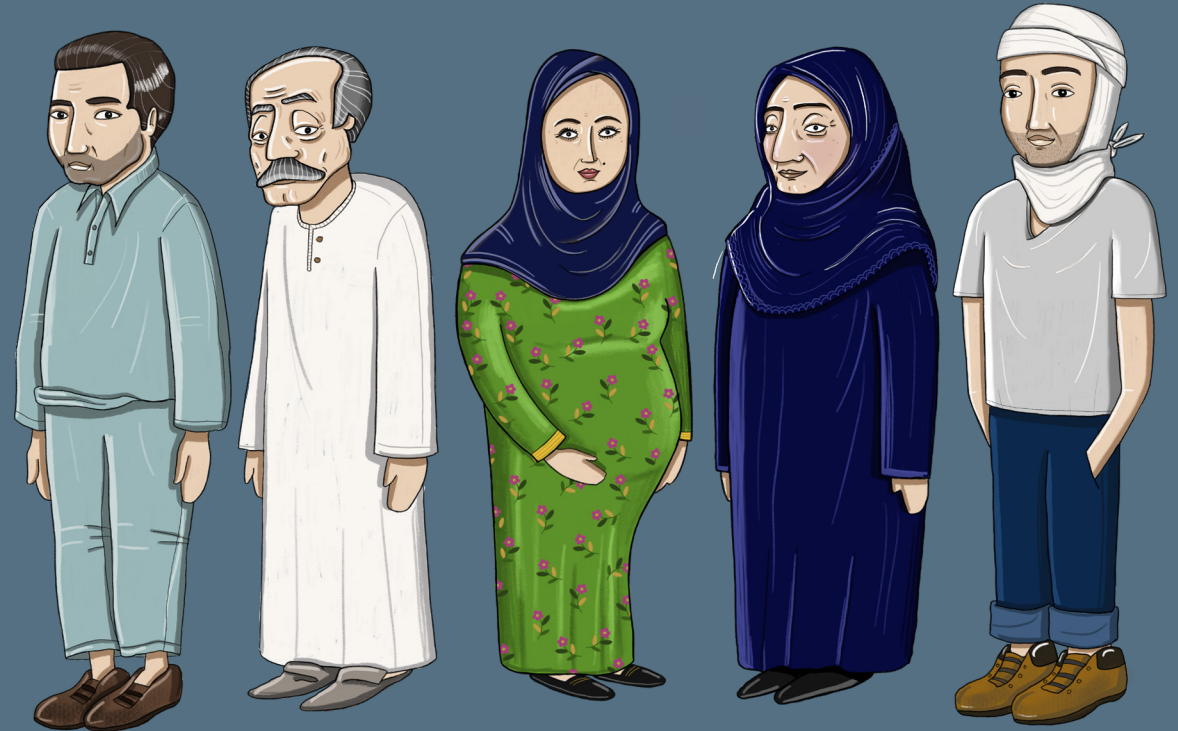


June 2021

Falling through the cracks

Iraq's daily workers live without security, savings or support



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Introduction

In 2020, an estimated two billion people earned their livelihoods in the informal economy, accounting for 62% of all workers worldwide.¹ Prevalent in all countries, informality is broadly described as activity unregulated by labour laws, taxation schemes, and frameworks that ensure social security and decent work conditions. In Iraq, issues that favour this “grey economy” are rife, including urbanisation, displacement, low access to finance, and bureaucracy.² An estimated two-thirds of all workers in the country are in the informal sector.³

Daily wage earners are a prominent component of the grey economy in Iraq. Often referred to as “daily work,” this kind of employment is frequently characterised by low pay, manual labour, and limited opportunities for career advancement. Daily workers are unable to rely on savings or supplementary sources, limiting their capacity to deal with shocks. Various studies conducted in 2020 identified daily workers as one of the groups most affected by COVID-19.⁴

To better understand daily workers’ profiles and experiences, as well as COVID-19’s impact on their lives and livelihoods, Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) partnered with the Cash Consortium for Iraq (CCI) to interview daily workers across four locations in December 2020.

We spoke to 47 men and women from urban and rural areas in Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah al-Din with facilitation support from CCI partners. For the purposes of this study, daily workers are defined as *skilled or unskilled workers hired and paid to perform tasks at an hourly or daily rate for short periods*. Our sample represents a diversity of occupations, including construction and agriculture workers, drivers, domestic workers, and service sector employees.

Key findings:

- **Daily work is a necessity, not a choice.** It offers people with low education or skill levels a fast and sure way to make ends meet.
- **Young men constitute the majority of the daily worker labour force, while social barriers restrict women’s participation.**
- **Since the onset of COVID-19, daily workers have had to reduce hours, accept lower wages, and go into greater levels of debt.**
- **Access to medical care and education has worsened.** People tell us they are unable to afford medication and technology to facilitate at-home lessons.
- **Respondents are worried about the economy, their children’s well-being, and access to education.**

¹ ILO. April 2020. “ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Third edition.” https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf.

² UNESCO Office Iraq. 2019. “Assessment of the labour market & skills analysis: Iraq and Kurdistan Region-Iraq: informal sector.” <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371374>.

³ UNESCO Office Iraq (2019).

⁴ National Protection Cluster. September 2020. “Protection monitoring in response to COVID-19 analysis dashboard.”; Cash Consortium for Iraq. August 2020 (unpublished). “Community Committees Perception Survey Report.”

Reading this report

To weave tangible experiences into the narrative and bring findings to life, five ‘key personas’ were created during data analysis in collaboration with project partners. We based the resulting personas on geographical areas (urban/rural), demographic characteristics, and job sector. Quotes were derived from respondents who share these similar traits. For privacy reasons, names are fictionalised.

To read their stories in full, go to the [Appendix](#).

Additional quotes in the report are authentic and have been extracted from individual transcripts.

