factors that Drive Women's Employment

Fewer than one in five women in Iraq of working age are currently in the labour force - i.e., working or actively seeking work.<sup>55</sup> To enable more women to work, it is therefore critical to understand what factors motivated those women who are working or who have worked to look for a job and what enables them to find employment. This section therefore explores women's motivation for entering the labour force, how women and their families make decisions about women's employment, and perceptions of appropriate jobs for women. It then explores a range of factors that were found to enable women to find a job, including having relevant experience and education and the use of personal or political connections.

### Reasons for Seeking Employment<sup>56</sup>

Among II respondents who were currently employed or who had ever sought employment, the most frequently reported motivation for seeking employment was a **need for additional income** (reported by 475 out of 499 respondents), either to supplement the income of other family members (284 respondents) or because respondents were the only family member able to work (191 respondents), followed by **personal satisfaction** (166 respondents). This section will explore each of these motivations in more depth.

FGD participants across assessed governorates reported that families' **need for additional income** has increased as a result of the financial crisis and displacement. Due to austerity measures implemented to support government efforts against so-called ISIL, employees working on government contracts have been receiving only a portion of their salaries, according to KIIs with government representatives. Increased competition from displaced people and the country's overall economic struggles have also led to reduced wages in the private sector. Both refugees and IDPs face additional financial demands: in the FGDs, several male and female IDPs and refugees living out of camps reported needing more income to pay for rent, while some refugees in Erbil reported needing additional funds for food. According to these FGD participants, these factors have driven many women to seek employment to supplement their family income, and many men to seek second or third jobs.

More specifically, the most commonly reported motivation for female IDPs and refugees living in camps to work was a need for additional income because they were the **only household member able to work** (61 out of 95 and 30 out of 57 respondents, respectively, compared to 100 out of 347 for all other groups). The reasons for this were unclear from the IIs; however, the SDR indicates that familial separation, conflict-related disability, and limited job opportunities for men could have contributed to these findings.<sup>57</sup> A KI from an NGO commented anecdotally that some women participating in their programmes are financially responsible for three or four families as a result of conflict, and therefore will seek as much work as they can.

<sup>55</sup> International Labour Organisation, "[World Employment and Social Outlook](#)," accessed December 2018.

<sup>56</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

<sup>57</sup> IPSOS Group SA, October 2011.

Iraq's long history of conflict has also left many women widowed or with missing husbands and therefore taking on the role of primary or sole financial providers for their families. While current data on the number of female-headed households and war widows are unavailable, commonly cited statistics indicate that women are the head of 1 in 10 households in Iraq, 80% of whom are widowed.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, among the women interviewed for this assessment, **a much higher proportion of women who were heads of the household reported being the only household member able to work than women who were not heads of the household** (110 out of 161 respondents who were heads of the household versus 81 out of 338 who were not).

Though the need for more income emerges as a primary driver of employment, many respondents also reported that they sought work for **personal satisfaction** (166 out of 499 respondents), indicating that the desire for work goes beyond economic necessity. A noticeably higher proportion of respondents from the KR-I than from other areas of Iraq reported personal satisfaction as a motivating factor for employment (112 out of 231 respondents versus 54 out of 268 respondents who were employed or who had ever sought employment). A possible reason for this, as suggested by female FGD participants in Erbil, is that attitudes towards women working are more positive in the KR-I than in other parts of Iraq, as those living in the KR-I are perceived to be less conservative and traditional. This may imply it is more acceptable for women to work because they want to, not just because it is financially necessary for them to do so. Furthermore, FGD participants also highlighted that exposure of host community women to refugee women working may have shifted attitudes in favour of women working. This shift will be discussed in further depth below.

### Decision Making in Women's Employment

Another important consideration for women seeking employment is how families make decisions. This influences the extent of women's authority and autonomy in being able to choose whether to pursue a job and which job to pursue. Of currently or previously employed respondents, **almost all said that they had been involved in the decision to look for a job** (341 out of 349 respondents<sup>59</sup>). This was consistent across population groups. **Of these, 191 respondents reported that they were the only person involved in the decision to pursue employment.**

**Among the 207 married women<sup>60</sup> who were currently or previously employed, a lower proportion responded that they were the only person involved in the decision** (101 respondents), with the husband being the most commonly involved additional person in the decision making (80 respondents replied that they and their husbands only made the decision to seek employment). Aside from the women who responded that they were the only person involved in the decision, 22 married respondents did not indicate that their husband was involved in the decision making. Among other respondents<sup>61</sup> (142 respondents), the majority responded that they were the only person involved in the decision (100 respondents), followed by themselves and another family member (41 respondents). These family members included their father (24 respondents), mother (21 respondents), brother (5 respondents), or sister (4 respondents). The II responses thus indicate dispersed decision making regarding women's entrance in the labour force, with the husband playing a notable role for married women.

FGD participants gave a slightly different, perhaps more nuanced, perspective on household decision making. Participants from every population group in every governorate also reported that women often have a say in whether they would pursue a job, especially if they are the head of their own households. In Erbil, refugee, IDP, and host community female participants who were employed said that the mother's opinion was also very important. However, if there were to be disagreement within the family on this issue, FGD participants said that **the final decision would usually rest with a woman's father, husband, or older brother**. This apparent discrepancy with II responses may result from selection bias: respondents who were willing to participate in a phone survey may have more autonomy than those who were not. It may also simply reflect the difference between who is involved in decision making, and who has the most (and final) authority.

<sup>58</sup> IOM-Iraq, October 2011.

<sup>59</sup> 49 out of 416 currently or previously employed respondents did not provide their marital status; 31 out of 416 respondents did not answer the question regarding decisionmaking. Of these, 13 respondents answered neither question.

<sup>60</sup> This does not include women who responded that they were separated or had a missing spouse (10 respondents).

<sup>61</sup> This includes women who responded that they were single, divorced, or widowed, as well as women who responded that they were separated or had a spouse missing.

**Conflict and displacement have also reportedly had an impact on decision making related to employment, depending on perceived levels of safety and family need.** In Mosul, for example, women who were not in the labour force reported in an FGD that host community and returnee families have become much more cautious about allowing a woman to accept a job: the father or husband would investigate the potential place of employment, and consider issues related to safety and transportation more closely than before the conflict started. A KI from an NGO that works with IDPs in Anbar noted that male family members often accompany women to work in order to protect them. Conversely, employed host community FGD participants in Erbil commented that seeing refugee women work has begun to change societal attitudes towards women working, and has given women more autonomy to make decisions about working. Male refugee FGD participants in Duhok commented that women have gained more decision-making power regarding their employment as a result of being displaced, as they are able to find work while men are not able to do so. This was confirmed by male and female refugee FGD participants in Sulaymaniyah who were not in the labour force: they reported the stronger influence of women in making these decisions as a result of families' need for additional income. In addition, male FGD participants from Erbil cited a more stable security situation as an influencing factor in letting women have more control over their employment decisions.

### Perceptions of Appropriate Jobs for Women<sup>62</sup>

Social expectations and perceptions of employment opportunities may also influence the jobs and employment agreements that women pursue. Just over half of II respondents (317 out of 614) reported that they believe **some sectors are more suited for women**: these include **education, health, and sewing and textiles**. These closely, but not exactly, mirrored the sectors in which unemployed respondents reported seeking work: **education** (64 out of 149 respondents), **international or local NGOs** (48 respondents), **health** (33 respondents), **sewing and textiles** (33 respondents), and **cleaning** (28 respondents). Of respondents who reported that some jobs and sectors are more appropriate for women, most indicated that **permanent, part-time employment agreements were most suitable for women, given the demands of their domestic responsibilities**. This section will discuss each of these findings in more depth.

Out of all 614 II respondents, 317 indicated **they believe there are certain jobs and sectors that are more suited for women**; 204 respondents responded that they did not believe there were jobs more suited for women, while 25 respondents said that women should not work.<sup>63</sup> Among IDPs (both in and out of camps) and returnees, responses were evenly split, while the vast majority of refugee respondents both in and out of camps responded that they believed certain jobs and sectors were more suited for women. The reason for this division is unclear; however, as discussed below, the jobs perceived as more suitable do not vary largely between population groups.

The sectors that respondents who answered affirmatively to this question believed were more suitable for women include **education, health, sewing and textiles, cosmetology, and local or international community-based organisations (CBOs) or NGOs**, in order by the number of respondents (see Table 6). When asked why certain jobs were more suitable for women, respondents primarily answered that the working hours are less and allow women to balance their domestic responsibilities (102 respondents); social expectations (71 respondents); the jobs suit the nature of women (30 respondents); and they are useful sectors (20 respondents). **A combination of domestic responsibilities and social perception thus appears to influence ideas about what work is appropriate to pursue across population groups.**

Table 6. Jobs Perceived as More Appropriate for Women, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
<b>Reported Some Jobs More Suitable for Women</b>	48 out of 118 respondents	60 out of 142 respondents	49 out of 67 respondents	40 out of 57 respondents	31 out of 80 respondents	86 out of 150 respondents	317 out of 614 respondents
<b>Sectors</b>	Education (38)	Education (47)	Education (43)	Education (33)	Education (27)	Education (76)	Education (264)

<sup>62</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

<sup>63</sup> The remaining 68 respondents replied, "Don't know."

	Health (24)	Sewing and textiles (23)	Health (28)	Sewing and textiles (19)	Health (15)	Health (52)	Health (159)
	Sewing and textiles (23)	Health (22)	Sewing and textiles (14)	Health (18)	Sewing and textiles (15)	Sewing and textiles (23)	Sewing and textiles (117)
	Cosmetology (19)	Cosmetology (12)	Local or international NGOs (12)	Local or international NGOs (18)	Cosmetology (13)	Local or international NGOs (22)	Cosmetology (86)
	Local or international NGOs (12)	Local or international NGOs (10)	Cosmetology (10)	Cosmetology (15)	Agriculture (9)	Cosmetology (17)	Local or international NGOs (82)

Perceptions of jobs that were more suitable for women varied slightly based on employment status (Table 7). Unsurprisingly, **respondents employed in agriculture reported agriculture as an appropriate sector for women** more often than any other population group. As indicated in Table 7, **respondents who were not in the labour force reported sewing and textiles** more frequently as an appropriate sector for women than other population groups. This may be influenced by the fact that currently employed respondents were not from this sector; however, the difference is still notable when compared to unemployed respondents' answers. FGD participants offered further insight into this variation: both male and female participants reported that sewing and textiles were considered more appropriate for women from conservative families, as this type of work could be done at home. It also allowed women the flexibility to fulfil their domestic responsibilities and take care of children.

