

MISSING SKILLS AND PROMISING MARKETS IN COMMUNITIES TARGETED FOR LIVELIHOODS ASSISTANCE

ANBAR, DIYALA, NINEWA AND SALAH AL-DIN



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OVERVIEW

This report draws insights from data collected during the assessment and screening phase in communities targeted for livelihood assistance. It combines quantitative data from expressions of interest submitted by Iraqi jobseekers applying for IOM's individual livelihoods assistance and qualitative assessments with local key informants conducted by community engagement teams at the village or neighbourhood level. The analysis uncovers local perceptions of high-demand and struggling sectors, as well as opportunities for skill-training exercises, from over 13,800 business owners in 29 communities. The findings are indicative of perceptions in communities targeted by IOM for programming and do not provide a representative or comprehensive picture of the situation in the four governorates where data collection took place.

The most noteworthy trends were common across targeted communities in the four assessed governorates. Non-food manufacturing and mining were commonly categorized as both high-demand and struggling sectors, suggesting the presence of supply-side barriers. For example, 38 per cent of respondents in Salah al-Din answered that non-food manufacturing was both a high-demand and a struggling sector, and 23 per cent of respondents in Ninewa answered the same for mining. Accounting was also commonly mentioned as high-demand and struggling in Diyala and Salah al-Din (15% of respondents in both governorates). Key informant testimonies suggest that firm-specific factors play an important role, as they cite supply issues due to financial limitations. Moreover, across all governorates, the most high-paying jobs are associated with the government. Construction workers were also broadly mentioned as having high salaries (37% across all respondents), but are perceived to be a prerogative of male workers. Key informants frequently reported that men migrate to nearby areas for temporary construction jobs.

The largest variation across governorates appears when respondents are asked about missing skills in the community. In Anbar, where most of the studied villages are urban neighbourhoods, missing skills include marketing (20%), textile (18%) and pottery abilities (30%). Meanwhile, participants in Diyala, where most studied villages are rural, mention skills related to construction (28%), pottery (17%) and metalwork (14%) as the most recognized. In Salah al-Din, citizens tend to mention mobile phone (31%) and vehicle repair skills (41%). Urban communities in this governorate tend to mention missing marketing skills, while rural communities mention metalwork skills. Finally, key informants in Ninewa's largest studied community, Rajim Hadeed, state that most of their labourers are unskilled people, while skilled community members work in the construction sector. Accordingly, in this governorate, many of the sectors are selected as having missing skills.

Across demographic groups, there are significant trends of gender-based occupational segregation. Participants' perceptions point to female skills being demanded in domestic work, or traditionally female-associated jobs, including pottery and ceramics, sewing, cooking and in some cases agriculture.

Overall, communities report difficulty finding local jobs and a lack of vocational training services available to them. These are often associated with damaged infrastructure, security issues, financial constraints or lack of local demand. As a result, at least one village in each governorate reports migration to larger cities with more opportunities. In the case of Salah al-Din and Diyala, all villages mention this trend as very common. For rural community members, finding work in urban areas can be an opportunity for upskilling and securing higher wages. Moreover, circular migration can contribute to the development of rural areas if commuters and seasonal workers spend their income in their areas of origin.

While labour mobility can present opportunities for some individuals, it is important that those who wish to remain in or return to rural areas are able to find meaningful employment in their places of residence. The destruction of local infrastructure and forced population displacement caused by the conflict severely disrupted local economies, requiring external support to restart productive activities. The data show the need for continued recovery programming to promote sustainable return and resilient livelihoods.

METHODOLOGY

The report builds on two primary sources. First, qualitative data from assessments conducted by IOM's community engagement teams with local authorities and key informants, which provide an overview of economic and labour needs in villages targeted for livelihood programming. These data allow examining details of the demographic makeup, infrastructural conditions, available services, security, social cohesion, movement intentions and other livelihood indicators for internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and their host communities. Second, quantitative data from the expressions of interest submitted by jobseekers applying for individual livelihood assistance offer a comprehensive view of individual-level perceptions of the local economy, shedding light on the realities faced by displaced, returning and host populations in Iraq. This document includes information on 13,848 interviewees located across four governorates (Anbar, Diyala, Ninewa and Salah al-Din), 13 districts and 29 villages or neighbourhoods.¹

Combining the two sources, the report presents profiles for each governorate that highlight sectors with potential for high demand, high-paying jobs, missing skills and opportunities for training programmes. Additionally, these profiles draw attention to contrasting perspectives across demographic and socioeconomic groups defined by gender, employment and migration status. The report provides an indicative picture of governorate and village-level conditions, offering valuable insights for future programming.

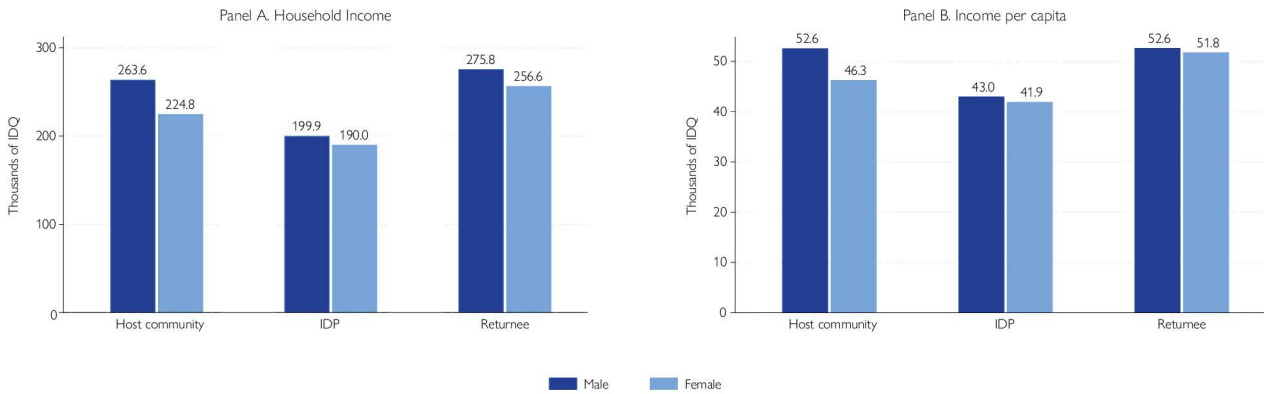
BACKGROUND OF JOBSEEKERS

Figure 1 shows the distribution of household income by gender and displacement history for the entire sample of jobseekers who applied for IOM livelihoods assistance. The group consists of 57 per cent males and 43 per cent females – 68 per cent returnees, 19 per cent host community members and 13 per cent IDPs. As shown in Figure 1, returnees and host community members stand on slightly higher income brackets than IDPs. Figure 2 shows returnees are also

¹ The largest sample came from Mosul, Ninewa, with three communities and over 2,700 observations, followed by Khanaqin, Diyala, which included three communities and 1,710 observations, and Al-Ba'aj, with three communities and 1,692 observations.

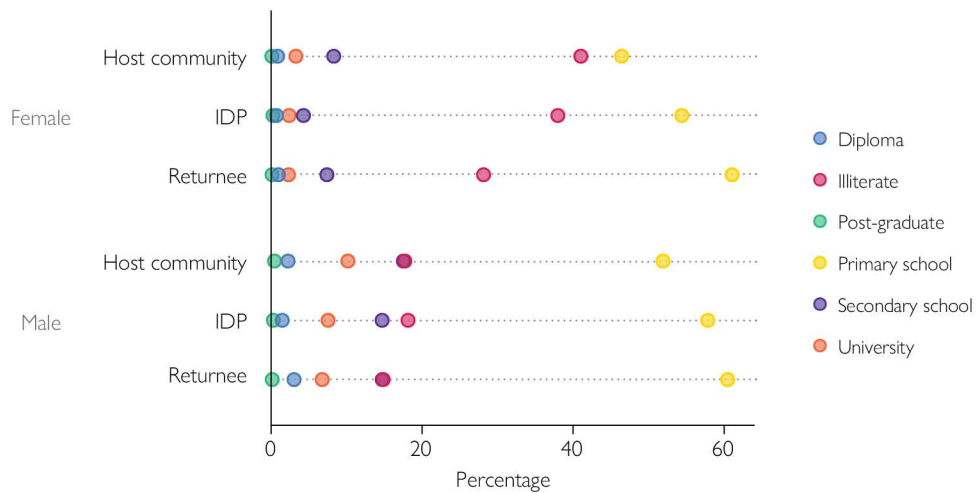
the most likely demographic group to only have completed primary school. Moreover, females within the sample tend to be less educated than males, with larger percentages of illiteracy (32% for women compared to 16% for men). In the same line, the largest percentage of females is unemployed, and the largest percentage of males is employed on a daily wage (both 61%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1. Distribution of income by jobseekers' gender and displacement history