Recommendations for the response

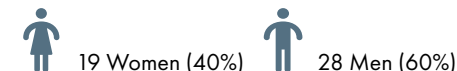
- 1. Improve access to daily work.** Facilitate linkages between workers and potential employers at the local level, through digital platforms, employment centres, or other connection hubs.
- 2. Increase appropriate daily work opportunities for women.** Work with local committees and support networks to reduce obstacles and identify low-risk income-generating activities – such as home-based businesses and farming grants – to bridge the gender gap in the day-wage workforce.
- 3. Improve daily work conditions.** Work in partnership with actors such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Iraq Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to advocate for decent work conditions at the national and the local level to reduce the potential for exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and unfair pay for daily workers. When humanitarian and development actors are facilitating access to employment opportunities, they should raise awareness for employees of their rights as workers, as well as with employers on labour standards. This should likewise include expansion of government social protection assistance to account for daily workers as a particularly vulnerable group with distinct needs for unemployment and old-age pension support.
- 4. Support transition from daily work to better employment opportunities.** In line with the Iraqi government's White Paper initiative,⁵ advocate with relevant government stakeholders and financial service providers at the local and national level to establish an enabling environment for private sector growth as an engine for increased employment. Value chain and market systems development may yield promising results when applied to sectors with high growth potential, such as agriculture, food processing, construction, manufacturing, and the digital economy. This should likewise include skills development programmes, where curricula design should consider social mobility and career progression opportunities for vulnerable groups (including those with low levels of education). Government-run technical and vocational education and training centers, as well as private providers, should be supported to expand, with focus on market-based curricula.

⁵ In October 2020, the Iraqi government formally adopted 'The White Paper for Economic Reform,' a programme that seeks to set out a clear roadmap for a more diversified and dynamic economy: Government of Iraq. October 2020. "White Paper for Economic Reform." <https://gds.gov.iq/iraqs-white-paper-for-economic-reforms-vision-and-key-objectives/>

Demographics of respondents

47 telephone surveys

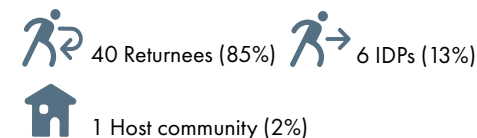
Gender



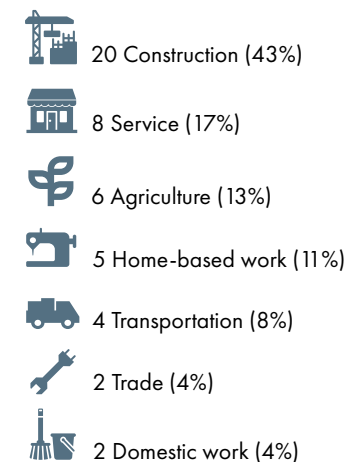
Location type



Status



Sector



A day in the life of a daily worker in Iraq during the pandemic

These personas are fictional people representing the perceptions of daily workers sharing similar characteristics. Through quotes and illustrations, the personas enable us to better visualise their experiences. Stories and quotes featured in the report come directly from respondents.



Rasha

Kirkuk | urban

"I am 45 years old and have four children. Before the pandemic my day was limited to household tasks, visiting parents, caring for children and following up on their education, and working as a tailor for a woman who owns a sewing workshop. I do not have a breadwinner in my household and this work is our only source of income. I used to work daily and on demand, and it was good and our needs were met, until the virus hit Iraq. This reduced our income and forced us to ask relatives and other people for help, and it increased our debts. Only a few of our needs are being met, education is suspended, and accessing medical services is very difficult. Life is no longer normal. Work is less and the economic situation is very bad."



Khalid

Ninewa | urban

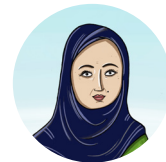
"I am 22 years old and work in construction. I live at home and support my mother and father. Before, life was normal. The usual daily routine was to go out to work and take a leisurely walk, and bring home fruits and vegetables for the family. We used to see friends, visit relatives, make meals, and go out for picnics. Now, quarantine is something new for us and for the whole world. We are not going outside – only for basic and essential needs – and trying to avoid being among crowds. I spend time at home and stay in bed, and family problems have increased because money is not coming in. Fear exists in people's hearts because of the economic, education, and health situation. Work days have been reduced due to the economic crisis caused by the Corona pandemic."



Saad

Salah al-Din | urban

"I am a 38 year-old goods porter. Me, my wife and our three children are displaced from another village here in Salah al-Din. Before Corona, the employment rate was higher and wages were good, but now there is less work and wages are low. Iraq is going through a difficult situation right now. There is high unemployment and people fear that the economic situation will worsen and the virus will continue spreading."



Amal

Diyala | rural

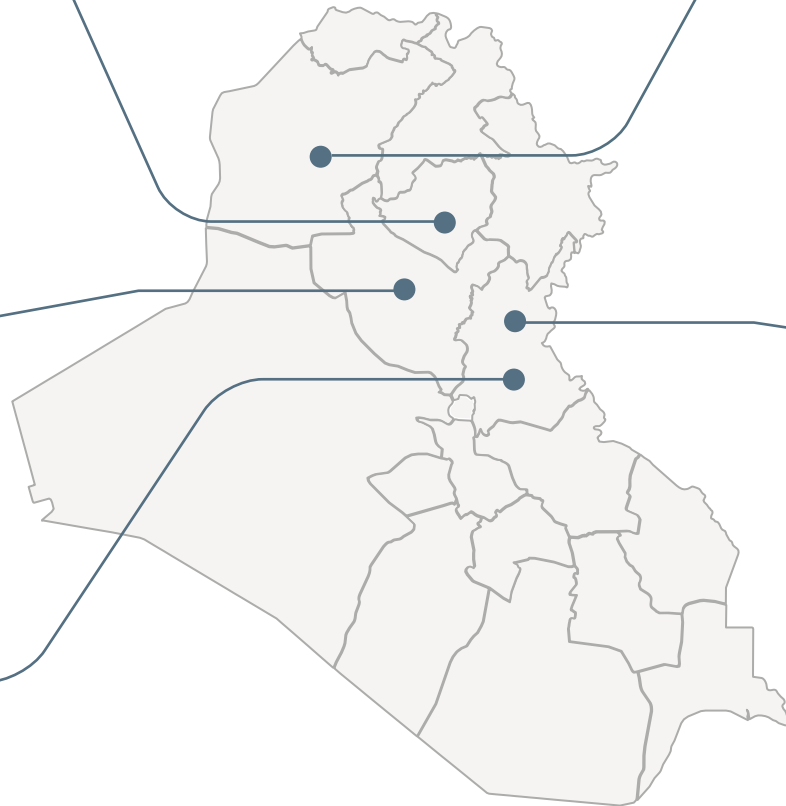
"I am a 26 year-old with a husband and two children, and another on the way. Before Corona, I was going between taking care of the house, preparing food, caring for children, and working as a farmer for a person who has a large orchard. I raise livestock, sell milk, and participate in the harvest. My day depends on what I accomplish, and the amount of milk sold, since I keep half of the profits. I used to go to the field three days a week, but now after the crisis I go one day a week due to the pandemic and the restrictions. The owner of the field lost half of his crop and had to sell half of his cows to pay for this loss. The work is now limited to raising cattle."