Table 7. Jobs Perceived as More Appropriate for Women, by Number of Respondents from Each Employment Status

	Employed in Agriculture	Employed in Education	Employed in Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force	All
Reported Some Jobs More Suitable for Women	46 out of 102 respondents	67 out of 115 respondents	67 out of 113 respondents	70 out of 149 respondents	64 out of 135 respondents	317 out of 614 respondents
Sectors	Education (38)	Education (64)	Education (57)	Education (59)	Education (46)	Education (264)
	Health (20)	Health (23)	Health (47)	Health (44)	Sewing and textiles (32)	Health (159)
	Sewing and textiles (18)	Sewing and textiles (12)	Local or international NGOs (20)	Sewing and textiles (37)	Health (25)	Sewing and textiles (117)
	Agriculture (17)	Local or international NGOs (12)	Sewing and textiles (18)	Cosmetology (29)	Cosmetology (21)	Cosmetology (86)
	Cosmetology (12)	Cosmetology (7)	Cosmetology (17)	Local or international NGOs (25)	Local or international NGOs (16)	Local or international NGOs (82)

For women with limited education, **FGD participants included baking alongside sewing and textiles as accessible options**, though IIs made limited mention of baking as a potential profession. Sewing and textiles was in the top three most commonly listed appropriate sectors by women with secondary school education or below. However, the perception of sewing and textiles as appropriate work for women is not limited to those with lower levels of education: when disaggregated by respondents' education levels, sewing and textiles emerged in the top four most commonly listed sectors across all groups, even among those who completed a university education.

Notably, respondents across all population groups and employment statuses most often cited **education as a suitable sector for women to work in**. Respondents explained that working in education was perceived positively because of “a summer break to spend more time with family,” the fact that women work “few hours in the education field,” and “it suits the nature of women.” These comments were echoed in FGDs and KIs: FGD participants and government KIs cited the security of government contracts for teachers, shorter working hours, and societal expectations of women to be working in this sector as explanations for why education was a preferred sector. These findings suggest that the flexibility associated with jobs in education enables women to balance their work and domestic responsibilities, making them perceived to be more desirable and appropriate for women.

FGD participants also commented on jobs perceived to be less appropriate. The number of opportunities in malls and restaurants is reportedly increasing, particularly in cities like Erbil and Baghdad; however, female refugee FGD participants in Baghdad and Sulaymaniyah indicated that these jobs were not preferred because employers allegedly exploit women by requiring them to work long hours with limited job security. Also, women in public places are reportedly more vulnerable to harassment. **Jobs in nightclubs or cafes were also perceived negatively** because of women’s exposure to strangers, cultural perceptions of impropriety, and the supposed danger for women being out at night. Employed FGD participants in Erbil and Baghdad also expressed hesitancy about jobs that required women to go into rural areas due to potential insecurity, while both male and female participants across assessed governorates noted that jobs requiring heavy lifting or hard manual labour were less suitable for women.

When asked **the sectors in which they would most like to work**, respondents who were currently working, seeking employment, or planned to look for work in the future (517 respondents) reported they would prefer to work in **education, health, agriculture, international or local NGOs, or sewing and textiles**, though this varied widely by employment status and sector (see Table 8). **The vast majority of employed respondents reported a strong preference to work in their current sector of employment.**

Table 8. Sectors in Which Women Would Most Like to Work, by Number of Respondents from Each Employment Status

	Employed in Agriculture	Employed in Education	Employed in Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force but Planning to Work in the Future	All
Total Respondents	102 respondents	113 respondents	115 respondents	149 respondents	38 respondents	517 respondents
Sectors	Agriculture (90)	Education (106)	Health (109)	Education (63)	Education (13)	Education (204)
	Sewing and textiles (16)	Local or international NGOs (12)	Local or international NGOs (18)	Local or international NGOs (50)	Sewing and textiles (13)	Health (160)
	Cosmetology (8)	Health (6)	Education (15)	Health (35)	Local or international NGOs (9)	Agriculture (110)
	Local or international NGOs (7)	Information and computer technology (5)	Cosmetology (6)	Sewing and textiles (30)	Cosmetology (9)	Local or international NGOs (96)
	Cleaning (7)	Sewing and textiles (5)	Human services and social work (4)	Cleaning (28)	Health (6)	Sewing and textiles (66)

**Among those who were unemployed or planned to work in the future (187 respondents), preferences for jobs in certain sectors varied more widely**, particularly by education level. Those with primary education (57 respondents) indicated a preference for employment in cleaning (20 respondents) and sewing and textiles (16 respondents). Those with a university education (42 respondents), on the other hand, indicated a preference for employment in education (25 respondents) and local or international NGOs (24 respondents).

By population group, **IDP respondents living in camps** (38 respondents) reported wanting to work in cleaning (14 respondents), local or international NGOs (14 respondents), and education (11 respondents), while **IDPs living out of camps** reported wanting to work in education (18 respondents), sewing and textiles (13 respondents), and local or international NGOs (11 respondents). Among **refugees in and out of camps**, preferences were predominantly for education (21 out of 40 respondents) and local or international NGOs (18 out of 40 respondents). **Returnees** (28 respondents) preferred sewing and textiles (9 respondents) and education (8 respondents), while **host community women** (42 respondents) preferred education (21 respondents), local or international NGOs (11 respondents), and health (10 respondents).

Similarly, a recent report found that over 60% of adolescent girls in Iraq report aspiring to a job in education or health services, while just under 20% hope to be housewives.<sup>64</sup> These findings largely mirror the sectors in which unemployed respondents reported currently seeking employment: **education, international or local NGOs, health, sewing and textiles, and cleaning.**<sup>65</sup> However, **displacement and financial need appear to influence the sectors in which women are seeking employment.** Among unemployed IDPs living in camps (27 respondents), for example, most respondents reported looking for work as cleaners (14 respondents), followed by international or local NGOs (13 respondents), and then education (8 respondents). **The disparity between jobs reported as appropriate for women and jobs that these women are pursuing likely results from limited job opportunities available in more socially acceptable sectors.**

Overwhelmingly, II respondents reported that **permanent, part-time employment agreements** were considered more appropriate for women (271 out of 317 women who reported that they believed certain jobs were more suitable for women), followed by permanent, full-time employment agreements (44 out of 317 respondents) and temporary-part-time employment agreements (20 respondents).<sup>66</sup> This preference held true across all population groups and employment statuses. When asked why these employment agreements were considered more appropriate, FGD participants commented, again, that they enabled women to balance their domestic responsibilities with work. **The expectations associated with women's roles in the home therefore appear to dominate all aspects of women's employment, from the sectors in which they work to the amount of time considered appropriate for them to work.**

Feedback from both FGD participants and KIs suggests that attitudes towards women working are shifting as a result of conflict and displacement. A host community FGD participant from Erbil commented that host community women saw many refugee women working, which caused them to reconsider their opinion on women's employment. Displacement from rural to urban areas has also likely shifted attitudes: a male IDP from an FGD in Sulaymaniyah said that many women work in Sulaymaniyah city. This has encouraged women he knows to start working, and they intend to continue working if and when they return to Anbar. However, this shift is not limited to the KR-I: a camp manager for the Danish Refugee Council cited a higher number of female applicants for NGO work in recent years, largely because women want to contribute to the community after seeing the consequences of displacement. Efforts to promote women's employment could capitalise on this shift in attitudes.

## Relevant Experience and Education

With respect to the factors that enable women who are searching for employment to successfully get a job, currently or previously employed II respondents (416 respondents) across all population groups perceived that **work experience and expertise** (281 respondents), **educational attainment** (195 respondents), and **technical or professional training** (85 respondents) were the **primary enabling factors to a woman getting a job.** Though work experience and expertise was the most commonly reported enabling factor overall, II respondents from Baghdad more frequently listed educational attainment (27 out of 35 respondents listed educational attainment, and 16 out of 35 respondents listed work experience and expertise) as a factor enabling them to get a job. This may reflect that the jobs available in this mostly urban governorate could require higher levels of education compared to those available in rural areas, therefore making education qualifications more relevant.

<sup>64</sup> Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018.

<sup>65</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

<sup>66</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

The perceived value placed on experience and education from 11 respondents echoes the 2014 Iraq Human Development Report, which found that young women's participation in the labour force depends more on their education and technical training than their connections.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, a recent study by the Women's Empowerment Organisation found that the vast majority of employers consider experience and education as the top two factors influencing hiring.<sup>68</sup> Positively, among employed respondents, the vast majority (305 out of 330 respondents) reported **they feel they have the skills needed to be successful in their sector**.

### Connections: Politicians, Family, and Friends

Though only 7 out of 416 respondents who were currently or previously employed listed family and friends' connections or political ties as enabling factors to get a job, the vast majority of those who had ever sought employment reported **asking friends and family contacts and networks for help in finding a job** (407 out of 499 respondents). Reports from FGDs also indicate that connections are important. Host community FGD participants in Duhok and Baghdad, for example, reported that **connections were essential to securing government contracts**. Sometimes even well-placed connections are insufficient to get a job: several FGD participants also cited the need to pay someone to get a job. Displaced FGD participants across assessed governorates reported needing connections as well, though **IDPs reportedly rely more heavily on friends and relatives than political connections**. For example, a host community FGD participant from Baghdad commented that connections were essential for IDPs because employers are suspicious of where the IDPs come from. Most FGD participants mentioned that connections are more important in the public sector than in the private sector, which could be attributed to the high levels of competitiveness for government jobs. Also, male FGD participants from Mosul commented that the private sector reportedly has higher turnover than the public sector, meaning that connections may not endure as long as those in the public sector.

## Challenges to Women's Employment

In a conflict-affected context where the women's labour force participation rate is low and unemployment is high, women entering the labour force and searching for jobs face significant challenges. This section first examines the reasons why women may not seek employment and instead remain out of the labour force, as well as the challenges of managing domestic responsibilities and childcare. It then summarises the challenges that women who have decided to seek employment face in procuring a job.

### Reasons Why Women Do Not Seek Employment

Among 11 respondents who were not in the labour force (135 respondents), the top three most commonly reported **reasons for not seeking employment** include **domestic responsibilities** (87 respondents), **insufficient education** (49 respondents), and **a lack of desire to work** (25 respondents). These responses provide initial insight into the barriers that women face in entering the labour force: **competing demands on time and cultural expectations and a perceived lack of qualifications**. Respondents from Sulaymaniyah also posited that a lack of access to safe and affordable transportation, health problems, and opposition from family members could hinder women's ability to seek employment.

When female FGD participants who were not in the labour force were asked why some women did not work, women from both FGDs again cited domestic responsibilities and insufficient education. Some male family members of women who were not in the labour force also said in FGDs that women were expected to take care of the home and the children, and that women did not need to work. Female FGD participants from Shirqat reported there are usually few nurseries or kindergartens in rural areas to take care of children, so women held the responsibility. Most male FGD participants in Sulaymaniyah who were family members of those not in the labour force said that women feared sexual harassment or that having a job would negatively impact their reputation.