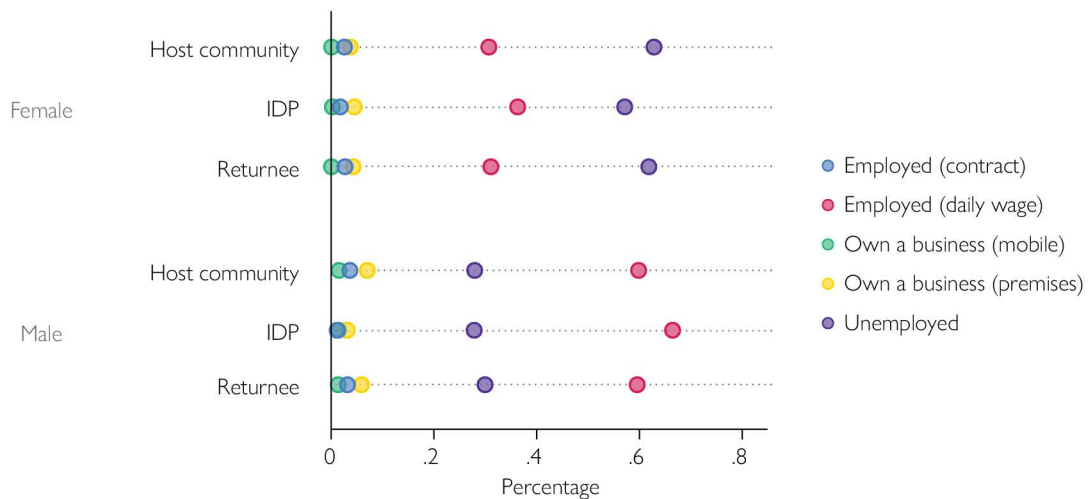
Note: Different combinations of migration status and gender are shown in colours in the X-axis, while the Y-axis displays the average for the household income bracket in thousands of Iraqi Dinars (IDQ).

Figure 2. Jobseekers' education by gender and displacement



Note: Different combinations of migration status and gender are shown in the Y-axis, with colours representing different education levels. The X-axis displays the percentage of each demographic with each education level.

Figure 3. Jobseekers' employment status by gender and displacement history



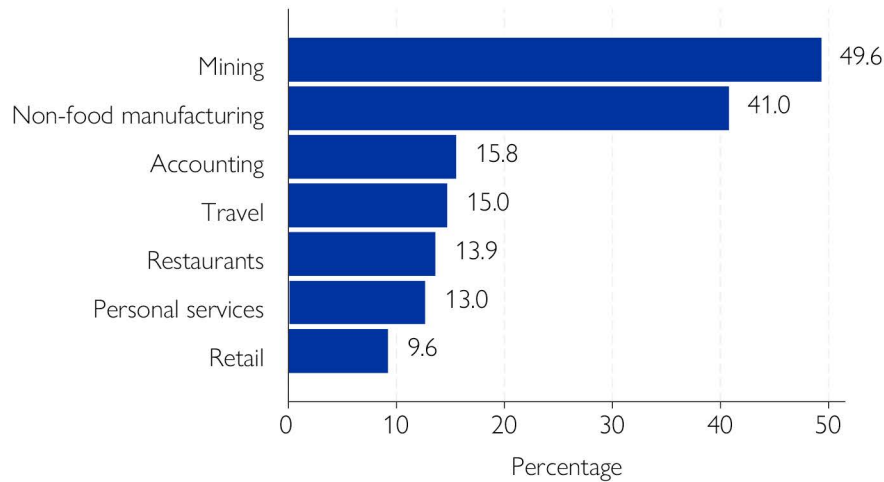
Note: Different combinations of migration status and gender are shown in the Y-axis, with colours representing different employment types. The X-axis displays the percentage of each demographic with each education level.

ANBAR

The survey sample within Anbar included six communities across five districts. Three communities were located in Al-Ka'im, and the other three in Falluja, Haditha and Ramadi, with one each.

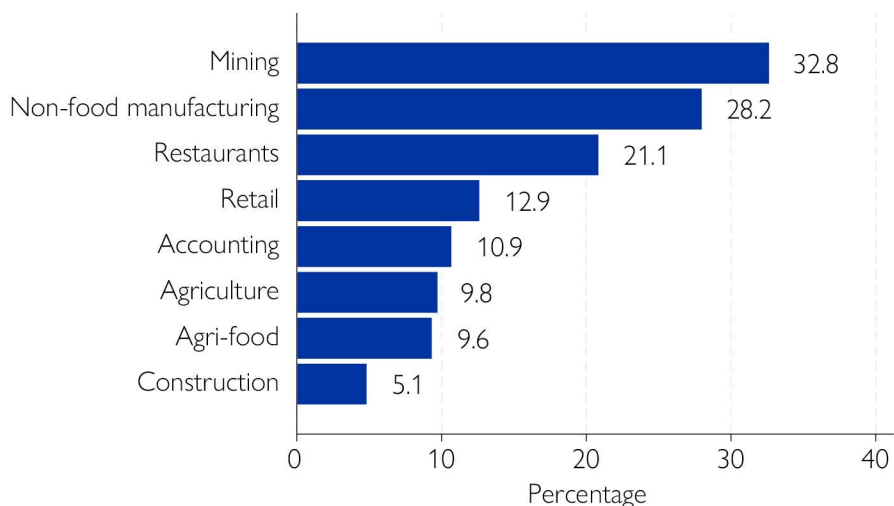
High-demand sectors: Over 40 per cent of interviewees stated that the non-food manufacturing and mining sectors have the highest demand in Anbar Governorate. Key informants also report high demand for food supplies, with frequent shortages and long waiting times. Communities lack access to local suppliers of basic goods and services, forcing residents to travel to other areas to purchase clothing, household items and construction materials.

Figure 4. Sectors with high demand in Anbar



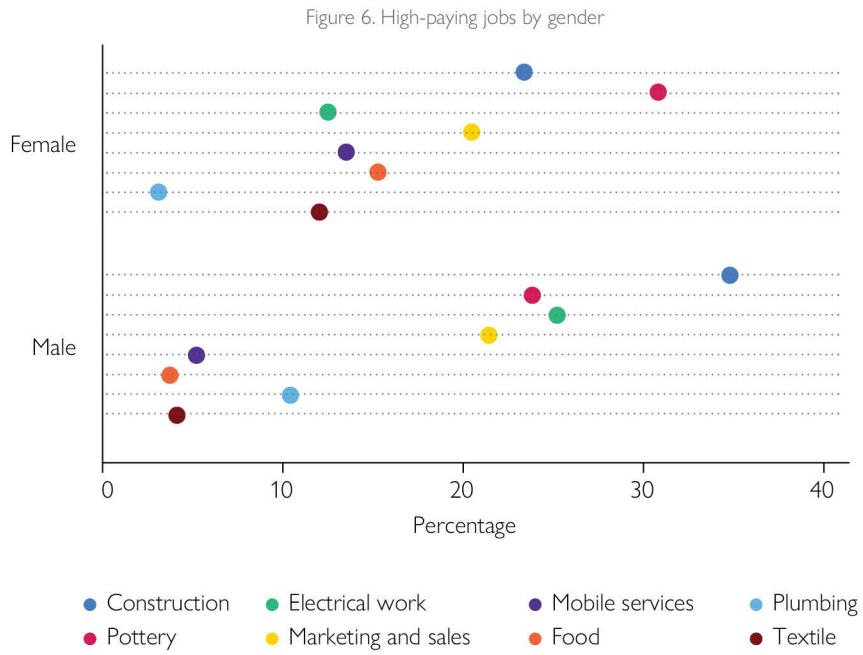
Struggling sectors: There is no specific indication of market oversaturation. On the contrary, in some cases, local community members cite an overall lack of businesses. Residents describe non-food manufacturing and mining as both in high demand and struggling, suggesting supply-side issues are the main constraint to economic recovery.² Key informants in this Governorate often cite a lack of financial liquidity to open businesses and meet the high demand. As community members try to access outside markets, they incur transportation fees.