Abdulrahman

Diyala | rural

"I am a 58 year-old construction worker with diabetes. Before the pandemic, I would go to work in the morning and come back in the afternoon. But now I don't go out of the house except out of necessity due to my old age. These days I eat, sleep, and sit in the garden. It's difficult now because I am old and afraid of getting infected, and there are no job opportunities. We have no communication with family and friends and have to adhere to public safety recommendations, like wearing a mask and gloves."





Day labour is a common, but not necessarily desirable, path to income

Most respondents say that daily work is a common way to earn a living in their community, primarily due to lack of skills and education, and the overall absence of formal work. Similar to other countries in the region, the public sector hosts the bulk of formal employment in Iraq.⁶ Government jobs are highly desirable because they offer job security, higher wages, and social security coverage. Three-quarters of people we spoke to, and almost all of the women and rural respondents, engage in day labour out of necessity rather than choice. While people believe it is the most convenient way to earn money quickly, many mention disadvantages, including exploitation, low wages, instability, and physically demanding tasks. Evidence from the ILO suggests this a global phenomenon: informality most often arises out of the absence of other means of livelihood and a lack of formal sector opportunities.⁷

Demand for labour is contingent on season, sector, and location

Respondents say day labourers typically work in construction or agriculture, and that summer is the best time to find opportunities. Construction work is considered stable, although projects are often scaled down or put on hold due to rain and bad weather during winter. Farm work is seasonal and dependent on the needs of individual farm owners who hire in small numbers.

Versatility is helpful for those trying to make ends meet. People say shifting sectors is easy to do as tasks require few skills, but note that jobs are scarce. People over 50 find it more challenging to change industries. Overall, people perceive urban areas to have higher wages, more jobs, and a diversity of sectors while in rural locations opportunities are limited to agriculture.

Most respondents expressed interest in receiving training to gain new skills, diversify job prospects, and earn more money. But some see such initiatives as impractical. Given the low-skill nature of work, they see themselves as proficient enough in what they do and do not see the need for more instruction. Others say there is no demand in the labour market for their skillset.



I need new skills, like learning to use a computer, because gaining experience and skills is important for diversifying job opportunities and enabling workers to work in more than one field. – Male goods porter, rural Ninewa, age 25



Many people depend entirely on daily wage work for their subsistence due to the lack of other work. Most workers are men, and for women there are less opportunities, especially for the uneducated.



Rasha - urban Kirkuk
45 year-old tailor



I do not need specific skills because my job does not require experience. I don't want training. – Female food vendor, urban Ninewa, age 43

⁶ UNESCO Office Iraq (2019).

⁷ ILO. 2018. "Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture. Third edition." https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_626831.pdf.



باطون

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The day-wage workforce has a gender participation gap

According to those surveyed, young men constitute much of the informal workforce. Often this is due to the nature of the work itself, which respondents describe as strenuous and inappropriate or too difficult for women and older people to manage. Both men and women question women's capacities to undertake physically demanding tasks. "Most of those who depend on wages from daily work are the ones who are able to endure bodily and physical pressures," a tailor from rural Kirkuk told us. But this is not the only factor influencing women's participation. Some female respondents point to Iraqi society, saying customs and norms reduce opportunities or restrict them to certain occupations deemed more appropriate for their gender, such as agricultural work. While studies do show higher rates of female employment in agriculture,⁸ women are often confined to their own family farms and are prohibited from working elsewhere.⁹

Demographics of daily workers may be changing, however. Respondents in Kirkuk say men and women participate equally in day labour to fill income gaps left by heads of household who were lost to the conflict against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Recent CCI research on gender and livelihoods indicates that women are contributing more actively to household income than before.¹⁰

Job scarcity and informal arrangements make it difficult to meet needs

Finding daily work was already a challenging process prior to COVID-19. Connections are essential: according to more than half of respondents, finding work is impossible without a social network. Gathering in public places – including markets and meeting points – is a common way of seeking work. People approach shopkeepers and other potential employers directly, passing around their mobile numbers in the hope of landing an opportunity. This is less common for women and people from rural areas. People see it as easier for those with education, skills, and connections to get hired. Most respondents say finding work has been more difficult during COVID-19.

In most cases, working hours, pay, and other conditions are agreed verbally. Without a formal employment arrangement, people are often left vulnerable to exploitation, unfair wages, and unsafe working conditions. Around one-third of respondents do not trust their employers to pay them fairly or on time. But some find flexibility in precarity, saying they have freedom to move onto other opportunities if conditions are unfavourable.

Most people say day labour is their only source of income, and that it does not generate enough to meet their needs. While wages can cover basic necessities like food, it is often difficult to stretch income to cover clothing, medicine, and doctor's visits.

⁸ UNESCO Office Iraq (2019).

⁹ Oxfam. 2015. "CLARA: Designing safer livelihoods programs in Iraq." <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/clara-designing-safer-livelihoods-programs-in-iraq-560876/>.

¹⁰ (Forthcoming) Cash Consortium for Iraq. "Gender Analysis of Economic Empowerment Programming on Household and Community Dynamics in Rural and urban Areas of Ninewa and Salah al-Din."



There is a difference in terms of tasks, responsibilities, thinking and feelings, and providing care, cooking, attention to the home and children. These are the responsibilities of women, and you find that work and earning a living are the responsibilities of men. The reason for this difference is due to nature, customs and traditions, and the Islamic religion of the Arab community. – Male construction worker, urban Salah al-Din, age 30



Usually, I would go to the market and wait with other labourers in a specific area for someone to hire me. I would also give my mobile number to people, and in case there was work, they would call me. I don't think it's possible to find a job without connections and networking – at least it's not easy. Those who have *wasta** get more opportunities, and this has become worse during the pandemic.



Khalid - urban Ninewa
22 year-old construction worker

*'Wasta' is a widely-used Arabic term which loosely translates to "personal connections," "clout," or "influence."

خضار و فواكه



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COVID-19 and its containment measures exacerbate economic and social vulnerability

Curfews and movement restrictions have been damaging for Iraq's economy. Previous GTS studies found people's ability to meet their needs worsened over the course of the pandemic, primarily due to income losses.¹¹ Work opportunities have become scarce, leading to salary cuts, layoffs, higher competition in the job market, and deteriorating living conditions. According to the CCI and the ILO, lockdown measures have reduced the median monthly income of vulnerable households by 60%.¹²

In the last year, daily workers say they have had to cut working hours, accept lower wages, and go into debt to provide for themselves and their families. The ILO and CCI report similar findings: 72% of respondents in their recent COVID-19 rapid assessment lost income due to reductions in working hours, and 81% have taken on debt to make ends meet.¹³ Workers without formal written contracts were also more likely to experience wage loss.¹⁴ People we surveyed believe those working for a daily wage have been more affected by the pandemic than other occupation groups, given their lack of job security, savings, and supplemental sources of income.