Addressing the barriers to entering the labour force would enable women to seek employment if they want to. **Joining the labour force for the first time is a critical step**: among unemployed respondents and respondents who were not in the labour force within the present sample, those who have been in the labour force previously

<sup>67</sup> UNDP, "Iraq Human Development Report: Iraqi Youth, Challenges and Opportunities," 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Women's Empowerment Organisation, presentation on findings from assessment on women's economic participation in the KR-I from employers' perspective, obtained from WEO in February 2019.

were much more likely to either be looking for work or planning to return to work in the future than women who had never been in the labour force (165 out of 169 respondents,<sup>69</sup> compared to 23 out of 115 respondents<sup>70</sup>). There therefore appears to be a distinction between women who have ever been in the labour force and women who have neither worked nor sought employment with respect to entering and remaining in the labour force.

### Managing Childcare and Domestic Responsibilities

As indicated above, one of the primary challenges to women accessing and managing employment is the demand of domestic responsibilities. Women are most often considered to be the primary homemakers and caregivers, particularly of children, in Iraq. Therefore, the ability to balance or share childcare and domestic responsibilities is a critical component of a woman's ability to pursue employment and therefore a critical barrier to overcome. FGD participants reiterated this point, stressing that family support or flexible working hours to take care of children and the home is a priority if women are to start or continue working.

Of 11 respondents who were currently or had been in the labour force and had children under 18 years old (233 respondents), 42 reported that they did not have childcare; it was unclear how these respondents handled this situation. Of those that reported having childcare, the majority of respondents reported that **immediate family members most often provided childcare** (146 out of 162<sup>71</sup> respondents).

Though only 12 11 respondents (specifically IDPs in and out of camps and host community women) reported paying for childcare, **the need to pay for childcare could add an economic burden on households that are already financially stressed**. One host community FGD participant in Sulaymaniyah who was not in the labour force said that she did not work because the amount of money she would make would be insufficient to pay for childcare and transportation; therefore, she preferred to take care of her children herself. These findings offer an overview of the range of challenges related to childcare and the impact that this requirement has on women's desire and capacity to enter the labour force.

**Low rates of school enrolment in Iraq also indicate a challenge for women who want to pursue work, as children who are not in school must be looked after.** This particularly affects displaced families: as of 2015-2016, 48.3% of internally displaced school-age children were out of school in Iraq, while more than 90% of children were out of school in the most conflict-affected governorates.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore availability of nurseries and kindergartens are limited, particularly in rural areas. Data from 2007, the most recent available, indicates that only 7% of children aged 3-5 are enrolled in pre-primary education (e.g., nursery school or kindergarten).<sup>73</sup>

Other domestic responsibilities also place high demands on women's time and capacity to enter into employment. Iraq has one of the highest inequalities in time spent on unpaid care work<sup>74</sup> between men and women: over a year, it is estimated that women spend up to 10.5 more weeks on unpaid work than men in Iraq.<sup>75</sup> These demands are particularly high for internally displaced women, as unpaid care work increases during displacement;<sup>76</sup> similar demands may be placed on refugee women as well. Employed and unemployed FGD participants from all population groups across assessed governorates confirmed these expectations when asked how households divide domestic responsibilities when women work, though many participants also noted that this often varies between families. Participants in six out of eight FGDs conducted with employed and unemployed women and male family members mentioned that women are most often responsible for childcare; participants in four out of eight FGDs mentioned that women should prepare meals and clean the dishes. **Women must therefore balance the cultural expectations of domestic responsibilities when seeking employment.**

<sup>69</sup> 149 unemployed women, considered to currently be in the labour force; 14 women who were not currently in the labour force but were previously employed; and 6 women who were not currently in the labour force, had never employed, but had sought employment in the past.

<sup>70</sup> 115 women not in the labour force who had never been employed and never sought employment.

<sup>71</sup> The remaining respondents reported that they did not need childcare because their children were old enough to look after themselves (25 respondents) or because of their working hours (3 respondents), or said they didn't know (1 respondent).

<sup>72</sup> UNICEF, "[The Costs and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An Analysis of the Education Sector and Strategies to Maximize the Benefits of Education](#)," May 2017.

<sup>73</sup> World Bank, "[Iraq: Early Childhood Development SABER Country Report](#)," 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Care work is defined as "activities pursued by a person including all tasks that directly involve family welfare done in service of members of the family and/or community." Dietrich and Carter (2017), p. 26.

<sup>75</sup> Samman, E. et al., "[Women's Work: Mothers, Children, and the Global Childcare Crisis](#)," ODI, March 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Dietrich & Carter, May 2017.

## Challenges Faced by Women Seeking Employment

Once women have begun the search for a job, gaining employment presents a new set of challenges. Overall, 212 out of 493 respondents who were employed, unemployed, or out of the labour force but previously employed reported facing difficulties in finding a job. These respondents reported **increased competition for both women and men, finding a job relevant to prior experience, and having insufficient education to get a job** as the top three most common challenges (Table 9). This section will explore these responses and anecdotal reports of hiring discrimination and language barriers.

Table 9. Challenges to Gaining Employment, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
Reported Challenges in Findings Employment	51 out of 94 respondents	39 out of 113 respondents	21 out of 27 respondents	27 out of 44 respondents	28 out of 63 respondents	46 out of 122 respondents	212 out of 493* respondents
Challenges Noted	Increased competition (33)**	Increased competition (24)	Finding jobs relevant to prior experience (14)	Increased competition (20)	Increased competition (14)	Increased competition (28)	Increased competition (127)
	Insufficient education (14)	Insufficient education (13)	Increased competition (6)	Denied jobs because of refugee status (12)	Insufficient education (9)	Insufficient education (10)	Finding a job relevant to prior experience (57)
	Finding jobs relevant to prior experience (11)	Finding jobs relevant to prior experience (8)	Denied jobs because of refugee status (4)	Finding jobs relevant to prior experience (27)	Finding jobs relevant to prior experience (5)	Finding socially acceptable jobs (8)	Having insufficient education to get a job (51)

\*Respondents who reported challenges out of those who were employed, unemployed, or out of the labour force but previously employed

\*\*Respondents who reported this challenge

### Competition and Limited Availability of Jobs

Among those who had ever sought employment, the top challenge reported collectively was **increased competition for jobs** (127 respondents out of 212 respondents who reported challenges in finding a job); this holds true across five out of six population groups (see Table 9). FGDs and KIIs offered several insights into the drivers behind these challenges. The primary reason cited for increased competition was population movement: **an influx of displaced people searching for employment heightens the demand for jobs**. Several host community FGD participants in Baghdad alleged that IDPs would work for more hours with lower wages because of their financial challenges and to counterbalance employers' hesitancy to hire people who may not remain in the job for long. In addition, the reduced availability of government contracts has also increased competition for the limited opportunities that remain.

Similarly, 11 respondents also reported challenges in **finding a job relevant to prior experience** (57 respondents). This was listed most often as a challenge by refugees living in camps (14 out of 21 respondents who reported challenges in finding a job). The challenge in finding a job relevant to prior experience indicates limited availability of jobs in which respondents have worked previously, which could exacerbate competition. For example, all government KIIs commented that there were extremely few, if any, government contracts available in health, education, or agriculture due to the financial crisis. The two school managers in Erbil who participated in KIIs also indicated that while more private schools are opening, these also face challenges in obtaining sufficient funding from private and international donors to hire new employees. In addition, they noted that private schools are not opening fast enough to meet the demand for jobs from prospective teachers who cannot get a government contract. Thus, there is significant competition for job opportunities in the sectors in which women have indicated they would want to work. At the same time, economic opportunities for women outside of these sectors are limited and, as discussed above, often perceived as less desirable.

## Lack of Education and Relevant Experience

While education is perceived to be one of the top enabling factors to get a job, as discussed above, a **lack of education was the third most commonly reported challenge** to getting a job (51 respondents). For respondents who had only completed primary education and reported challenges, insufficient education emerged as the most commonly reported issue (28 out of 60 respondents). The **proportion of respondents from Anbar and Salah al-Din who reported insufficient education as a barrier was higher than in other governorates** (13 out of 28 and 16 out of 41 respondents who reported challenges, compared to 22 out of 143 respondents).

Those who had ever sought employment were asked if they faced challenges in accessing the education and training they needed to get a job: overall, 89 out of 499 women responded they had. The most commonly reported education-related challenge was **not completing primary or middle school education** (44 respondents).<sup>77</sup> This reflects statistical trends in Iraq over the last two decades, the time when women who are currently of working age would have been in school: the out-of-school rate for girls in primary education ranged from 18% in 2000 to 13% in 2007.<sup>78</sup> For secondary education, the out-of-school rate ranged from 59% in 2000 to 38% in 2007.<sup>79</sup> This challenge persists: even after several years of strong growth in enrolment, the out-of-school rate for girls in primary education was 11.4% in 2015-2016, compared to 5.4% for boys.<sup>80</sup>

FGD participants gave several insights into why girls attend school less frequently than boys, particularly among IDPs. Families reportedly face challenges in affording school supplies and the cost of transportation to send their children to school, especially if they live outside of camps. A KI working with IDPs in Salah al-Din noted that many families did not allow their daughters to finish education because they feared for their safety in being exposed to strangers, and therefore preferred for their daughters to stay home. A KI implementing programmes for IDPs around Baghdad commented that families did not send their daughters to school because they would be married soon and therefore did not need to be educated. Based on the qualitative responses from FGDs and KIIs, the lower attendance and completion rate for girls reflects a combination of economic, security, and cultural influences.

Conversely, a **noticeably lower proportion of Syrian refugee respondents listed insufficient education as a challenge to gaining employment** (5 out of 48 respondents) **than all other population groups** (46 out of 164 respondents). This may be attributable to overall higher levels of education and literacy of Syrians prior to displacement: as of 2011, prior to the Syrian conflict, 93% of female youth in Syria were literate and 69% of girls were enrolled in secondary school,<sup>81</sup> compared to 80% literacy and 38% enrolment in secondary school for girls in Iraq.<sup>82</sup> This finding highlights the enduring impacts of education and its relationship to employment prospects. It is also possible that the other challenges listed have a more immediate impact on their search for employment.

At the same time, with respect to higher education, refugee participants in the FGDs commented that many women had been forced to leave Syria before finishing their university studies, and found it challenging to transfer their credits over to universities in Iraq, despite high-level efforts to ease this process.<sup>83</sup> Depending on the jobs they were pursuing, those who had completed a university education reported needing to have their diplomas certified in Iraq. In general, the primary challenge to doing so was reportedly **a lack of the appropriate paperwork**: for example, refugees from the men's FGD in Erbil noted that many of their family members and friends had left their certificates behind when they fled Syria. Further sector-specific difficulties related to this requirement are discussed below in the section on working conditions.

KIIs with government ministries and private employers alike indicated that women needed to complete either university or a training institute in order to be considered for a position in education or health. For women who do persist in education, FGD participants noted that access to universities and training institutes is contingent on grades, finances, and familial support. Those who do not score sufficiently high on examinations must seek higher

<sup>77</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

<sup>78</sup> World Bank, "[Children out of school, female, \(% of female primary school age\)](#)," accessed March 2019.