Figure 5. Struggling sectors in Anbar



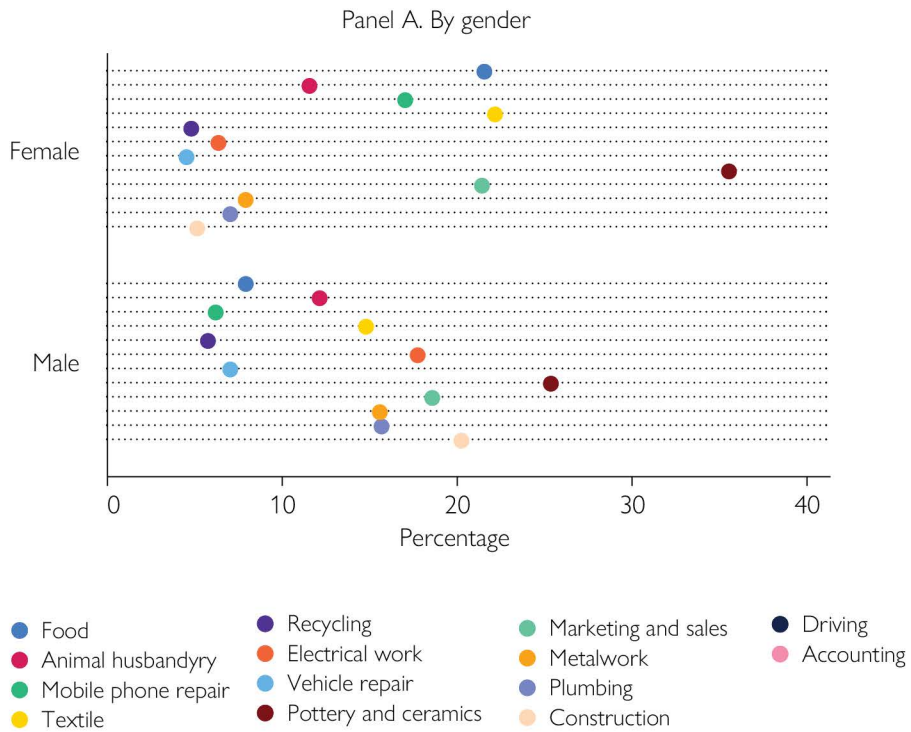
High-salary jobs: Government employment is generally reported as the highest-paying job across all communities. Specific roles, such as security positions and electricity operators in Bezabize Central Camp, also offer relatively high salaries.

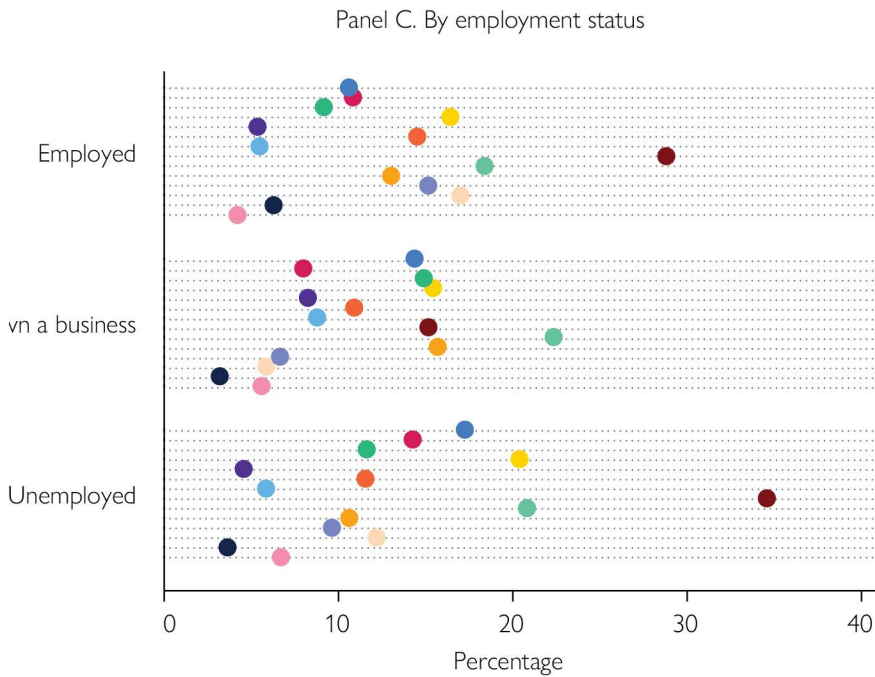
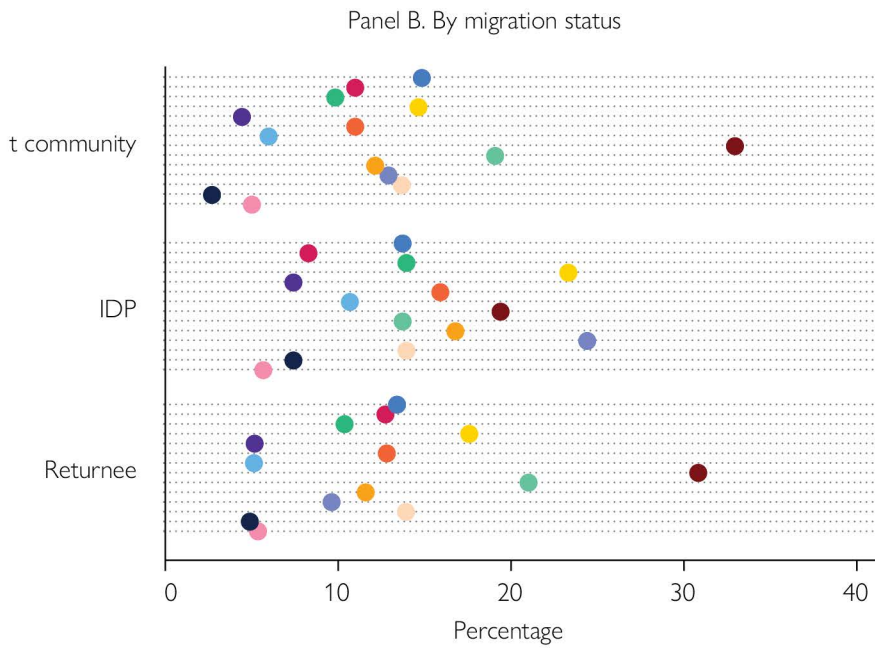
² This tendency remains when zooming into districts and subdistricts. For example, in Haditha District, 57 per cent of participants mentioned non-food manufacturing as a struggling sector and 54 per cent it as a high-demand sector.



Missing skills: Key informants in all communities report a shortage of skills like blacksmithing, carpentry, and technical or construction skills. Both men and women would benefit from training in business skills. Moreover, there is a broad consensus around the demand for vocational training for women in areas like pottery, hairdressing, sewing, cooking and selling clothes.

Figure 7. Missing skills by demographic groups





- Food
- Animal husbandry
- Mobile phone repair
- Textile
- Recycling
- Electrical work
- Vehicle repair
- Pottery and ceramics
- Marketing and sales
- Metalwork
- Plumbing
- Construction
- Driving
- Accounting

Available jobs for men and women: Typical jobs for men include blacksmithing, carpentry and construction work. For women, sewing, cooking and retail work (selling clothes) are common. These jobs are generally available to all community members, including host community members, returnees and IDPs. Agricultural work is commonly available, particularly for men, while women are often restricted to roles within the family property.

Employment challenges: Financial constraints and lack of demand hinder job creation. Communities face challenges like damaged or non-existent infrastructure, limiting local business potential. Small-scale businesses like clothing stores, food outlets and butcher shops have emerged, though financial limitations restrict their ability to meet community needs. The communities observe a trend of families and young individuals moving to larger urban areas to access work.