Around half of respondents have felt unsafe on the job due to worries about contracting COVID-19. Some were provided with protective equipment by their employers, but this did not necessarily ease anxieties. Others say they have had to purchase protective equipment at their own expense. Women and older people have felt less safe than men and those from other age groups.

Easing pandemic restrictions had little effect on livelihoods

Government-imposed lockdown measures were temporarily lifted during the summer of 2020. Despite indications that this might have improved vulnerable households' access to work,¹⁵ respondents in this study saw few changes. While people experienced improvements in their social life, the job market did not recover. Finding employment continues to be difficult, and some say the situation has pushed more people into informality. Compared to rural areas, urban respondents were less likely to see positive changes resulting from relaxed restrictions. A recent GTS study found one-quarter of crisis-affected people in Iraq do not approve of the authorities' response to COVID-19.¹⁶

More than half of those surveyed are unable to commute or change location for employment. Reasons include lack of resources for transportation and lodging, social barriers to women's mobility, responsibilities towards family and home, and nationwide job scarcity. Yet several respondents, some of whom are rural-to-urban migrants, say they managed to find opportunities outside their community.

¹¹ Ground Truth Solutions. 2021. "Nearing a year of restrictions, Iraq's vulnerable are running out of options – and trust." https://groundtruthsolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GTS-COVID_19-report_-_Iraq_-_R3.pdf.

¹² CCI and ILO. 2020. "Rapid assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations and small-scale enterprises in Iraq". https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_751209.pdf.

¹³ CCI and ILO (2020).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cash Consortium for Iraq. 2020. "Brief: COVID-19 impacts on Prices and Markets." https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/cci_brief_-_covid-19_prices_and_markets_impacts_mar-oct_2020.pdf.

¹⁶ Ground Truth Solutions (2021).



I have felt safe to some extent, but I don't have a feeling of complete safety. My employer provided me with some safety measures, but not all. He told me to bring masks from home, at my own expense. – Female domestic worker, rural Kirkuk, age 29



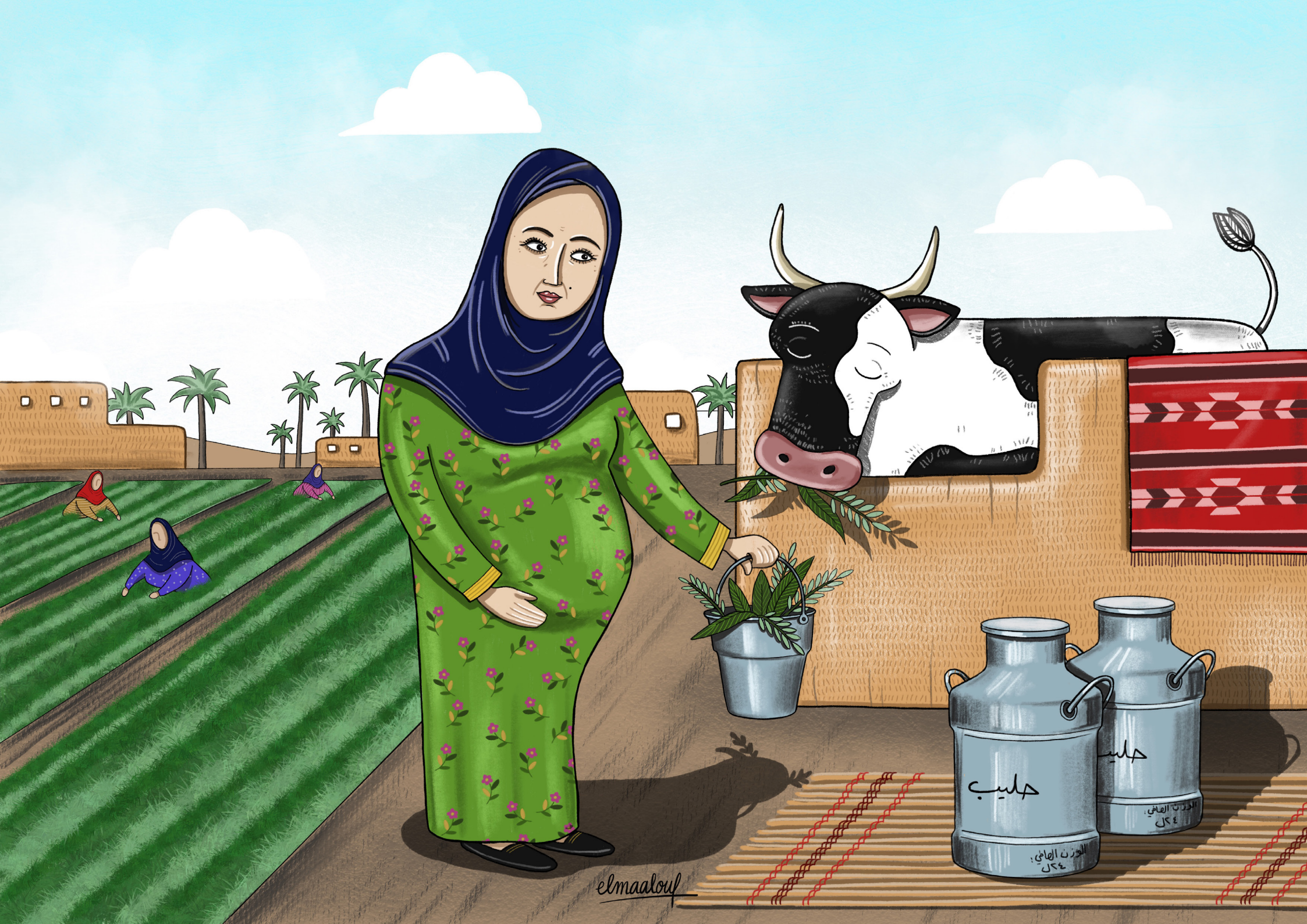
The curfew was imposed for a long period of time and this had a bad effect on workers, forcing many to live in debt. Additionally, a large number of workers were infected with the Coronavirus due to contact at work, and because they failed to adhere to the protective measures against the virus. – Tailor, urban Ninewa, age 60



There was a slight increase in opportunities, but no one helped us to find work or make a living. We have not seen any material support and our financial situation has become more difficult. Our psychological conditions have deteriorated. I used to work five days a week or more, but now I work only a day or two.