<sup>79</sup> World Bank, "[Adolescents out of school, female \(% of female lower secondary school age\)](#)," accessed March 2019,

<sup>80</sup> UNICEF, May 2017.

<sup>81</sup> UNICEF, "[Syria: MENA Gender Equality Profile](#)," 2011.

<sup>82</sup> UNICEF, "[Iraq: MENA Gender Equality Profile](#)," 2011.

<sup>83</sup> See, for example: UNESCO, "[UNESCO Arab Regional Education Support Strategy 2016-2021](#)," 2016.

education in private universities, which are significantly more expensive and less frequently recognised. **Women therefore reported that it was challenging to receive the level of education that they need in order to be competitive for the jobs they want.**

Some respondents also reported an **inability to access and afford additional training** as a barrier to getting the education they need to get the jobs they want (29 out of 89 respondents). FGD participants cited a lack of affordable options in universities and institutes, particularly among refugees.

Many FGD participants were aware of or had participated in trainings from NGOs or government ministries, particularly those from Erbil, Duhok, Sulaymaniyah, and Mosul. Only two participants in Baghdad knew of trainings, provided by government ministries rather than NGOs; no participants in Shirqat knew of any programmes. Some men from the FGD in Duhok reported that the training offered by some NGOs in makeup and hairdressing would prepare women appropriately for future jobs. Female refugees who were not in the labour force from the FGD in Sulaymaniyah reported participating in training on sewing, baking, and hairdressing, but they said that the **training was not sufficiently long-term and they were unable to access tools and materials to practice after the training was finished.** FGD participants who had engaged in sewing training in Erbil voiced the same concern.

When unemployed respondents and respondents who planned to work in the future were asked if they would be interested in receiving training, the majority said yes (151 out of 187 respondents). Respondents reported wanting training in how to look for a job (48 respondents), computer skills (46 respondents), finances and bookkeeping (15 respondents), and starting a business (13 respondents). Most requested training related to a technical sector (98 respondents). The sectors requested included education (46 respondents), sewing and textiles (27 respondents), and health (25 respondents). **The demand for further training indicates that women are interested in developing both their general technical and sector-specific skills to better prepare themselves to look for work in a competitive environment.**

Though, as mentioned above, most employed women believed that they had the skills necessary to be successful in their sector, many women also expressed an interest in receiving further training (296 respondents out of 330 currently employed women). Table 10 details the kind of training women from each sector indicated interest in receiving.

Table 10. Type of Sector-Specific Training that Employed Respondents are Interested in Receiving, by Number of Respondents per Sector

Total Respondents	Employed in Agriculture 83 out of 102 respondents	Employed in Education 103 out of 113 respondents	Employed in Health 110 out of 115 respondents
Type of Training Requested	Technical training in agriculture (crops, seeds, etc.) (70)	Teaching techniques (78)	Technical training in primary healthcare (85)
	Technical training in irrigation (23)	Curriculum development (48)	Technical training in a specialist field (35)
	Technical training in animal husbandry (17)	Administration (29)	Computer skills (15)
	Technical training in agricultural technology (16)	Computer skills (23)	Job searching and salary negotiation (7)

### Hiring Discrimination

Discrimination can manifest in several forms. During the hiring process, **the majority of currently or previously employed II respondents (262 out of 416) believed that their chances of being hired were the same as men.** All government KIs commented that there was no hiring discrimination based on gender for government positions and contracts. Though IIs did not probe into differences in discrimination between the public and private sectors, all four male FGD participants from Mosul, three out of six female FGD participants from Duhok, and two NGO KIs

indicated a belief that there was more discrimination in the private sector. This may be as a result of less stringent enforcement of labour laws in the private sector.<sup>84</sup>

Of 11 respondents who said the chances of women being hired were different, perceived reasons included **more flexibility for men to work in different sectors** (20 respondents), **men perceived as being more qualified** (9 respondents), **societal expectations of women's place in the home** (5 respondents). FGD participants from several governorates reported that it would be more difficult for a newly married or pregnant woman to get a job in the private sector due to employers' reluctance to grant maternity leave. On the other hand, **several participants commented that they believed women were more likely than men to be hired for certain jobs**. Among these, all female FGD participants in Baghdad and Erbil commented that it would be easier for women than men to be hired for positions in malls, restaurants, or cafes. In following up with this line of discussion, one female FGD participant working in education in Baghdad commented that women are more likely than men to get jobs as teachers; it was unclear if this referred to a job in the public or private sector. A private employer KI, for example, indicated that the school preferred to hire female teachers as they believed women worked better with children. Aside from gender, **some refugees, both in camps and out of camps, reported having been denied jobs because of their status as a refugee** (4 out of 21 refugee women living in camps and 12 out of 27 refugee women living out of camps who reported challenges in finding a job), reflecting potential discrimination against refugees. This echoes findings from the 2018 assessment referenced above that found, despite the fact that only 4% of female Syrian refugees interviewed were employed, almost a quarter of women interviewed responded that they wanted to work more but were unable to.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, a 2019 assessment that found that only 21% of refugees believed they had equal access to employment and livelihoods opportunities as host communities.<sup>86</sup>

Female FGD participants in Baghdad and Erbil, a government KI, and several NGO representatives commented that hiring is influenced by physical appearance in both the private and public sectors. In addition, **ageism was a significant issue reported among KIs**. Though FGD participants in Baghdad reported that employers were seemingly reluctant to hire younger women because they might soon marry or become pregnant and need to leave, **KIs from several NGOs reported that older women were less likely to be hired** because they were perceived as less competent or attractive. This could present a particular challenge for female-headed households: **older women tasked with the responsibility of being the primary provider for their family may then face age discrimination when searching for a job**, increasing their vulnerability.

### Language Barriers

**Language skills also reportedly affect displaced people's access to jobs, particularly job opportunities for those that need to interact with local populations**. This was reflected in 11 responses: 4 out of 39 IDPs living out of camps who reported challenges in finding a job reported language as a challenge, while no IDPs living in camps reported this as a challenge. All four of these IDPs were displaced into the KR-I. It is therefore possible that these women do not speak any Kurdish dialects, commonly spoken in the KR-I, and therefore face additional challenges in getting a job. Indeed, all male refugee FGD participants from Erbil reported that this specifically was an issue.

Language also presents a challenge to refugees when seeking employment: 2 out of 21 refugee respondents living in camps who reported challenges in finding a job noted this as a barrier, while 9 out of 27 refugee respondents living out of camps reported this. Particularly, **out-of-camp refugee respondents in Erbil reported language as a challenge to finding employment**. Refugees may either not speak Kurdish or may speak a different Arabic dialect than those in their area of displacement. It is also possible that opportunities in the more urban areas of Erbil require language skills beyond Kurdish or Arabic, skills that some refugees do not possess.

KIs with private employers in both health and education highlighted the importance of language skills for those seeking jobs in their sectors. A KI from a private school in Erbil that teaches the local population noted that applicants needed to speak Kurdish, as the school curriculum is in Kurdish. A KI from a private school for refugees in Erbil noted the opposite: many host community people who only speak Kurdish apply for jobs there, but are less likely to be hired as the language of instruction is Arabic. For a large, international hospital in Erbil that caters to

<sup>84</sup> Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018.

<sup>85</sup> IPSOS Group SA, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Durable Solutions Platform and IMPACT, "[Far from Home: Future Prospects for Syrian Refugees in Iraq](#)," January 2019.

expatriates as well as locals, applicants are expected to speak Kurdish, Arabic, and English. Thus, language skills or the lack thereof can serve as either an enabling factor or significant barrier, particularly for displaced people moving into an area that speaks a language different from their native tongue.

## Working Conditions and Risks for Employed Women

This assessment also sought to understand the working conditions of currently or previously employed women (416 respondents: 330 currently employed women and 86 previously employed women), including awareness of labour laws and policies, their preferences for contracts and employment agreements, discrimination in the workplace, and harassment. It also examined the working environment and conditions specific to each of the three sectors of interest. This section reviews findings related to each of these issues.

### Awareness of Labour Laws and Policies

As discussed above, there are several laws and policies related to labour protection, harassment, and discrimination. Knowledge of these laws (and when they are being violated) is a critical first component to being able to assert one's rights. Of the 416 currently or previously employed respondents, **about two out of every five respondents reported not being aware of any laws or policies related to employment in Iraq** (167 respondents: 118 currently employed respondents and 49 previously employed respondents). Respondents currently working in agriculture were more likely to report being unaware of any laws (50 out of 102 respondents) compared to respondents currently working in health (36 out of 115 respondents) or education (32 out of 113 respondents). **Refugees living in camps were the group most likely to report being unaware of any policies** (30 out of 52 currently or previously employed respondents, compared to 137 out of 364 respondents), which may be attributable to a lack of exposure to Iraqi law because they originate outside of the country.

Of the respondents who reported being aware of labour laws and policies (249 respondents), **most reported that they knew there were laws related to maternity leave** (165 respondents), **retirement age** (135 respondents), **pension** (133 respondents) and **limitations on working hours** (102 respondents). Only 2 out of 52 refugees living in camps reported knowledge of laws related to maternity leave and none reported knowledge of laws on retirement, though more reported knowledge of laws related to limitations on working hours (20 out of 52 respondents). Concerningly, **only 4 out of 249 respondents reported being aware of laws related to discrimination or harassment in the workplace**. This means that women interviewed for this assessment are almost entirely unaware of the laws that protect them from discrimination and harassment, potentially leaving them vulnerable to and without redress for these challenges in the workplace.

### Contracts and Formal Employment Agreements

Most employed respondents (306 out of 330) said that it was important to have a formal employment agreement. Several FGD participants believed that having formal contracts would better ensure their rights. Among II respondents, **a slight majority reported having an employment agreement** (see Table 11). The lowest proportion of respondents who reported having employment agreements were IDPs, while the highest proportion of respondents who reported having an employment agreement were host community women.

Table 11. Number of Employed II Respondents who Reported Having an Employment Agreement, by Population Group

	IDP in Camps		IDP out of Camps		Refugees in Camps		Refugees out of Camps		Returnees		Host community		All	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Reported Having Employment Agreement														
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>145</b>
Agriculture (102 respondents)	1	21	1	21	2	9	0	4	3	9	12	15	19	79 <sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Four respondents employed in agriculture reported that they did not know if they had an employment agreement.

Education (113 respondents)	11	5	21	8	13	0	10	2	12	3	26	2	93	20
Health (115 respondents)	9	12	15	13	6	4	5	5	9	4	22	8	66	46 <sup>88</sup>

Those working in agriculture were much less likely to report having an employment agreement; this aligns with reports from KIs that most women working in agriculture work with their families rather than being under formal contracts.<sup>89</sup> Only 1 out of 15 respondents working in agriculture in Erbil and 1 out of 20 in Salah al-Din reported having an employment agreement; no respondents working in agriculture in Ninewa reported having an employment agreement. Of those working in agriculture who reported employment agreements, the majority reported having written contracts (17 out of 19 respondents) and worked on a permanent, part-time basis (10 out of 19 respondents).