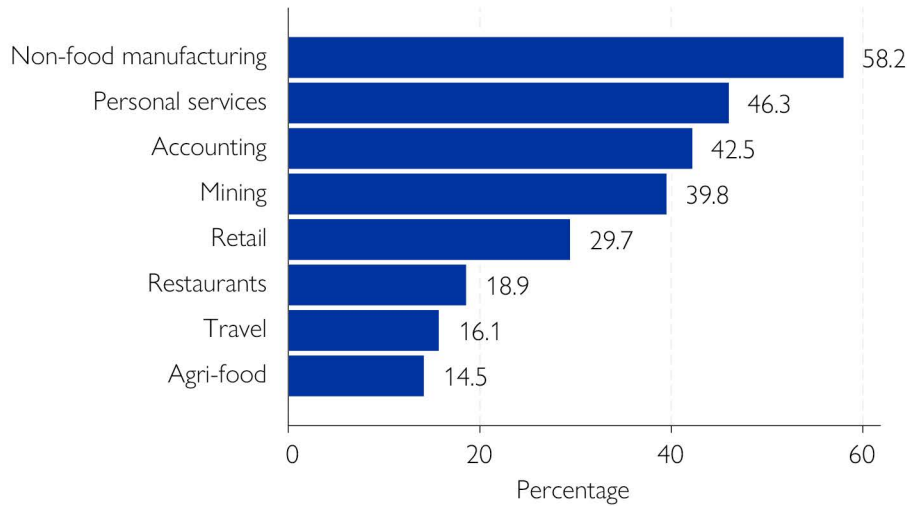
Training opportunities: All communities lack accessible vocational training and higher education options. Interviewed key informants state people need to travel to city centres for training in vocational skills.

SALAH AL-DIN

Within Salah al-Din, information was gathered for six communities in three districts. Half of these communities were categorized as rural, two in Al-Fares district and one in Tuz Khurmatu.

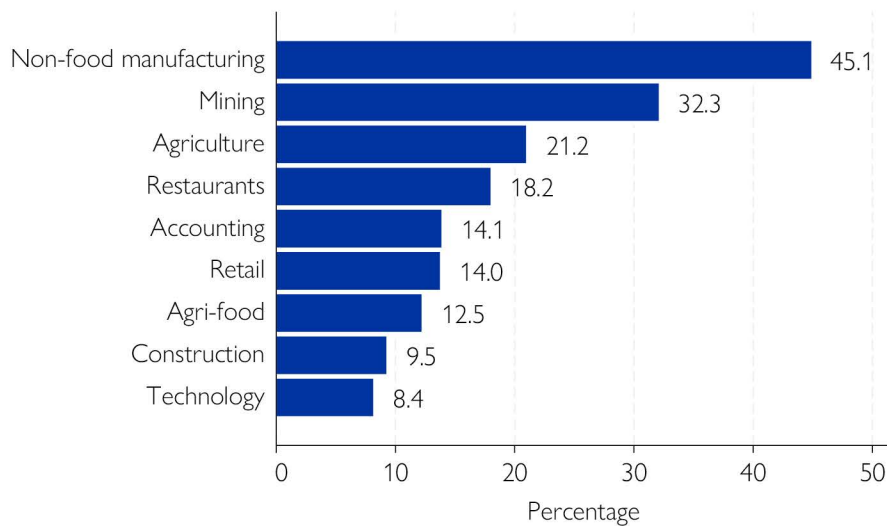
High-demand sectors: More than half of the interviewees in Salah al-Din consider the non-food manufacturing sector a high-demand sector, an opinion most likely rooted in low supply.

Figure 8. Sectors with high demand in Salah al-Din



Struggling sectors: Basic goods are in short supply, compelling residents to travel to nearby towns for essential items. Grocery stores are prevalent, but specialized services are lacking. Similar to Anbar, in Salah al-Din the sectors mentioned the most as high-demand are also mentioned as struggling, particularly non-food manufacturing, mining and accounting. This governorate had the highest percentage of people mentioning non-food manufacturing as both high-demand and struggling (38%), occurring mostly in Al-Ajelyah (71%), Al-Shehabbi (56%) and Yangija (36%).

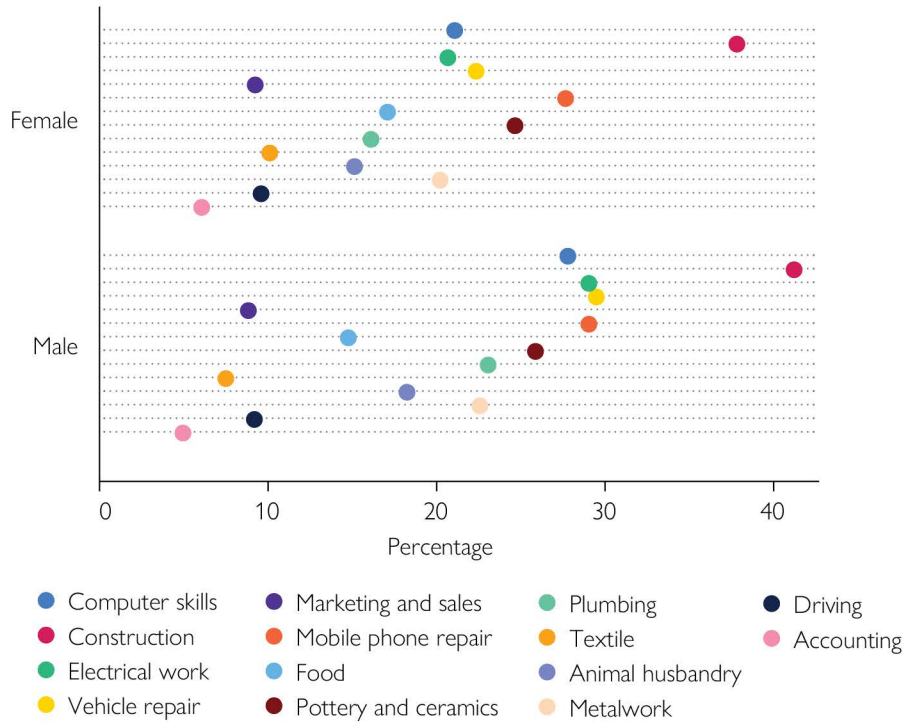
Figure 9. Struggling sectors in Salah al-Din



High-salary jobs: Government jobs offer the highest salaries, with limited availability.³ Besides the public sector, employment options are concentrated in agriculture and small businesses.

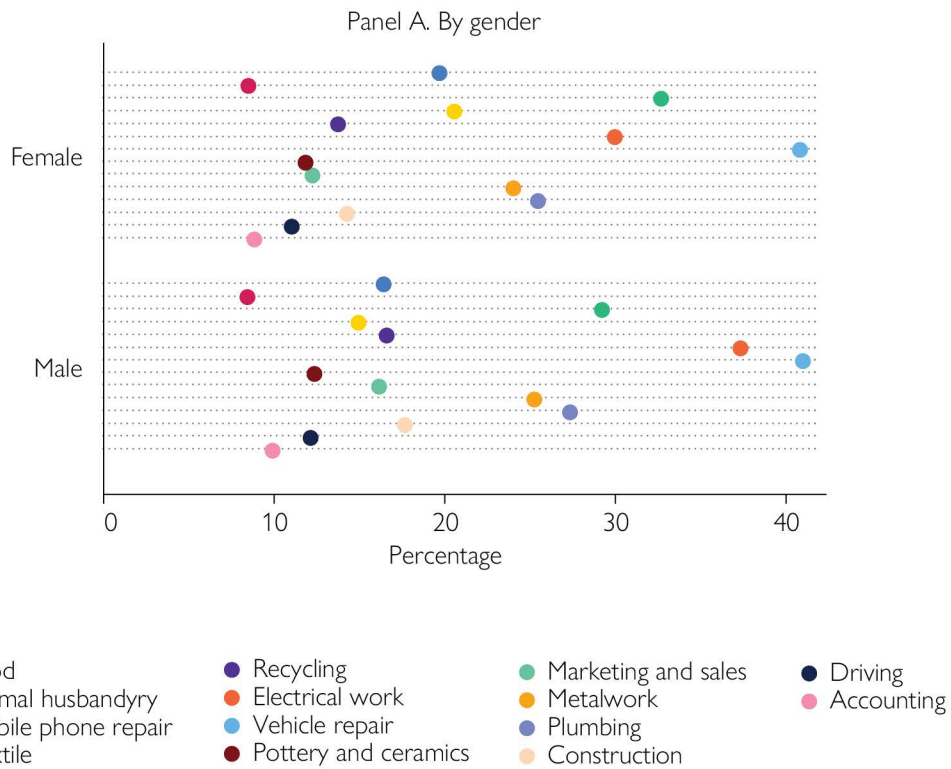
³ As the survey questionnaire focused on private sector livelihood opportunities, government-related jobs were not included in the answer options. Opinions regarding public posts come from interviews with key informants.