Saad - urban Salah al-Din
38-year old goods porter



Distance-learning places financial and social burden on parents

Lack of access to education is a primary protection risk for children during COVID-19, in addition to trauma, stress, and anxiety.¹⁷ Given their lack of financial resources, daily workers have been severely impacted by school closures. All respondents say accessing education has become more difficult. Even if they could afford the technology for home-schooling, often nobody is available to do the teaching. Although schools in Federal Iraq re-opened in late November, hybrid learning is viewed with scepticism. In response, a few intend to suspend their children's education.

These findings are concerning given the negative correlation between informal sector participation and education level.¹⁸ Most participants in this study either did not attend school or only finished their primary education, and worry for the education of their children as well. Financial and structural barriers to education perpetuate this social vulnerability trap.

Health access is problematic due to low resources and high costs

More than half of respondents say health services have taken a turn for the worse due to prohibitive costs and limited resources. People are hesitant to visit clinics out of fear of contracting the virus, mentioning that hospitals have high rates of infected patients. Findings from our COVID-19 perception survey highlight similar concerns.¹⁹ Most respondents say they are unable to afford treatment and medication, noting that these are more accessible and of higher quality at private clinics. Public hospitals, although free of charge, appear to lack staff, medication, and specialised treatment.



“Access to medical care was easier [before COVID-19]. We used to go to public health centres near us. Some medicines were available, and some were not, but doctors were always present. But now we do not go to health centres because doctors are not there every day, and we are afraid of the Coronavirus. There are a large number of sick people in hospitals and we fear getting infected. Public centres lack hygiene and sterilisation.” – Male goods porter, rural Ninewa, age 25

¹⁷ National Protection Cluster. September 2020. “Protection monitoring in response to COVID-19 analysis dashboard.” <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiO-WVIZGY1NDkiZTU2MC00OGMyLThkMzAtNTUwNjNlOGI1Yzc0liwidCl6ImU1YzY3OTgxLTUyNjQ1NDEzNC04YTBljTY1NDNkMmFmODBiZSIsImMiOjIh9.>

¹⁸ UNESCO Office Iraq (2019).

¹⁹ Ground Truth Solutions (2021).



My children are attending school, but it's difficult for them because they go to school only one day a week. The rest of the week is home school, and I do not think this is effective. The problem is that we don't have the time and we did not complete our own education to teach them.



Amal - rural Diyala
26-year old agricultural worker



I have four children who were hard-working and went to school daily, but now education will be facilitated through the internet at home. This will reduce learning capacity. Studying at home is difficult and does not work. There is no need for this because currently, everyone gathers everywhere except in schools. – Male construction worker, urban Ninewa, age 41



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Concerned about the future

People worry most about the economy and unemployment, their children's well-being, and education. Respondents are also concerned about a potential resurgence of the pandemic. Although there is hope that the end of COVID-19 will usher in more job prospects, economic recovery, and re-opened schools, some do not believe the situation will improve.

A majority of respondents are not hopeful they will be able to return to their pre-pandemic economic situation, emphasising that this will require time and significant effort due to low wages, debt accumulation, and the absence of government or humanitarian assistance. Especially those aged 18–30 and people from rural areas hold more negative views. A joint study by the CCI and ILO shows the pandemic has disproportionately affected younger workers, with 36% of those between 18 and 24 saying they were permanently laid off.²⁰

Others are confident a return to their pre-pandemic earnings can be made with hard work and diligence if the situation improves. Although two-thirds of daily workers surveyed do not see any positive outcomes of COVID-19, some note they have become more appreciative of nature, relationships, and their health.



I do not think that my situation will improve, due to the bad economic situation of the country, the lack of job opportunities for women in particular, low wages, exploitation of workers, society's lack of acceptance of women's work in all areas, and the restriction of work to a certain group who own the means. – Tailor, rural Ninewa, age 41

Areas for further research

1. Daily work is a gap-filling measure to provide income. How does it interact with other gap-filling measures, such as purchasing food on credit and borrowing?
2. Does daily work risk subverting education? Some respondents in our study have considered taking their children out of school due to insufficient resources. This carries the risk of trapping the next generation in a vicious circle of vulnerability, hampering their chances to find more stable income-generating opportunities in adulthood.
3. Medical expenses can be highly burdensome for vulnerable households in Iraq due to the lack of available resources in the public healthcare system. Further research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the effect of medical expenses on the ability of vulnerable households to meet their needs.

²⁰ CCI and ILO (2020).



I'm worried about my family's financial situation and I'm afraid that another pandemic will come after the Coronavirus. I think my financial conditions will improve if the virus goes away and they've found an effective treatment for it, because when that happens the country's economic situation will re-stabilise. I expect the situation will recover and employment opportunities will increase.