Most respondents working in education reported having an employment agreement (93 out of 113 respondents); this is perhaps unsurprising as education is typically a public sector profession, which more often provides formal contracts. A higher proportion of IDPs both in and out of camps did not have an employment agreement compared to other population groups (13 out of 32 respondents, compared to 7 out of 61 respondents). Of those with an employment agreement, all but two education employees reported written contracts, with most working on a permanent full-time or part-time basis (44 and 26 out of 93 respondents, respectively).

Respondents employed in health were split between having and not having employment agreements (66 and 46 out of 115 respondents, respectively; three reported that they did not know if they had an employment agreement). All but five health employees with an employment agreement reported written contracts, working on a permanent full-time or part-time basis (38 and 15 out of 66 respondents, respectively). Again, this aligns with the understanding that most healthcare workers are public sector employees. The majority of respondents in Anbar and Ninewa reported not having contracts (9 out of 16 respondents in Anbar, including IDPs and non-displaced women; and 9 out of 17 respondents in Ninewa, all of whom were IDPs).

Of those who reported receiving benefits (166 out of 178 respondents with an employment agreement), most respondents indicated that receiving a pension and having limits on working hours were the most important to them (62 respondents and 43 respondents, respectively).

FGD participants almost unanimously indicated a preference for permanent government contracts, as these are reportedly guaranteed for life, pay good wages for fewer hours, and offer paid maternity leave, pensions, vacation, and higher job security. However, as indicated previously, these contracts are currently very limited. A government KI noted that many Iraqi women are therefore working as volunteers in the hopes that they will later be hired on a government contract. Furthermore, all refugee FGD participants and two government KIs indicated that, though refugees have the right to work in the KR-I,<sup>90</sup> refugees are reportedly ineligible to receive permanent government contracts and should seek private sector employment instead. Though it is unclear if this restriction exists legally, the perception of ineligibility nevertheless could disincentivise women from pursuing these opportunities. A January 2019 report also found that extremely few refugees were employed in the public sector due to various restrictions.<sup>91</sup> FGD participants indicated that private contracts often do not offer the same benefits and security as public sector contracts, and leave employees, particularly women, more vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Many refugees and IDPs living out of camps reported that people from their communities, especially men, find jobs as daily workers, which offer no benefits.

## Transportation

Access to safe and affordable transportation is another important factor enabling women's employment outside of the home, as women are unable to work in jobs they cannot get to. FGD participants reiterated that access to transportation was a high priority when considering employment: for example, female participants from Sulaymaniyah who were not in the labour force said that transportation issues and distance to work were significant reasons why they and other women they knew did not work. Refugees living in camps in Duhok reported in FGDs

<sup>88</sup> Three respondents employed in health reported that they did not know if they had an employment agreement.

<sup>89</sup> This assessment did not distinguish between unpaid family workers and others working in agriculture. Both groups are included here.

<sup>90</sup> Sadek, G., "Legal Status of Refugees: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq," December 2013, The Law Library of Congress Global Legal Research Center.

<sup>91</sup> Durable Solutions Platform and IMPACT, January 2019.

that they struggled to get transportation to jobs outside of the camps; this issue was also reported by an NGO KI working with IDP women living in camps.

The most commonly reported method of transportation to work among currently employed respondents (330 respondents – see Table 12) was **walking** (124 respondents), followed by **carpooling** (88 respondents) and **taxi** (78 respondents).<sup>92</sup> Overall, respondents most frequently reported their transportation as “very safe.” A higher proportion of IDP respondents who reported taking a taxi or public transport rated their transport as “somewhat safe.” Specifically, most employed female FGD participants, both refugees and IDPs, from Erbil and Baghdad reported harassment from taxi drivers on their way to work. Carpooling was perceived as either “very affordable” or “somewhat affordable”; taxis were perceived mostly as “somewhat affordable.” FGD participants from Baghdad commented that sometimes the cost of transportation was higher than women’s wages; for those without access to their own cars, this high cost sometimes proved prohibitive to these women being able to get to work.

Table 12. Most Commonly Reported Methods of Transportation to Work, by Number of Respondents from Each Population Group Who Are Currently Employed

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
Total Respondents	60 respondents	79 respondents	38 respondents	28 respondents	85 respondents	40 respondents	330 respondents
Forms of Transportation to Work	Walking (42)	Carpooling (29)	Walking (28)	Taxi (8)	Walking (14)	Carpooling (32)	Walking (124)
	Carpooling (10)	Taxi (25)	Taxi (9)	Carpooling (7)	Taxi (8)	Taxi (20)	Carpooling (88)
	Taxi (8)	Walking (20)	Public transportation (7)	Walking; public transportation (6)	Carpooling; public transportation (7)	Public transportation (15)	Taxi (78)

The majority of employed refugee and IDP respondents living in camps reported not leaving the camp for work (30 out of 38 and 39 out of 60 respondents, respectively). Of those who did not leave the camp to go to work, the vast majority reported walking to work (24 out of 30 refugees respondents in camps, and 37 out of 39 IDP respondents in camps). Refugees who left the camp to work (8 respondents) reported walking, using a taxi, or public transportation. IDPs who left camps to work (21 respondents) reported using taxis, carpooling, and walking. Tables 13 and 14 show a breakdown of transportation types by population groups and governorates.

Table 13. Number of Employed Refugees Living in Camps Who Reported Using Various Methods of Transportation to Work

Left Camp to Work	Duhok		Erbil		Sulaymaniyah	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Total Respondents	1	11	4	9	3	10
Walking	0	9	1	7	3	8
Taxi	1	3	3	1	0	1
Public Transportation	0	0	2	1	0	4
Carpooling	0	3	0	0	0	0

<sup>92</sup> Respondents could select multiple options.

Table 14. Number of Employed IDPs Living in Camps Who Reported Using Various Methods of Transportation to Work

Left Camp to Work	Anbar		Baghdad		Duhok		Erbil		Ninewa		Salah al-Din		Sulaymaniyah	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>Total Respondents</b>	4	8	2	2	6	2	1	5	1	11	5	6	1	5
Walking	1	8	0	2	0	2	0	4	1	10	1	6	1	5
Taxi	1	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Public Transportation	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Carpooling	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	0	0

## Wage Discrimination

With respect to wage discrimination, **most respondents (349 out of 416) believed that they would receive salaries equal to men for doing the same work.** FGD participants affirmed this, though some men from Erbil claimed that the bigger issue was low salaries in general, rather than unequal wages. According to Iraqi labour laws and KIIs with government representatives, wage discrimination is illegal. A government KI commented that all employees' salaries in the public sector are dependent on their academic certifications, skills, and experience in the government, not their gender. However, **in the private sector, wage equality is more difficult to enforce:** a government KI also commented that salaries sometimes differ between men and women in the private sector, which does not align with existing labour laws and policies.

Though data on the magnitude of the wage gap in Iraq is not available, literature from the SDR supports this perception of wage inequality in both the private and public sectors: a 2012 survey found that 49% of Iraq women reported wage inequality in favour of men in the private sector, compared to 32% in the public sector.<sup>93</sup> This could possibly be a result of either discrimination or the disparity between the salaries associated with the types of jobs women and men are able to get (i.e., management positions, etc.).

## Harassment

**A small proportion of II respondents reported either experiencing harassment themselves or knowing someone who was harassed (17 out of 614 respondents).** Due to the sensitive nature of these topics, there is potential for underreporting in the responses to these questions in the IIs. Enumerators commented during debrief sessions that respondents were highly uncomfortable in answering these questions over the phone, and most declined to answer or answered very abruptly. **Those who reported experiencing harassment specified a combination of verbal and sexual harassment (7 out of 17 respondents),** though the type of harassment was often not specified (10 out of 17 respondents). About half reported that the harassed person quit her job or was relocated (8 out of 17 respondents); the follow-up for the other incidents was unclear.

**FGD participants across assessed governorates indicated that harassment was a much more prevalent issue than shown by II responses.** Female participants mostly mentioned verbal harassment but alluded to other forms of harassment as well. When asked if certain groups were more vulnerable to harassment, women from Baghdad said that women who did not cover their heads, widows, divorced women, and women who were friendlier with men were more likely to be harassed, while male participants from Mosul and Baghdad alleged that younger and prettier women were more vulnerable.

Male FGD participants from Mosul and Baghdad also claimed that **harassment is much more prevalent in the private sector as opposed to the public sector.** They commented that the consequences for those who harass women in the public sector are more severe than in the private sector. However, most female FGD participants in Duhok believed that those who harassed women in either the public or private sector would face consequences for their actions. At the same time, **many female FGD participants from Baghdad and some from Erbil noted that**

<sup>93</sup> Vilardo and Bittar, December 2018.

women were hesitant to report harassment because they feared that doing so would harm their reputations or that they would be blamed for inviting the harassment.

### Working Conditions in the Agricultural Sector

Though it has contributed only 4-5% to overall GDP over the last five years, agriculture accounts for about 20% of employment overall and is a substantial source of employment for rural and impoverished families.<sup>94</sup> In addition, almost half of the female workforce is working in this sector, as referenced above.<sup>95</sup> Most women employed in agriculture work with their families, rather than as salaried employees for a company.<sup>96</sup> II respondents and FGD participants alike noted that the motivations for working in this sector include its accessibility to women with limited education, as well as the ability for women to work within their own families.

Typical jobs for women in the agriculture sector include small-scale cultivation of family land, processing harvests, and producing goods like honey, jam, or tomato paste, according to a representative from the Ministry of Agriculture and FGD participants. Among the women employed in agriculture who participated in IIs, most were involved in agricultural cultivation (70 out of 102 respondents); the rest were employed in food processing (22 respondents), agricultural research and food science (8 respondents), or other sub-sectors (2 respondents). Table 15 provides a breakdown of jobs by population group.