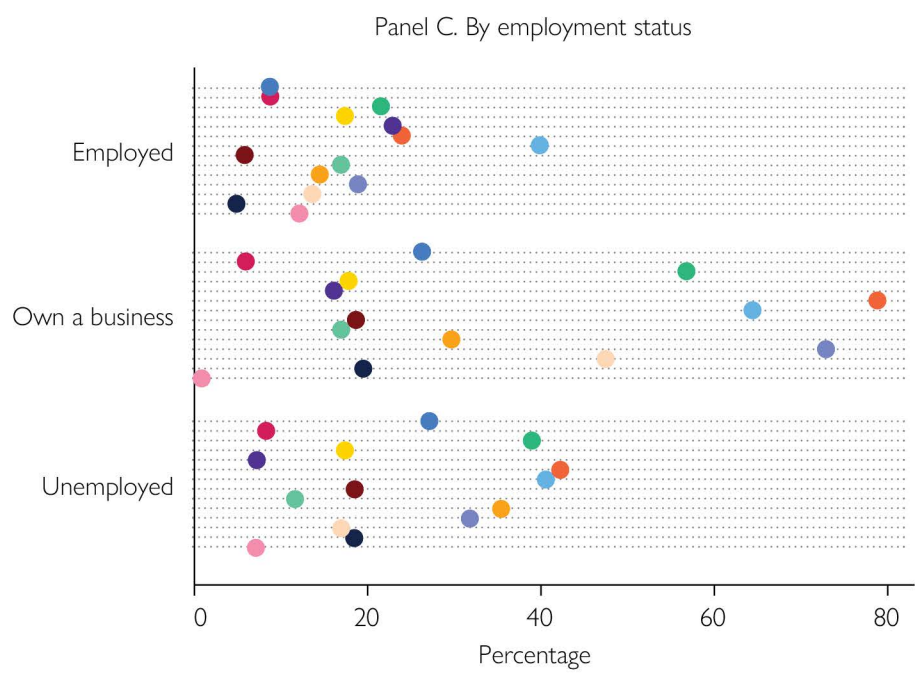
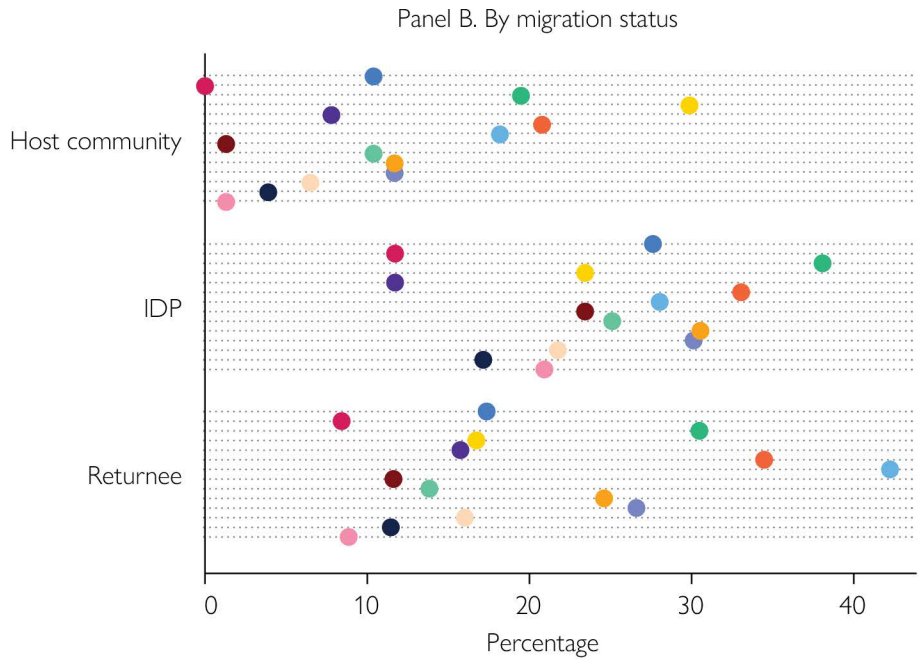
Figure 10. High-paying jobs by gender



Missing skills: The opinions on missing skills vary across gender, migration status and employment status. Vehicle repair is broadly considered a missing skill in the governorate. Interviewees also consider that the community faces a lack of vocational training, particularly for youth entering the workforce and in areas such as carpentry, blacksmithing and technical services.

Figure 11. Missing skills by demographic groups





- Food
- Recycling
- Marketing and sales
- Driving
- Animal husbandry
- Electrical work
- Metalwork
- Accounting
- Mobile phone repair
- Vehicle repair
- Plumbing
- Pottery and ceramics
- Construction
- Textile

Available jobs for men and women: Employment is largely in agriculture and construction. Men often work in construction, while job options for women are limited to domestic crafts (sewing) and agriculture. Skilled trades are lacking in availability. In specific villages, such as Yangjia, widowed or single women head families and face barriers to supporting themselves due to the lack of local job opportunities.

Employment challenges: Limited local businesses and resources lead to high dependency on outside job markets. Skills for various trades (blacksmithing, PVC work, carpentry, women’s salons) are present but underutilized due to limited financial resources.

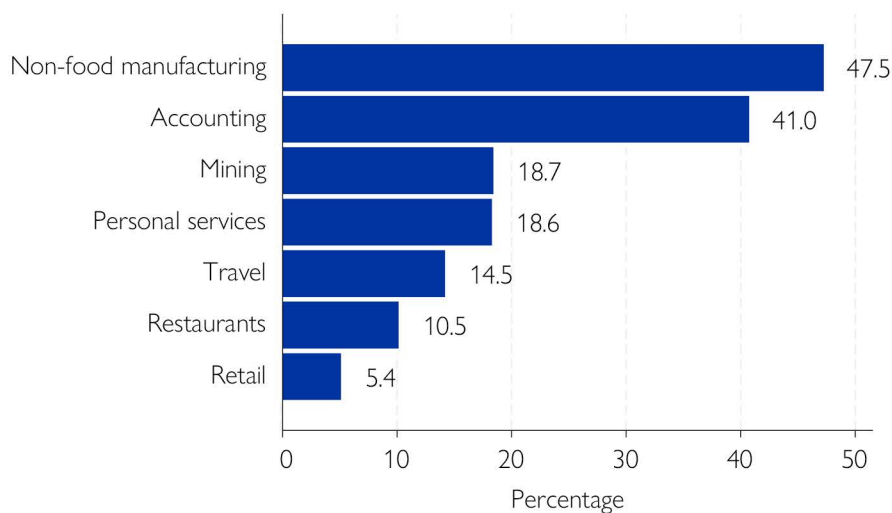
Training opportunities: The economic trend is slowly improving but has remained challenging over the past three years. Support and training for local businesses are needed, especially for women who are heads of households. Financial barriers prevent individuals from establishing businesses, despite available skills in the community.

DIYALA

The surveyed group within Diyala included three communities, all of which were located in Khanaqin District. Two of these were categorized as rural (Al Teneraa and Rabeaa), and one as an urban community (Al Tajneed).