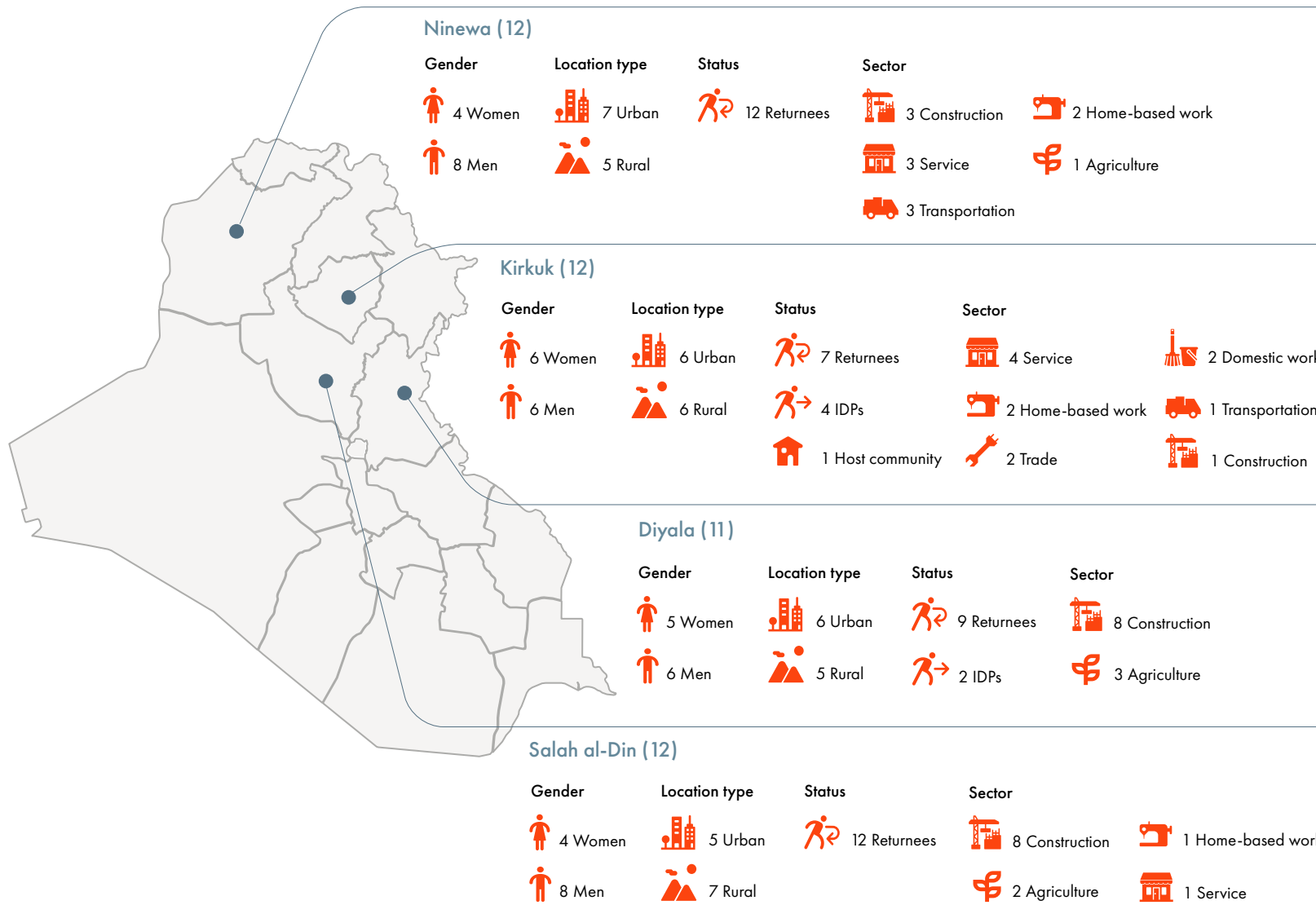
Abdulrahman - rural Diyala
58 year-old construction worker



Yes, it will change for the better. Business will increase, job opportunities will increase, our children will return to schools and university students will return to their studies, and we will be rid of the fear and anxiety that was brought onto us because of the virus. When life returns, parks and entertainment centres will open, and all of this will make our work better. – Male goods porter, rural Ninewa, age 25

Sample

47 telephone surveys



Additional demographics

Age group

36% 18-30
36% 31-50
28% 51+

Education level

57% Elementary
26% Did not attend
13% Secondary
4% University

Accommodation

60% Habitual residence
32% Rented accommodation
4% Living with host family
2% Caravan
2% Unfinished building

Methodology

Research objectives, interview questions, locations, and approach were defined in close collaboration with the Cash Consortium for Iraq (CCI). Interviews were conducted over the phone by enumeration teams from CCI partner organisations, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Oxfam. No participants consented to being recorded and notes were taken simultaneously during the interview. Enumeration teams received training on qualitative research and interview facilitation from Ground Truth Solutions prior to data collection.

Locations

Governorates were chosen based on partner access and feasibility. Of available locations, the four selected governorates (Salah al-Din, Ninewa, Diyala, and Kirkuk) showed the highest rates of informal employment. Respondents were sampled from rural and urban locations in each governorate.

Participants

All participants were over the age of 18. Of the total number of respondents, 60% were male and 40% were female. Individuals self-identifying as day labourers were selected randomly from existing databases maintained by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Oxfam.

Language and translations

Surveys were conducted in Arabic. Interview guides were translated from English to Arabic by a professional translator. Finished transcripts were translated from Arabic to English by partner staff.

Analysis

Transcripts were analysed in MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software programme. Themes and trends included in this report were identified through iterative coding.

Data privacy

No respondents consented to having their interview recorded due to fears around confidentiality. As a result, no recordings took place and notes were taken simultaneously during the interview. Names and other personally identifiable information were not requested, nor recorded, during the interview.

Challenges and limitations

Gender balance

While the aim was to maintain a 50/50 gender balance, female respondents were more difficult to reach – particularly those over the age of 51 – due to the overall gendered aspects of daily work. In such cases teams were instructed to locate a female key informant in another age bracket or location so as to maintain overall gender balance, but this was not always possible.

Perception data

Ground Truth Solutions gathers feedback from affected people, using their views, opinions, and perceptions to assess humanitarian responses. Gathering perception data from affected populations should be viewed as complementary to other monitoring and performance data. Collecting feedback is a vital first step in closing the accountability gap, empowering affected populations to be part of the decisions that govern their lives, building relationships with communities, and understanding local knowledge. Whenever possible, the process of collecting such feedback should be followed up with longer-term dialogue between affected communities and aid agencies. Communicating the results of the surveys back to affected people and triangulating perception data with other information sources is central to our approach in Iraq.

Partners and collaborators

About the illustrator

Tony Maalouf is an interior architect and illustrator. He sketches daily life and traditions, infusing architecture with photography, shapes and colour to create artwork that explores the spaces between nostalgia and modernity.

Cash Consortium for Iraq

The CCI is a multi-donor, multi-program partnership focused on meeting basic needs and supporting the self-reliance of vulnerable populations with cash and market-based approaches at scale. Since its formation in 2015, the CCI has implemented over \$160,000,000 USD in humanitarian and recovery funding. The CCI comprises the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Oxfam, and Mercy Corps as lead.

The H2H Network

The H2H Network envisages a new humanitarian action and systems capable of meeting today's challenges. Its mission is to enable and catalyze change in the wider humanitarian system, driving efficiency, accountability and impact.



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Author

Cholpon Ramizova – Project Coordinator

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About GTS

Ground Truth Solutions helps people affected by crisis influence the design and implementation of humanitarian aid. By gathering perception data we are able to listen and respond to their voices - a vital first step in empowering them to be part of the decisions that govern their lives.