Table 15. Subsector of Employment for Women Currently Employed in the Agriculture Sector, by Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
Total Employed in Agriculture	23 respondents	22 respondents	13 respondents	5 respondents	12 respondents	27 respondents	102 respondents
Agricultural Cultivation	18	17	8	3	6	18	70
Food Processing	5	5	5	1	3	3	22
Other	0	0	0	1	3	6	10

### General Working Environment in the Agriculture Sector

Agriculture in Iraq has suffered significant setbacks as a result of the recent conflict and resulting displacement. Crop production declined as IDPs fled conflict-affected areas; livestock holdings deteriorated due to theft and suspension of government veterinary programmes.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the conflict, water scarcity and desertification are increasingly impacting the viability of this sector.<sup>98</sup> At the governmental level, the state historically provided subsidised farm inputs, including fertiliser, seeds, insecticides, and machinery through the State Company for Agricultural Supplies (SCAS). As a result of the financial crisis, however, government support for these inputs has dramatically weakened.<sup>99</sup> An FGD participant in Baghdad who works as an agricultural engineer commented that, even if farmers did receive these subsidised inputs, there was no guarantee that they would be of good quality unless the farmers had the right connections due to limited supplies. Without access to inputs and technology of sufficient quantity and quality, it is likely that crop production, and consequently the income of those employed in agriculture, will continue to decline. Little is known about post-conflict livelihood prospects of women formerly employed in food processing, who may face challenges related to destroyed factories, disrupted supply chains, and weak markets. Furthermore, agricultural workers are not entitled to the same protections related to daily working hour restrictions as other employees under the 2015 Iraq Labour Law.<sup>100</sup>

The difficulties facing agriculture are reflected in the II responses: women currently working in agriculture most frequently reported challenges related to working in their sector compared to the two other sectors examined

<sup>94</sup> FAO, "Iraq: Agriculture Damage and Loss Needs Assessment," 2017.

<sup>95</sup> World Bank Data, "Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment)," accessed December 2018.

<sup>96</sup> UN Women, October 2018

<sup>97</sup> FAO, 2017.

<sup>98</sup> Dhehibi, B et al., "National Strategic Review of Food Security and Nutrition in Iraq," World Food Programme, October 2018.

<sup>99</sup> FAO, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Government of Iraq, "Iraq Labour Law," 2015.

here (30 out of 102 respondents employed in agriculture, compared to 17 out of 113 respondents employed in education and 4 out of 115 respondents employed in health). **The top three reported challenges for agriculture were renting land to farm** (11 respondents), **accessing agricultural inputs such as seeds or fertiliser** (11 respondents), **and accessing farming equipment** (10 respondents). Respondents working in agriculture also reported the most health and safety issues out of respondents employed in the three sectors of interest (12 out of 102 women currently employed in the agriculture sector). These included negative effects from working long hours outside, and risk exposure while working in food processing plants.

### Population-Specific Working Conditions and Challenges in the Agriculture Sector

**Returnees could face barriers to re-engaging with agriculture upon their arrival back to their areas of origin.** Agricultural infrastructure was especially targeted by armed actors, who destroyed irrigation systems, and planted farmland with unexploded ordnances.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, one IDP respondent, a returnee in Anbar, noted that fields were perceived to be unsafe to farm due to explosive remnants of war in the fields. Anecdotal evidence from FGD participants suggests that this problem is widespread and causes fear among those returning to work in agriculture. Rehabilitation of farmland will therefore be necessary before farmers can resume production safely. Furthermore, security in rural areas reportedly remains a challenge as people return to their areas of origin.

**In addition to receiving limited supplies of uncertain quality from the government, destroyed infrastructure and contaminated farmland, and disrupted markets to purchase inputs, host community farmers have reportedly also faced challenges related to demand and, consequently, their profits.** Male and female FGD participants from Shirqat, though not farmers themselves, reported that wages from agriculture have declined since the beginning of the conflict. Those providing grain to the government for the Public Distribution System (PDS)<sup>102</sup> have reportedly not received payment for their contributions for some time, which de-incentivises production and exacerbates farmers' vulnerability as they engage in negative coping strategies to provide for their families.<sup>103</sup>

**Internally displaced women** in the agriculture sector face additional challenges. An NGO KI commented that many women used to work in agriculture before they were displaced; however, they have had to stop working in this sector due to security concerns and a lack of available opportunities. Furthermore, **IDPs' access to land for cultivation is constrained:** among IDP respondents living in camps who specified barriers, finding transportation to access farmland was indeed the only sector-specific challenge (3 out of 4 who noted challenges). The KI from the Ministry of Agriculture noted that engagement with refugees and IDPs is limited due to budgetary shortfalls and a lack of capacity.

Issues faced by **refugees** in agriculture are similar. Male refugee FGD participants in Sulaymaniyah reported that they came from an agricultural area, but that **there were no jobs available for them in agriculture.** Some unemployed refugee women living in camps in Duhok reported in FGDs that, **though several organisations were promoting refugees' pursuit of agricultural livelihoods and there were farms available in the camps, these organisations only supported female-headed households and widows.** They therefore called for more support for their own endeavours.

### Working Conditions in the Education Sector

According to data from the Ministry of Education, in 2016 there were an estimated 510,686 teachers working in pre-school, primary, and secondary education in Iraq, the majority of which are female.<sup>104</sup> **As indicated above, education is the most commonly preferred sector of employment across population groups, and therefore represents a momentous point of intervention to promote women's livelihoods.**

<sup>101</sup> Regional Food Security Analysis Network, "[The Impact of ISIS on Iraq's Agricultural Sector](#)," December 2016.

<sup>102</sup> The PDS provides food entitlements to almost the entire Iraqi population irrespective of need, making it the largest social safety net in Iraq. For more information, see Krishnan, N. et al, "[Estimating the Welfare Costs of Reforming the Iraq Public Distribution System: A Mixed Demand Approach](#)," UNICEF, June 2018.

<sup>103</sup> Mathieu-Comtois, S., "[Toward Economic Recovery and Food Security in Post-Daesh Iraq: A Framework for Governance Moving Forward](#)," American University of Iraq Sulaimani, Institute of Regional and International Studies, December 2017.

<sup>104</sup> UNICEF, "[The Costs and Benefits of Education in Iraq: An Analysis of the Education Sector and Strategies to Maximize the Benefits of Education](#)," May 2017.

Among the women employed in education who participated in IIs, most were primary school teachers (64 out of 113 respondents), followed by middle school teachers (18 respondents), administrators (13 respondents), and secondary school teachers (10 respondents). Two professors were interviewed, while the remaining six respondents were kindergarten teachers (4 respondents) or university tutors (2 respondents). Table 16 provides a breakdown of jobs by population group.

Table 16. Breakdown of Women Currently Employed in the Education Sector, by Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
<b>Total Employed in Education</b>	<b>16 respondents</b>	<b>29 respondents</b>	<b>13 respondents</b>	<b>12 respondents</b>	<b>15 respondents</b>	<b>28 respondents</b>	<b>113 respondents</b>
Primary School Teacher	14	15	9	4	10	12	64
Middle School Teacher	2	5	0	5	1	5	18
Secondary School Teacher	0	4	2	0	1	3	10
Professor	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
Administration	0	4	1	2	2	4	13
Other	0	1	1	1	1	2	6

### General Working Environment in the Education Sector

According to the KIIs, the majority of teachers are employed by the government, and therefore are entitled to the protections and benefits included in government contracts. A government KI said that most teachers are employed under full-time contracts, though there are several temporary teachers or volunteers due to the limited hiring capacity of the government. The education sector has been severely impacted by the conflict, having suffered damage equivalent to 2.4 billion USD according to a Damage and Needs Assessment conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning and the World Bank.<sup>105</sup> While this is most often discussed in the context of disrupted access to education for children, this also has critical implications for those employed in the education sector.

The number of qualified teachers in Iraq, particularly outside of the KR-I, decreased between 2013 and 2017, while the number of students enrolled has increased.<sup>106</sup> This places additional strain on teachers and school administrators alike. To meet demand, many schools have moved to hosting multiple teacher shifts, which has affected learning outcomes in addition to increasing the number of hours that teachers work, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, in the KR-I the government has cut the salaries of teachers in public schools by up to 75% due to budgetary challenges.<sup>108</sup>

For women currently working in the education sector, reported challenges in the workplace included limited access to school supplies, as mentioned by both IDP women living out of camps and host community teachers (5 out of 17 respondents employed in education who reported challenges), and teaching mobile student populations (3 out of 17 respondents). All interviewed host community teachers from Baghdad reported fearing insecurity from armed groups<sup>109</sup> (4 out of 4 respondents), while other concerns were related to low wages (2 out of 17 respondents) and a lack of written contracts (2 respondents). With respect to entry barriers in this field, private employers reported in the KIIs that a significant challenge was language barriers, as discussed above: IDP and refugee women applying for jobs in Kurdish schools may not have a sufficient level of Kurdish.

<sup>105</sup> World Bank, Fall 2018.

<sup>106</sup> UNICEF, "The Costs and Benefits of Education in Iraq," May 2017.

<sup>107</sup> UNICEF, "The Costs and Benefits of Education in Iraq," May 2017.

<sup>108</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq," November 2018.

<sup>109</sup> The identity of these armed groups was not specified.

## Population-Specific Working Conditions and Challenges in the Education Sector

Findings from the SDR indicate that IDP children have limited access to school and many have missed years of education during displacement.<sup>110</sup> These findings also indicate that **IDP teachers might have limited opportunities to teach formally**. Some IDP teachers who find work reportedly travel some distance to work as there are limited or no schools in their immediate vicinity.<sup>111</sup> A government KI commented that teachers working under government contracts continued to receive their salaries from the central Iraqi government during displacement. However, this KI and the SDR<sup>112</sup> indicated that the government may no longer pay salaries to IDPs who did not return to their area of origin, though the timeline for this is unclear. Another challenge that emerged from FGDs in Mosul was that some **IDP teachers were driven out of conflict-affected areas** due to destroyed schools and threats if they did not agree to teach ISIL's curriculum.

**Returnee and host community FGD participants in Mosul and Shirqat noted that many school buildings were destroyed during the conflict and reiterated that most teachers had consequently fled.** This point is confirmed in the 2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview, which estimates that approximately 50% of schools in former conflict areas need repair.<sup>113</sup> FGD participants commented that the remaining schools are perceived as overcrowded and insecure. In addition to affecting those seeking employment in education, this knowledge could potentially impact IDPs' intentions to return. Host community FGD participants from Baghdad also reported that the conflict has impacted supply chains, with school supplies and furniture becoming scarcer and of lower quality, while a government KI highlighted the broader psychosocial impact of the conflict as a potential challenge for returnee teachers and students.

**Refugees reported being ineligible for long-term government contracts, which severely constrains their job options in the education sector.** Refugee FGD participants in Erbil commented that they needed to therefore look for work in private schools or as private tutors; such opportunities are also reportedly few. However, women do have the option to work at schools within refugee camps. Two refugee teachers living in camps who participated in IIs specifically mentioned **overcrowded classrooms as a challenge**, while a refugee FGD participant in Duhok reported a lack of access to childcare for teachers within the schools. A government KI reported that these positions are funded by NGOs and the United Nations. However, the KI also commented that schools in camps are facing imminent funding cuts, and consequently even these limited jobs are also at risk.

## Working Conditions in the Health Sector

The health sector is another significant employer of women and, based on IIs, is considered to be a preferable and appropriate job for women across population groups. Among the women employed in health who participated in IIs, most were nurses (71 out of 115 respondents), followed by doctors (16 respondents), healthcare workers (10 respondents), administrators (6 respondents), and pharmacists (6 respondents). Table 17 provides a breakdown of jobs by population group.