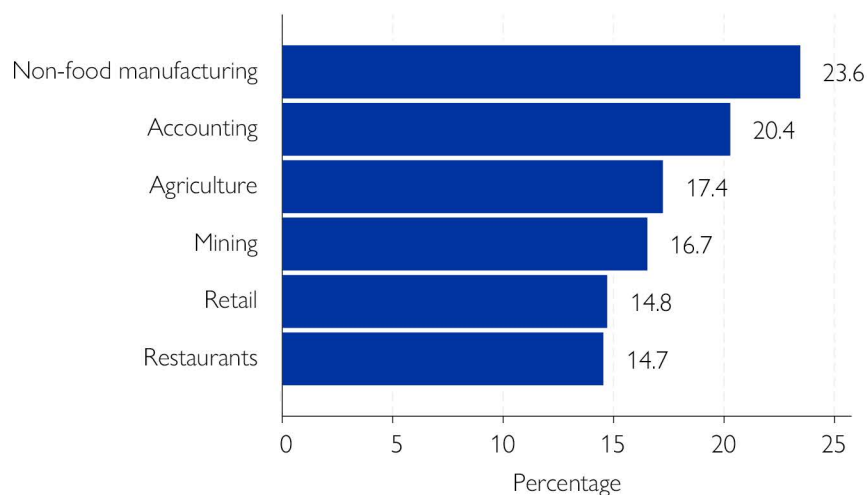
High-demand sectors: As in Salah al-Din, the non-food manufacturing sector was considered a high-demand sector by the majority of interviewees. Moreover, there is a strong demand for construction services, agriculture-related jobs and basic consumer goods, which often require residents to shop outside their communities.

Figure 12. High-demand sectors in Diyala

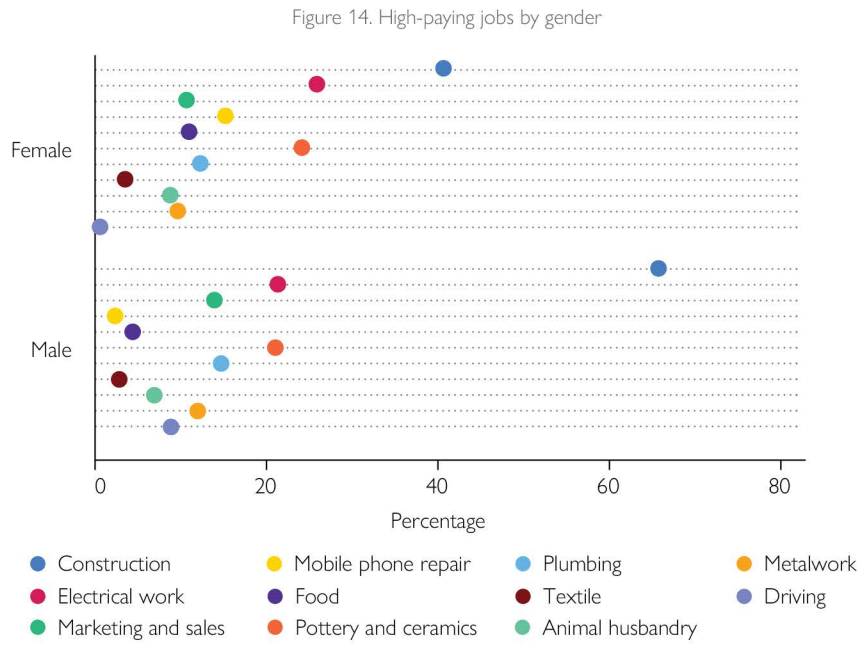


Struggling sectors: Certain sectors, such as the manufacturing of aluminum and PVC products, face oversaturation, leading to increased competition and business closures.

Figure 13. Struggling sectors in Diyala

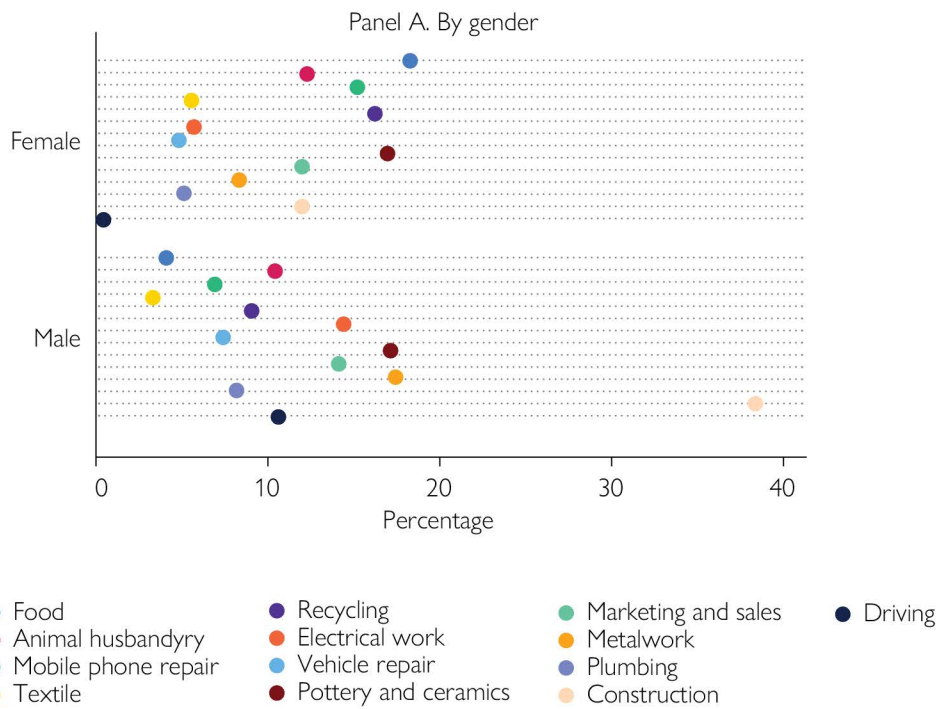


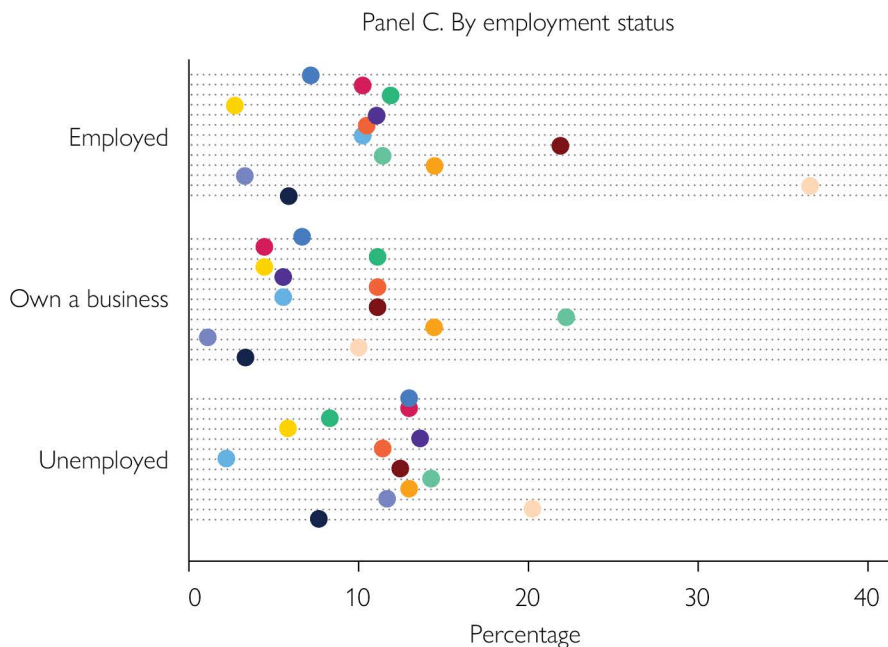
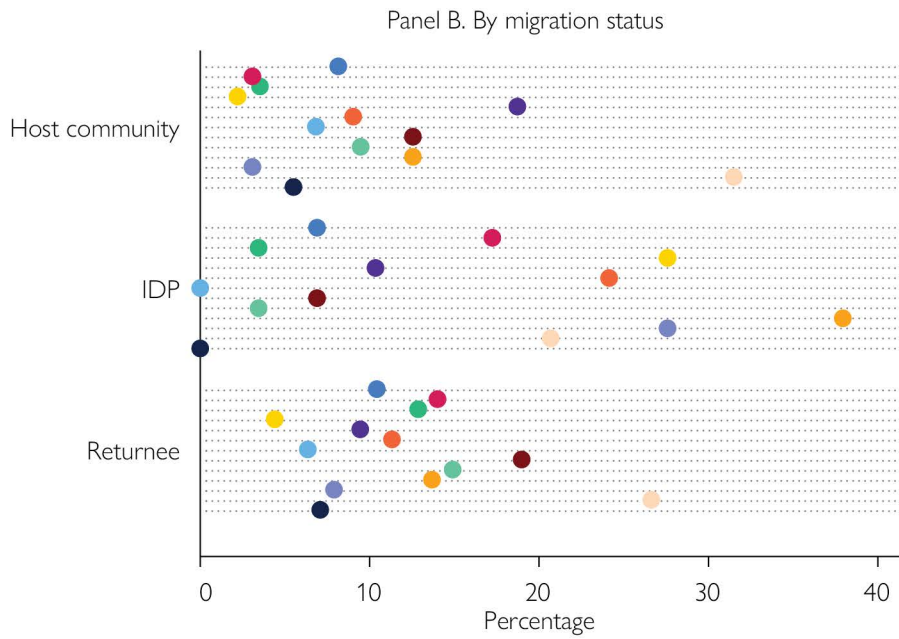
High-salary jobs: Jobs with higher salaries typically include positions in construction, electricity and skilled trades like blacksmithing. Most men find work as construction workers outside the community.