For more information about our work in Iraq, please contact Cholpon Ramizova (cholpon@groundtruthsolutions.org) or Nick Archdeacon (nick.archdeacon@groundtruthsolutions.org)

Annex 1: In Abdulrahman's words



Profession: construction worker

Age: 58

Location: rural Diyala

Family size: 1 spouse, 4 adult children

Status: returnee

Perspectives on daily work

Before the Coronavirus, income was stable because there was a lot of work available and there was no curfew or restrictions. Sometimes the pay was enough and sometimes it wasn't, so we'd have to resort to debt. I don't have a government salary and only completed primary school and this has had a bad effect on my life. I can't find better opportunities. In rural areas, access to services such as health, education, transportation and legal help is almost non-existent and demand for labour is lower.

There are no advantages, but many disadvantages, to daily work – including low wages and inconsistent opportunities due to the country's conditions. There is no health insurance or sick leave, and no guarantees, even though the work is tiring and arduous. But it is the only way to get a job quickly. No one does it by choice, because it requires a lot of physical effort.

Job search

Finding work was difficult. It's dependent on relatives, *wasta*, your experience and education. Competition was high among workers because there were a large number of young people without work. Now it's even more difficult. You have to call relatives or work friends and search, or visit employers and ask them if there's any work available, or stand on a street corner. Because of nepotism, people who have relatives in government agencies or companies have a higher chance of getting a job.

Impact of COVID-19

Since Corona, the unemployment rate has increased and incomes have decreased. Most daily workers are young people because of the lack of other opportunities in Iraq. Many women are also forced to work on a daily wage, especially widows and those who do not have a breadwinner and have children. A lot of women find work such as sewing and other simple jobs. As for government jobs, they are very difficult to get because they are very few and applications have been closed for years, which increases the unemployment rate among young people. The curfew has had a great impact on workers, forcing them to stay at home for a long time without working. We have to rely on borrowing to provide for basic needs. Construction was the most affected sector, due to the curfew and the financial crisis. Many employers and individuals have stopped construction works.

Changes since end of lockdown

The situation has improved somewhat, but life will not return to normal until an effective treatment and vaccine for the Coronavirus is found. Then, the economic situation of the country will become more stable.

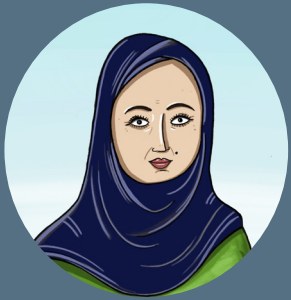
Access to medical services

Before the pandemic I used to go to a public clinic. It was nearby and easy to reach by local transportation. But now it is difficult, we fear getting infected because most health centres lack sterilisation procedures. In the past, I used to be able to bear expenses if I had to, but now I cannot due to my bad financial situation.

Future prospects

I'm worried about my family's financial situation and I'm afraid that another pandemic will come after the Coronavirus. I think my financial conditions will improve if the virus goes away and they've found an effective treatment for it, because when that happens the country's economic situation will re-stabilise. I expect the situation will recover and employment opportunities will increase.

Annex 2: In Amal's words



Profession: agricultural worker
Age: 26
Location: rural Diyala
Family size: 1 spouse, 2 young children
Status: returnee

Perspectives on daily work

Pre and post COVID-19, there was a lack of job opportunities in my community. There are many in our society who depend on daily work because they don't have government jobs. Those who don't have other income sources get married so they can meet their daily needs. The majority of workers are men, young people, and a few women. The situation has not changed since the Corona crisis because the responsibility of earning income for the household lies with the man. Rural areas have less job opportunities than cities. Services are few in these areas and there is little work. Opportunities are mainly in agriculture, and this depends on harvest season. Summer is the best time.

The main advantage [of daily work] is that a person will not remain jobless, they will be able to earn to meet their family's needs. But it is tiring, and risky because of the lack of safety measures during COVID-19, in addition to getting sick in winter. The wage is low for the hours worked. People don't have the option to choose – daily work is easy and fast to find since it doesn't require any qualifications.

Job search

You find work through relatives and friends, and owners of large fields in the area. People with ties to the government, university degree holders, and those with experience [find it easy to get hired]. It's difficult to find work in my area if you do not know employers because they give priority to their relatives and friends. There is a common agreement between employers and employees, where they verbally agree on number of working days per week and daily working hours, in addition to the salary. At the beginning, I did not know my employer. I knew they would pay my wages, but not on time.

Impact of COVID-19

Casual labourers were significantly affected by the Coronavirus. I have to work extra hours and accept a lower wage because of the lack of job opportunities in my community. The daily rate is low and not enough to cover family needs. But we don't have a steady income or the skills or experience to obtain other jobs.

Changes since end of lockdown

I have not observed any changes since the lockdown lifted. To a certain extent, access to services has become easier, but fear of infection is widespread due to lack of adherence to public safety rules. As for work, it's not as it was before. My husband works in construction, and his job is also affected by COVID-19 and the curfew.

Access to education

My children are attending school, but it's difficult for them because they go to school only one day a week. The rest of the week is home school, and I do not think this is effective. The problem is that we don't have the time and we did not complete our own education to teach them.

Access to medical services

Services provided at the health centre are not good and most of the prescribed medicines are not available and we have to buy them from private clinics. Now the situation has become difficult with the increase in cases of the Coronavirus.

Future prospects

I do not think there will be an improvement in Iraq even if the Coronavirus is gone. At the very least, my family members will be able to go to other areas and work. The only positive outcome is learning patience in crises and giving gratitude to God for all blessings.

Annex 3: In Rasha's words



Profession: tailor

Age: 45

Location: urban Kirkuk

Family size: widowed, 4 children

Status: returnee

Perspectives on daily work

Many people depend entirely on daily wage work for their subsistence due to the lack of other work. Most workers are men, and for women there are less opportunities, especially for the uneducated. During the pandemic, opportunities decreased for both men and women. Daily work is not a choice, but it is arguably the only way to live and to get money.

There are no advantages in daily work because income is always unstable and workers can lose their job at any time without guarantees. Employers exploit their workers by enforcing long working hours and minimal wages since they know there are no other opportunities. I have a professional relationship with my employer and there is no guarantee she will pay me on time. There are a lot of employers delaying payments.

Job search

You find jobs through connections, and by asking traders and shop owners if they have a vacancy. Young people who have work experience and university degree holders find it easier. Normally there is a verbal agreement with the employer on wages, working hours, and working days per week.

Impact of COVID-19

I used to work every day of the week for two hours a day before Corona, but now I work ten days a month. I didn't feel safe and my employer did not introduce any safety measures – I took responsibility for my own safety. Income during the pandemic is unstable and never meets our needs. Because of the recession, government employees did not get their salaries and this is also affecting the community. Daily workers are the most impacted because they totally depend on daily wages to cover their needs.