Table 17. Subsector of Employment for Women Currently Employed in the Health Sector, by Population Group

	IDP in Camps	IDP out of Camps	Refugees in Camps	Refugees out of Camps	Returnees	Host community	All
Total Employed in Health	21 respondents	28 respondents	12 respondents	11 respondents	13 respondents	30 respondents	115 respondents
Nurse	17	17	5	7	9	16	71
Doctor	0	6	0	2	3	5	16
Healthcare Worker	3	3	4	0	0	0	10

<sup>110</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq," November 2018; Save the Children, ["Picking up the Pieces: Rebuilding the Lives of Mosul's Children After Years of Conflict and Violence,"](#) July 2018.

<sup>111</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Iraq," November 2018.

<sup>112</sup> Danish Immigration Service, ["Northern Iraq: Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons \(IDPs\) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq \(KRI\),"](#) November 2018.

<sup>113</sup> Danish Immigration Service, "Northern Iraq," November 2018

Administration	0	1	2	1	0	2	6
Pharmacist	0	0	0	0	0	6	6
Specialist	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Other	1	1	1	1	0	1	5

### General Working Environment in the Health Sector

Though statistics on the number of women employed in health are unavailable, existing data indicate that the majority of women in this sector are also employed by the government.<sup>114</sup> A government KI commented that many women are now serving as volunteers in order to gain experience so they can obtain a government job once they become available. Like the education sector, the health sector was also devastated by conflict, particularly in the seven conflict-affected governorates: the World Bank estimates that the sector suffered approximately 2.3 billion USD in damage.<sup>115</sup> The Ministry of Health reported in the 2019 HNO that numerous hospitals and primary healthcare centres have been destroyed or are minimally functioning.<sup>116</sup> **Access to medicines and health supplies has also been affected by the conflict.**

Furthermore, there have been calls to build the capacity of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers in Iraq. A June 2018 Quality of Care assessment indicated high levels of need for training related to disease management, standards of care, health education, infection control, and supervision among health staff working in IDP camps.<sup>117</sup> Finally, part of the qualification requirements to become a doctor in Iraq includes time spent working in a rural health facility. A KI from an international private hospital in Erbil commented that many women are hesitant to fulfil this requirement because they fear insecurity in the rural areas.

### Population-Specific Working Conditions and Challenges in the Health Sector

From the IIs, only 4 out of 115 women currently employed in health reported challenges. **Host community respondents** currently employed in health reported the most challenges. These women noted challenges related to insecurity in Baghdad, **access to health supplies**, and **disagreement between doctors and patients**. The FGDs offered additional insight into some obstacles that women in these sectors face. **The biggest obstacle refugees reported facing when working in health in Iraq is the need to convert their medical certification from Syria**, which takes time and resources. Also, as discussed above, **many Syrians do not have the proper documentation available for conversion**, having left it behind when they fled. Furthermore, refugees are again reportedly ineligible for government contracts, which limits their job opportunities and job security. A KI from an NGO reported that IDPs who want to work in health have limited opportunities in camps, and struggle to find transportation to jobs outside of the camps.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this assessment was to provide an understanding of the challenges faced in accessing employment opportunities and current working conditions among conflict-affected women, namely Syrian refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host community women. Specifically, the assessment first sought to identify existing strategies and projects aimed at fostering female participation in the labour market. It then aimed to investigate the individual- and community-level factors that either facilitate or hinder women's access to employment. Given the importance of the agriculture, education, and healthcare sectors in providing employment to women in Iraq, the assessment also focused on the working conditions and challenges faced by women employed in these sectors.

**The government in Iraq has instituted several policies to promote and protect women's employment**, including the provision of maternity leave, the prohibition of discrimination against women, and efforts to increase

<sup>114</sup> World Bank, Fall 2018

<sup>115</sup> World Bank, Fall 2018.

<sup>116</sup> "2019 Humanitarian Needs Overview," November 2018.

<sup>117</sup> Health Cluster Iraq, "[Iraq: Quality of Care](#)," June 2018.

female participation in the public sphere. Based on findings from this assessment, the implementation and enforcement of these policies, however, is perceived to be inconsistent, particularly within the private sector. The government has also designed several reconstruction and poverty reduction strategies that aim to rebuild the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, each of which has faced immense setbacks as a result of the recent conflict. This indicates that these sectors have the potential to continue providing employment for women in the years to come. **KIs from NGOs reported implementing a range of programmes to support women's employment.** In general, these tend to focus on emergency livelihoods, psychosocial support, and legal services as the country transitions from a humanitarian context to one focusing on recovery and development.

At the individual level, this assessment identified several factors that both drive and enable women to work. Overall, **the need for additional income emerged as the primary reason why the women interviewed sought employment, exacerbated by displacement and increased costs of living.** Personal satisfaction also played a role in motivating women to work: many II respondents reported that they wanted to work, not just that they needed to work. This assessment also found that, among those who participated in the IIs, **women felt they played an active role in deciding whether or not they would work** although FGD participants indicated that male family members most often have the final say in these matters. In addition, most of the women interviewed reported they believe that there are certain jobs and sectors that are more suited for women. These include education, health, sewing and textiles, NGOs, cosmetology, and agriculture. Part-time employment is also considered more suited for women to allow them to balance domestic responsibilities. **The primary factors that enable women who are seeking employment to get jobs include work experience and expertise, educational attainment, and technical training.** Respondents from Baghdad more frequently listed educational attainment as a factor enabling them to get a job than other factors. This may reflect that jobs in this mostly urban governorate could require higher levels of education, therefore making education qualifications more relevant. Women also reported connections of family and friends as an important means of finding employment opportunities.

With respect to the challenges faced by women in accessing employment, both the interviewees and FGD participants noted that the **cultural expectations of women as the primary caregivers and domestic responsibilities disincentivised women from engaging in the labour force.** For respondents who were either employed or had ever sought employment, **the primary barriers to getting a job were increased competition, insufficient education, and a lack of jobs relevant to their previous experience.** The proportion of respondents from Anbar and Salah al-Din who reported insufficient education as a barrier was higher than in other governorates. Other barriers included hiring discrimination based on gender, age, physical appearance, and population group.

This assessment also investigated the working conditions of women employed in agriculture, education, and health. In general, **many respondents indicated a lack of awareness about labour laws and policies relevant to employment in Iraq.** While several II respondents were aware of their rights related to maternity leave and retirement, only four respondents reported that they were aware of laws related to discrimination or harassment. This is a concerning knowledge gap for working women. With respect to employment agreements, **a slight majority of currently employed women reported having an agreement: most women in health and education had an agreement, while fewer women in agriculture had an agreement.** Of those working in agriculture, respondents in Ninewa, Erbil, and Salah al-Din reported the fewest employment agreements; of those working in health, more respondents in Anbar and Ninewa reported not having contracts than those who reported having contracts. Finally, several women (17 out of 614 respondents) reported issues related to **harassment at work**, though FGD participants affirmed that this was a much more prevalent issue than indicated by the IIs. These findings indicate that while the frameworks are generally in place to support working women's rights, the application of these frameworks needs improvement.

Women employed in all three sectors of interest face several challenges as a result of conflict and the economic crisis in Iraq. As indicated in this assessment, these sectors have been severely affected by conflict and will therefore require significant investment and support to recover. **Women working in agriculture reported the most sector-specific challenges as well as the most health and safety issues, indicating that this group needs increased support and protection.** Refugees working in health reported challenges in converting their medical certifications. **Women employed in education and health will continue to face challenges in finding employment as the government rebuilds schools and healthcare centres, again underlining the critical importance of increased investment and support.**

## Recommendations

Based on a presentation of the findings of this assessment, participants in the two validation workshops held in Erbil and Baghdad developed several policy and programmatic recommendations. These are organised below according to recommendations for three groups of actors: the government, NGOs, and private sector employers. Recommendations for each group focus on three main themes: (1) addressing the barriers to women's employment to enable and encourage women to enter the labour force; (2) developing employment opportunities for women in the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, including in the private sector; and (3) increasing awareness of labour laws among all population groups and improving labour law enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

### Recommendations for Government and Policymakers

#### Addressing the barriers to women's employment to enable and encourage women to enter the labour force

At the policy level, validation workshop participants agreed that the government should ensure that labour, pension, and retirement laws reflect gender equality, and revise laws as necessary. This could include the development of affirmative action policies to balance gender and ratios of local to international staff in private companies.

Findings from this assessment highlighted that women face challenges in accessing sufficient education to get the jobs they want. Also, both respondents from this assessment and national statistics indicate that there is significant room for improvement in the level of education that girls attain. Based on these findings, validation workshop participants recommended that the government enforce laws related to the protection of children from child labour as well as laws on compulsory education, particularly for girls, internally displaced and returnee children, and those living in rural areas. This is a critical step in increasing school enrolment and educational attainment and addressing the barriers to education and training. Participants also recommended that the years of compulsory education should be expanded to include secondary school, and feasibility studies should be conducted to assess the possibility of also lowering the age to start compulsory education.

From a programmatic perspective, supporting women to enter the labour force for the first time emerged as a key recommendation. Validation workshop participants commented that the government could help women overcome barriers to employment by opening or funding nurseries and kindergartens for working women, which would increase access to affordable or free childcare.<sup>118</sup> This would help to address the challenges women in the assessment reported facing in balancing childcare and domestic responsibilities with employment. The government could also offer safe transportation to women working in government jobs, as FGD participants indicated that this was an important consideration when seeking employment.

To promote school enrolment and completion, the government could create incentives for children to attend school, such as conditional cash transfers or providing free meals or snacks at schools in addition to enforcing and expanding compulsory education laws. For women who are already out of school, the government can play a key role in offering technical and vocational training for unskilled women, in addition to providing licenses to vocational training centres. This could help to address the demand for further training indicated by unemployed respondents and respondents who planned to work in the future.

#### Developing employment opportunities for women in the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, including in the private sector

During the validation workshops, it was also recommended that the government should continue to prioritise investment in and the development of public-private partnerships in the sectors of agriculture, education, and health. With respect to agriculture, specifically, validation workshop participants commented that the government should focus on the rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure and rebuilding rural areas, while also encouraging the implementation of modern technology. This would begin to address the challenges identified by women in this assessment, as well as by secondary data sources, in rebuilding the agricultural sector.

<sup>118</sup> See also Hein, C. and N. Cassirer, "[Workplace Solutions for Childcare](#)," 2010, International Labour Organisation, Geneva.

From a policy perspective, workshop participants recommended that the government should ensure that land rights are equal for both men and women of all nationalities and areas of origin in policy and practice. It should also develop strategic plans to improve irrigation strategies, adjust trade policy to make Iraqi products more competitive, and encourage foreign and domestic investment in storage facilities and food processing factories with modern safe technology. Finally, it was recommended that the government should develop a strategic plan to provide protection for farmers working in rural areas with their families.