Missing skills: According to villagers' testimonies, key roles that are missing include child circumcision practitioners, electricians, certified midwives and other vocational trades. There is also relative consensus on the lack of construction skills across demographic groups.

Figure 15. Missing skills by demographic groups





- Food
- Recycling
- Marketing and sales
- Driving
- Animal husbandry
- Electrical work
- Mobile phone repair
- Metalwork
- Vehicle repair
- Plumbing
- Textile
- Pottery and ceramics
- Construction

Available Jobs for men and women: Across the communities, there is a demand for women in sewing, hairdressing and dairy production, and for men in agriculture, construction and trades like blacksmithing and carpentry.

Employment challenges: Unemployment is high due to limited agricultural opportunities following drought conditions, and many residents depend on external markets for employment. Economic activity has declined in recent years, with many young people seeking work in larger towns like Baqubah. A notable trend includes families relying on remittances from relatives working in larger cities or abroad. There is a mix of unemployed graduates in fields such as engineering and teaching. Infrastructure destruction due to past conflicts has severely impacted the local economy.

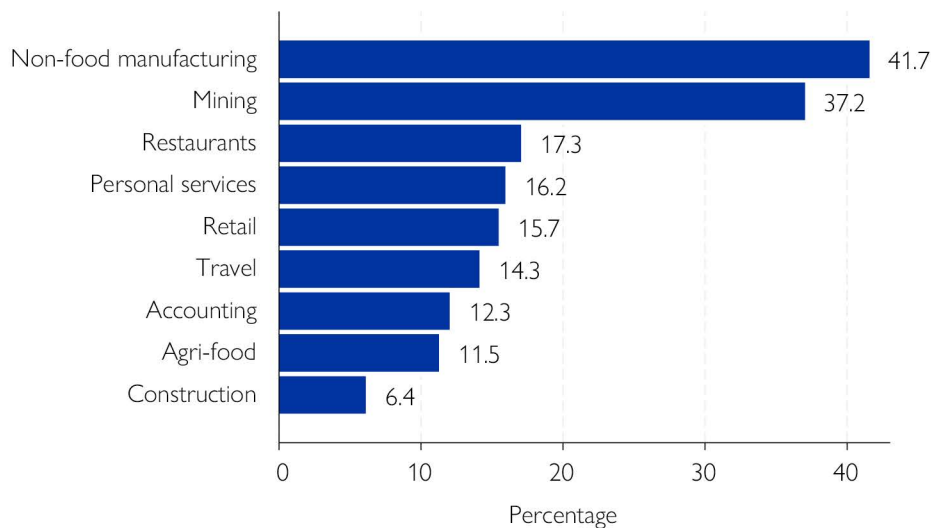
Training opportunities: Vocational training centres are largely absent from these communities, with the nearest facilities located in Baqubah and Kalar, both requiring significant travel. A pronounced need for vocational training in baking, restaurant management and sewing or tailoring exists.

NINEWA

In Ninewa, nine communities were visited and surveyed, and key informants were interviewed. Three communities were in Al-Ba'aj district, two in Al-Hamdaniya, one in Sinjar and three in Mosul, the governorate's capital.

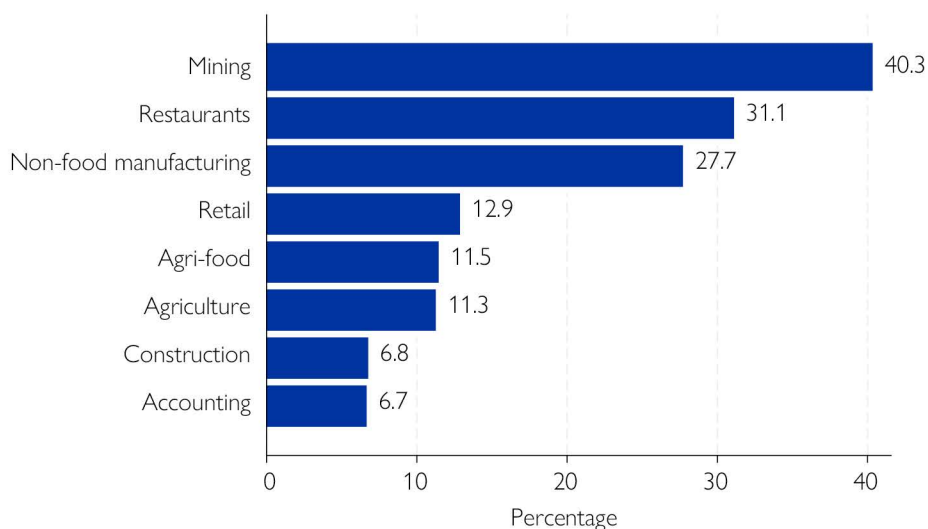
High-demand sectors: For interviewees in different Ninewa villages, the non-food manufacturing and mining sectors have the largest demand. Food markets, butcher shops, grocery stores, cosmetics, vegetable shops, cleaning supplies and home electrical supplies are in demand. Pharmacists and food shops also see high demand. Additionally, businesses such as hair salons, grocery stores, and electrical supply shops are needed.

Figure 16. High-demand sectors in Ninewa

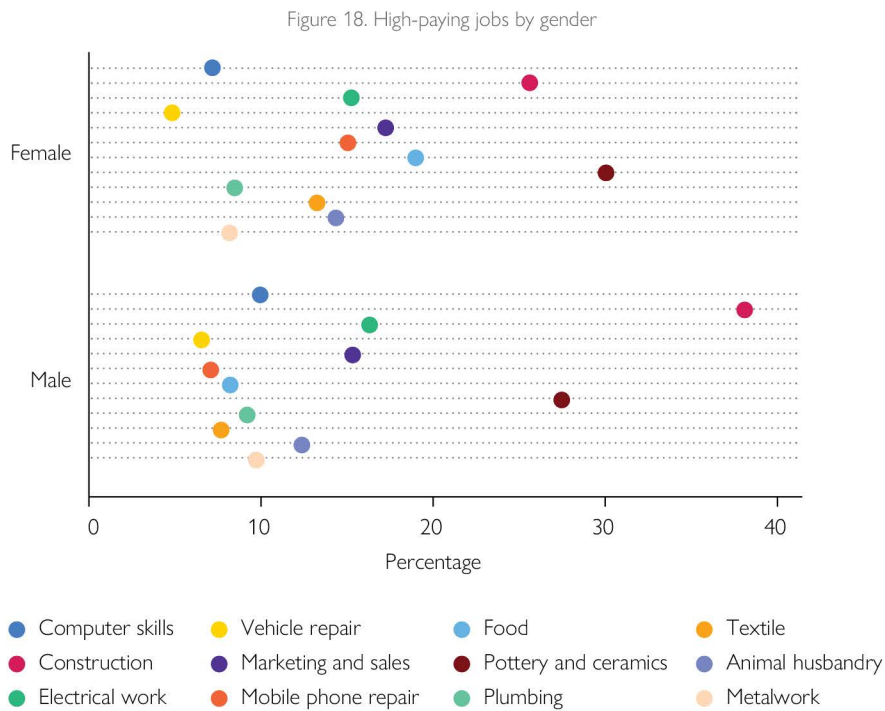


Struggling sectors: The same sectors considered to have high demand were commonly mentioned as struggling or facing too much competition. Among the areas mentioned as having high demand, services was the only one that was not considered struggling. Oversaturated businesses include restaurants, clothing shops and cafes. Some areas have enough grocery stores and cafes to meet local needs, reducing demand in these sectors. In Markaz HAA, all goods are readily available, minimizing the need for residents to shop elsewhere. However, in other villages, residents must often travel outside their neighbourhoods for certain goods.