Changes since end of lockdown

The situation has improved very little because the virus is still present. Work has become less, pay is less, competition for work has increased, and education has not yet returned. There are still difficulties in finding jobs because lack of profits affects workers. The lockdown had a major impact on businesses, and consequently weak profits for employers, which led to business stagnation.

Access to education

My children attended school before the pandemic and now they will attend classes one day per week. On the other days, they will get lessons via the internet. Distance education is not effective in my opinion but the issue is that I do not have enough time to teach them due to work and other responsibilities.

Access to medical services

Before the pandemic it was easy to access medical care, but now, there are not enough medical staff and people are concerned about getting infected. The situation has changed for the worse with regard to treatment costs and legal access.

Future prospects

I do not expect a change in my career. What will change is the return of children to school. I do not expect things to improve because of the shortage of work in my area and the debt I've accumulated during the Coronavirus, the low wages paid to workers, and the poor economic situation of the country. There is no positive outcome resulting from this pandemic. I only care about my kids and their education.

Annex 4: In Khalid's words



Profession: construction worker

Age: 22

Location: urban Ninewa

Family size: 2 parents

Status: returnee

Perspectives on daily work

Most daily workers in my community are men, young people, or anyone in need of a job. Many people depend on daily wages because there are no government jobs or other opportunities, or they don't have the experience or skills. They are forced to work for a daily wage in order to support their family. In my opinion, the advantage of daily work is that it's more reliable and easier than searching for a permanent job and does not require high skills or experience. The disadvantages are irregular, low pay – compared to the nature of the work – and long working hours and fatigue.

In our region, available jobs are in construction, so most workers are young men. There are less opportunities for work in rural areas than urban areas, in addition to the type of work available. For example, agriculture, construction, and livestock farming are common in rural areas. Urban areas have a variety of work opportunities in different fields and sectors. Men can work wherever, but women can't. Work is exhausting and takes place outside the home – this is not allowed for women due to our traditions. We can't work to the same degree in winter as we do in the summer due to bad weather conditions. But depending on the nature of the work, there are jobs with more opportunities in the winter, such as working in cafes or restaurants.

Job search

Usually, I would go to the market and wait with other labourers in a specific area and wait for someone to hire me. I would also give my mobile number to people, and in case there was work, they would call me. I don't think it's possible to find a job without connections and networking – at least it's not easy. Those who have *wasta* get more opportunities, and this has become worse during the pandemic. We have an oral arrangement with employers about number of working hours and days, the tasks to be performed, and the payment we receive. But my employer exploited our position and the difficult situation of workers, and reduced our wages, even though the tasks are demanding. Before the crisis I used to work four days a week and seven hours a day, but now I work only one or two days a week for ten hours a day.

Impact of COVID-19

Daily workers are most affected because they depend on daily work and don't have other resources. Income before Corona was stable, but during, it is non-existent – or rather close to non-existent. I work from morning until night with a small fee of only 5,000 dinar. It is not enough to cover my needs and sometimes I have to ask for help. Construction and agriculture were the most affected sectors. Imposing restrictions made farmers lose a lot of crops, and low production and yield led to a financial crisis. As for construction, the economic crisis affected employers, and this in turn disrupted or stopped construction-related activities.

Changes since end of lockdown

Things improved a little after the end of the lockdown, as life returned and people started up their businesses. Being able to move around has had a positive effect on workers, as chances for finding work are higher. There were many people who needed to repair their homes that weren't able to invite workers, but when restrictions were eased, some opportunities became available.

Access to medical services

The hospital is close to my house and previously it was easy to access, but now it's difficult because there are many Coronavirus cases and I'm afraid we will catch it. Most of the time, we take medicine from the pharmacy and private clinics that are outside the city.

Future prospects

There are no positive effects from the virus because it destroyed our lives and our mental health and lowered our standard of living. What worries me most is the financial and economic situation of the country, which is negatively affecting employment. I think that when restrictions are lifted and a vaccine is found, the fear that the world went through because of the virus will come to an end and everything will return to what it was before.

Annex 5: In Saad's words



Profession: goods porter

Age: 35

Location: urban Salah al-Din

Family size: 1 spouse, 3 children

Status: IDP

Perspectives on daily work

Most daily workers are men and young people, and nothing has changed for the better. Eighty percent choose this because they can't find other opportunities. It is the only way to earn an income for the family. Women have few opportunities to work because you need to put in more physical effort, especially in construction. There are more opportunities in urban areas because the population is larger, but rural areas suffer from government neglect and depend only on agriculture and crops. There are more construction than agriculture jobs, but even in construction, job opportunities are few or intermittent and have low wages.

Job search

It was very difficult to find a stable job [before COVID-19]. I was looking for work in markets, shops, restaurants, and any place that needed daily workers. But it was sporadic, and with four children my conditions were very bad. No one finds it easy to find work in these difficult circumstances, but people who have *wasta* have a greater chance than others. There are no advantages to daily work. There are so few opportunities and work is not always available. Income is low, especially for people who do not have a fixed income and for displaced people like us who have additional expenses, including rent. I can't cover basic needs.

Impact of COVID-19

Daily workers were more affected than the rest of the population, especially during the curfew when we were not able to work. People have been borrowing money from shop owners inside the market and their debts have increased. They are demanding we pay off our debts but we are unable to pay them back.

Changes since end of lockdown

There was a slight increase in opportunities, but no one helped us to find work or make a living. We have not seen any material support and our financial situation has become more difficult. Our psychological conditions have deteriorated. I used to work five days a week or more, but now I work only a day or two. I accepted lower wages to survive and meet my family's needs. There is no demand for my skills and I cannot move to look for work elsewhere because it will take more effort, in terms of bearing the costs of transportation and security clearances. I cannot go back to my place of origin because my house is destroyed and there is no shelter for me there, or job opportunities. I have to stay here and hope for the best.

Access to education

My children used to go to school on a daily basis. They loved school. Now they are very sad, and if the situation remains as it is, education will be in great danger.

Access to medical services

Access to health centres was easy and there is one close to my home. But now there is a scarcity of treatments compared to before.

Future prospects

There is nothing positive resulting from the Corona pandemic, only fatigue, unemployment, hunger, and ignorance. I'm worried about the lack of job opportunities and difficult living conditions, and that there is no safe place to live with my family. We hope that the situation will change for the better, especially if there is support from the government for citizens and the poor. But we will need a long period of time to return things to normal.