The education and health sectors, both of which are part of the care economy,<sup>119</sup> also represent an important opportunity for investment and development: strengthening this economy and formalising currently unpaid care work would address several labour market access barriers and generate additional jobs.<sup>120</sup> This assessment showed that employment in education in particular is highly desired by women from all population groups, while school enrolment for girls has the potential to increase significantly based on the current out-of-school rates noted in the secondary data review. To increase employment opportunities in education, validation workshop participants recommended that the government support increased demand for schooling by enforcing compulsory education while simultaneously investing in school reconstruction and teacher training. They also commented that the government could work to simplify the procedures required to create private sector schools while increasing enforcement of licensure laws. This would create an environment conducive to the development of high-quality, private schools. Additionally, rebuilding educational infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is currently a priority in several government policies and strategies; this must remain a priority, as indicated by damage reports and feedback from participants in this assessment.

Regarding increasing employment opportunities in healthcare, workshop participants also raised that the top government priority should be investment in healthcare centres, particularly in remote and rural areas affected by conflict. They recommended that the government offer incentives for women to join the healthcare sector, particularly in specialities that are not typically held by women. However, efforts to create jobs in the health and education sectors must happen in tandem with efforts to increase women's educational attainment and training. As highlighted by this assessment, while those who contributed to this assessment indicated a strong preference to work in health and education, these sectors are less accessible to women without sufficient schooling and training.

Programmatically, it was also recommended that the government restore its prior support for agricultural inputs while also working with private companies to strengthen their supply chains, as lack of access to inputs was identified in this assessment as a key challenge. Agricultural extension services should also place a higher priority on irrigation techniques, as well as information about packaging and marketing. The government could also provide small loans or grants for women to start agricultural businesses, including those that are based in women's homes. Furthermore, the government could create extra space in schools for nurseries to care for teachers' children who are not yet of school age in order to address the childcare barriers raised in this assessment. Finally, given that many participants indicated concern about healthcare shifts that require women to work overnight, government healthcare facilities should ensure that women working are provided with a safe and appropriate environment.

#### Increasing awareness of labour laws among all assessed population groups and improving labour law enforcement and accountability mechanisms in the private sector

The government in Iraq has developed several laws and strategies to protect women's employment, and several of the above recommendations encourage the development of additional policies. However, the currently or previously employed women who participated in this assessment indicated limited or no awareness of these laws and their rights while employed, especially with respect to laws on discrimination and harassment. About two out of five respondents reported not being aware of any laws, while only four respondents indicated they knew about laws related to discrimination and harassment. Validation workshop participants agreed that raising awareness among women on their rights under the law is therefore a critical first step to ensuring that women have the knowledge to assert their rights and know when those rights are being violated.

<sup>119</sup> The "care economy" is defined as the formal and informal "production and consumption of goods and services necessary for the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of care-dependent groups, such as children, the elderly, the ill and people with disabilities." See UN Women, ["Issue Paper: Promoting Women's Economic Empowerment: Recognizing and Investing in the Care Economy,"](#) May 2018.

<sup>120</sup> For policy recommendations related to the care economy more generally, see UN Women, May 2018.

This assessment also found that women indicated a preference for government contracts due to the benefits and protections they contain. Furthermore, these benefits and protections are not as available in the private sector, thus creating a disincentive for women to search for opportunities in the private sector, and highlighting a potential consideration of amendment of gender-discriminatory labour laws. In parallel, it was recommended during the validation workshops that the government should aim to prioritise enforcement of labour laws and protections in the private sector, particularly with respect to social security laws and the provision of formal contracts. This is especially relevant for refugee women, whose job opportunities are primarily in the private sector, and women working in agriculture, who often do not have the protections associated with formal contracts, with the need for relevant civil documentation to be able to work potentially posing an additional challenge for IDP and refugee women seeking employment in the private sector. It was also recommended by participants during the validation workshops that the government (under MOLSA) should develop a committee dedicated to conducting routine checks on private companies to ensure compliance with labour laws and increasing investigation on reported exploitation. However, it was flagged that an entity as such must also be under strict oversight with high levels of accountability given the potential for corruption.

Knowledge and enforcement of labour laws is only a first step. To underscore both recommendations, validation workshop participants also recommended that the government should develop and implement mechanisms for reporting labour law violations, harassment, discrimination, and exploitation. These mechanisms should be directly tied to legal services and psychosocial support. Indeed, having enforceable, actionable, confidential feedback mechanisms is critical to ensuring that employers are held accountable and women's rights are protected.

### Recommendations for NGOs

#### Addressing the barriers to women's employment to enable and encourage women to enter the labour force

Workshop participants commented that NGOs can play an important role in influencing policies to support women's employment. They can develop advocacy strategies to promote enforcement of laws against child labour, compulsory education laws, as well as the amendment of gender-discriminatory labour laws related to women's employment. NGOs should also ensure that their employment policies create a safe and enabling environment in which women can work.

Findings from this assessment indicate that programmes to support women's employment should include job training, especially focused on language skills, computer skills, and the sector-specific topics discussed above. Language courses are particularly relevant for refugees and IDPs who do not intend to return to their areas of origin in order to address the language barrier challenges women in this assessment identified. Validation workshop participants recommended that training opportunities should be inclusive of those in rural areas, and NGOs should provide training opportunities to women's homes in areas where women's movement is restricted. NGOs can also host capacity building workshops for government ministries, private sector employers, and women on ensuring gender balance in the workplace and adhering to labour laws.

It was also recommended that NGOs, particularly local NGOs, identify and train social influencers in the field to (1) raise awareness around the importance of education for women and girls and (2) encourage women who want to work to pursue employment and diversify the sectors in which they seek employment. While raising awareness, it is critical for these influencers to include and tailor messages for men in order to maximise buy-in from this influential group, as this assessment has shown that women do not often make decisions about their employment alone. Indeed, as flagged in this assessment during the KIIs, in communities where the role of women is changing to include being economic providers, it is necessary to ensure that men do not feel their role or authority is unduly threatened. Several other studies have shown that this may increase the incidence of domestic violence as men attempt to reassert their masculine identity as the head of household and sole provider.<sup>121</sup> Therefore, as recommended during the validation workshops, developing programmes that provide employment opportunities for men or sensitise men to women working could potentially soften this shift in perceptions and financial power.

#### Developing employment opportunities for women in the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, including in the private sector

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<sup>121</sup> Oxfam, May 2017

Participants in the validation workshops also recommended that NGOs should advocate to international donors to shift their focus from emergency response to longer-term investment and private-public partnerships in each of the three sectors. NGOs could also develop advocacy messages to support an increase in school enrolment and expanding the age of compulsory education, which would, again, address the challenge of providing more jobs in the education sector, which this assessment has found are in high demand, while mitigating the education barrier that girls and women face. It was also recommended that NGOs that are running schools or clinics shift their employment policies to prioritise local (rather than international) hiring of women when possible and focus on building capacity for IDP staff who may soon return to their areas of origin.

Programmatically, validation workshop participants recommended that NGOs develop short-term emergency livelihoods programming such as cash-for-work that prioritises rehabilitating agricultural, education, and health infrastructure in conflict-affected areas. They can create employment opportunities in agriculture by providing inputs and financial support for small agricultural businesses as well as offering training courses, ideally in collaboration or consultation with government ministries offering similar programmes. Based on feedback from the FGD participants, these programmes could also provide longer-term technical support and continued access to materials.

#### Increasing awareness of labour laws among all population groups and improving labour law enforcement and accountability mechanisms

Given the need to raise women's awareness of their labour rights indicated by this assessment, NGOs can support government efforts by also engaging in awareness-raising campaigns and trainings. With respect to accountability mechanisms, validation workshop participants recommended that NGOs provide technical support for these mechanisms and provide legal and psychosocial services while the government builds its capacity to do so.

#### Recommendations for Private Sector Employers

##### Developing employment opportunities for women in the sectors of agriculture, education, and health, including in the private sector

Validation workshop participants also recommended that private agriculture, education, and healthcare companies should implement hiring practices that prioritise opportunities for women. This may involve some affirmative action, as they may need to support women who have historically faced barriers to gaining the necessary education and experience to qualify for some jobs. Private sector healthcare facilities should also provide women with a safe and appropriate environment for those working at night. Finally, private sector employers could offer vocational and job skills training in collaboration with government and NGO partners.

##### Addressing the barriers to women's employment to enable and encourage women to enter the labour force

To mitigate the challenges that women face in balancing work and domestic responsibilities, it was recommended that private sector employers should focus on the development of policies that allow for part-time opportunities or flexible working hours for women. Like the government and NGOs, private sector employers should also develop policies to provide childcare and transportation to working women to address these barriers. More tangibly, validation workshop participants recommended that private sector employers contribute to building women's skill sets by offering apprenticeships and internships for recent graduates.

##### Increasing awareness of labour laws and rights among all assessed population groups and improving labour law enforcement and accountability mechanisms

Finally, workshop participants commented that the government and private sector both have significant responsibilities with relation to securing rights for employed women, and efforts to increase implementation and enforcement of these laws must therefore happen collaboratively. Workshop participants and key informants recommended that private sector companies should be required to host educational sessions for employees on their labour rights. Companies could also develop their own internal reporting and accountability mechanisms to complement the national mechanisms recommended earlier.

## ANNEX A: WOMEN INTERVIEWED BY GOVERNORATE, POPULATION GROUP, AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS, BY NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

	Syrian Refugees									
	Living in Camps					Living Out of Camps				
	Agriculture	Employed Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force	Agriculture	Employed Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force
Anbar										
Baghdad										
Ninewa										
Salah al-Din										
Duhok	4	4	4	5	4	0	4	4	5	6
Erbil	5	4	4	6	4	3	4	4	6	4
Sulaymaniyah	4	5	4	5	5	2	4	3	4	4
	Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)									
	Living in Camps					Living Out of Camps				
	Agriculture	Employed Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force	Agriculture	Employed Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force
Anbar	4	4	4	4	4	2	2	4	5	4
Baghdad	2	1	1	2	2	0	4	4	4	4
Ninewa	5	4	4	4	8	4	4	5	4	5
Salah al-Din	6	2	3	6	4	7	7	4	6	5
Duhok	4	1	3	5	5	2	3	3	4	4
Erbil	2	2	2	2	4	1	5	5	5	5
Sulaymaniyah	0	2	4	4	4	6	4	3	5	3
	Returnees					Host community				
	Agriculture	Employed Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force	Agriculture	Education	Health	Unemployed	Not in Labour Force
	Anbar	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Baghdad	0	2	1	1	1	4	4	5	7	5
Ninewa	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4
Salah al-Din	4	5	4	14	7	3	4	4	7	4
Duhok						4	4	4	4	4
Erbil						4	4	5	5	4
Sulaymaniyah						4	4	4	4	4