Figure 17. Struggling sectors in Ninewa



High-salary jobs: Government roles offer the highest salaries, while private businesses such as barbers, food shops and salons provide moderate incomes. Individuals with their own businesses, such as shop owners or taxi operators, tend to have higher incomes than the average community members. Demand exists for grocery and cosmetic shops, but the community is largely unskilled.



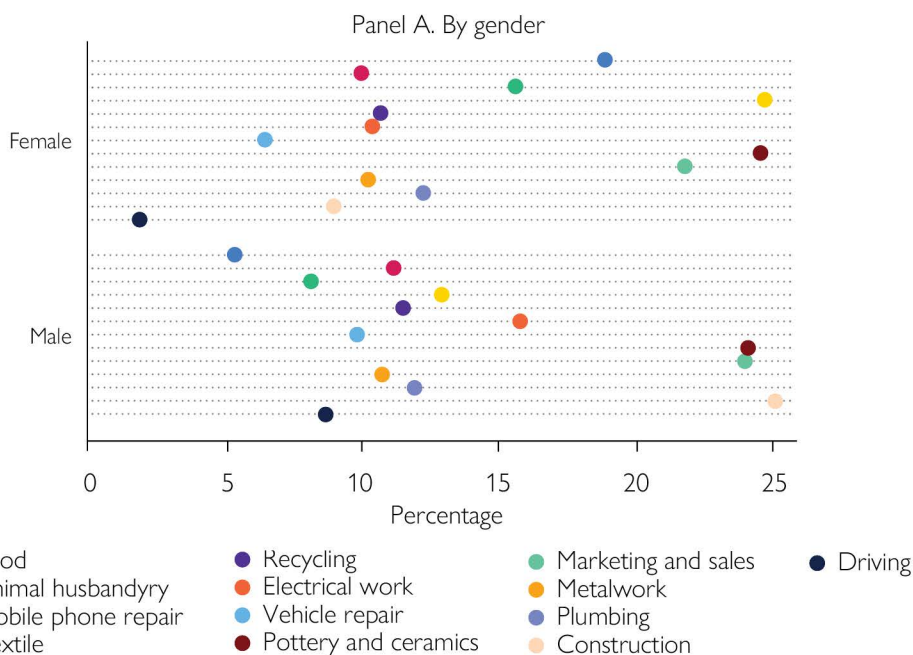
Missing skills: Skills in demand include dairy and food preparation, dessert making, tailoring, hairdressing, blacksmithing, maintenance of mobile phones and electrical appliances, and technical skills in medical fields. Community members also seek opportunities for vocational skills in drawing, cooking, carpentry and sewing, though they lack access to formal training.

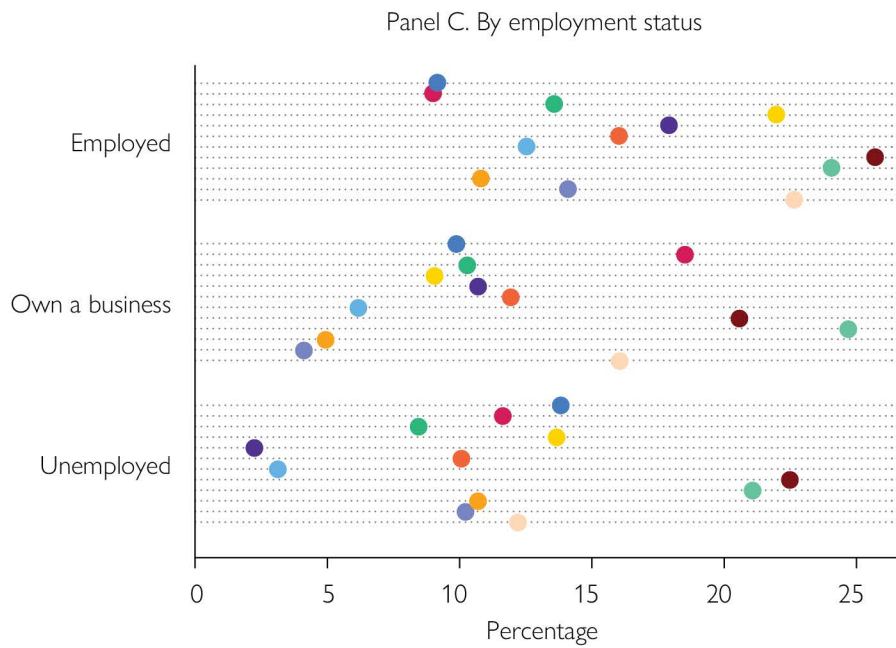
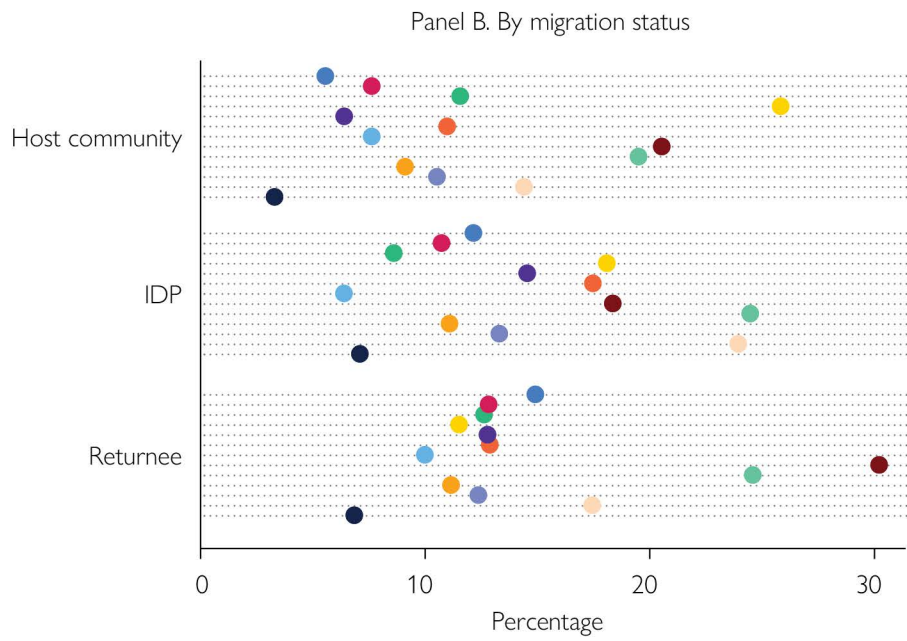
Available jobs for men and women: Men primarily work in construction, both locally and in cities like Erbil, Baghdad and Duhok, though some face security issues accessing jobs outside Mosul. Unemployment and underemployment remain high among men, with many working as daily laborers for just two or three days per week. Women predominantly work in agriculture, cosmetic centres, salons and sewing. Young children, particularly in lower-income families, often work in industrial areas, agriculture or collecting cans and garbage.

Employment challenges: Many youths are unemployed due to limited job opportunities and lack of financial support. Customs and traditions restrict women’s participation in some job sectors. Low-income families struggle with job security, and some employers do not pay children fairly for their labour.

Training opportunities: There are no vocational training programmes, and the community lacks organizations that can support skill development. Community members express a need for vocational training in areas like sewing, food preparation and technical trades. Proposed training programmes include establishing factories, drawing studios, sewing workshops and food preparation centres, as well as cultural exhibitions and handicraft workshops aimed at economic development.

Figure 19. Missing skills by demographic groups





- Food
- Animal husbandry
- Mobile phone repair
- Textile
- Recycling
- Electrical work
- Vehicle repair
- Plumbing
- Pottery and ceramics
- Marketing and sales
- Metalwork
- Driving
- Construction

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