

Gaps in Formal Education in Iraq Education Consortium of Iraq

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MERCY CORPS

Nonviolent Peaceforce

NRC
NORWEGIAN REFUGEE COUNCIL

Save the Children
منظمة إنقاذ الطفل

The Education Consortium of Iraq (ECI) is a project funded under the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (BRPM) and is entitled Ejtyaz. It is a multi-year education programme with four NGO members working together to support education in Iraq through activities in six governorates. The Consortium is comprised of Norwegian Refugee Council (Consortium lead), Save the Children, Mercy Corps, and Nonviolent Peaceforce.

The ECI would like to acknowledge the contributions of Elizabeth Robinson in designing and drafting the report, as well as support from technical and advocacy teams of all members.

ECI2: Students starting their school year, queueing to get their books in a dark hall in Maimoona School, Mosul. Photo: Alan Ayoubi/ NRC

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Acronyms

ALC	Accelerated Learning Center
ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
ALS	Alternative Learning Spaces
CFS	Child Friendly Space
CWD	Children with disabilities
ECI	Education Consortium of Iraq
DoE	Department of Education
FGD	Focus group discussion
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-governmental organization
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
GoI	Government of Iraq
KII	Key informant interview
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MC	Mercy Corps
MoE	Ministry of Education
MS	Minimum Standards
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NP	Nonviolent Peaceforce
OOS	Out-of-school
PIN	People in Need
PSS	Psychosocial support
PTA	Parent-teacher association
SCI	Save the Children
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene

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Executive Summary

From August - December 2021 the Education Consortium of Iraq (ECI) conducted a study to investigate gaps in formal education service provision at the primary and secondary level to better understand the ongoing challenges and barriers affecting the education sector in Iraq. The research focused on three components of education: first, education infrastructure including physical infrastructure; water, sanittion, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure, and technology infrastructure; second, education personnel including both contract teachers (paid) and volunteer lecturers (unpaid/low-paid); and third, reintegration services for out-of-school children. The geographical scope of the research covered the governorates of Anbar, Diyala, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Salah ad-Din, and also examined cross-cutting themes of inclusion, gender, sustainability, protection/psychosocial support, and COVID-19.

The research methodology comprised secondary data collection through a literature review, as well as primary qualitative and quantitative data collection. The qualitative research comprised a total of 38 key informant interviews and 41 focus group discussions with stakeholders, including children, parents, teachers, Ministry of Education and Department of Education officials, community leaders, NGO and UN representatives, and ECI partners. The quantitative data collection included an assessment of school infrastructure, conducted in 38 schools. In addition, two pre-existing datasets one from Mercy Corps and one from NRC were analyzed as part of the research.

The findings on school infrastructure show that physical infrastructure and WASH infrastruture are frequently insufficient to meet existing needs, while technology infrastructure is largely absent. The infrastructure that does exist is low quality, often due to lack of maintenance and overuse resulting from overcrowded classrooms and multiple shifts. School infrastructure especially WASH facilities are typically not accessible for children with disabilities, and children's safety is threatened en route to school by road accidents, stray dogs, checkpoints, and harassment, mainly from young men and boys, including other students. In most cases, students and teachers have no choice but to make do with the infrastructure that is present; all stakeholders are dissatisfied with the quality of their school's infrastructure. The absence of needed infrastructure as well as insufficient, and low-quality infrastructure is limiting access to and quality of education.

Regarding education personnel, government processes for the recruitment and training of teachers largely stalled after 2014. Limited teacher recruitment has a highly negative impact on children's education, as schools are understaffed. At the same time, existing staff are often unprepared, due to the lack of trainings. Teachers who are "hired" are typically in temporary and un-paid roles, which is a key reason for their dissatisfaction. Available training is mainly provided by INGOs and the UN, though these services are not sufficient to meet existing needs and largely do not include guidance on support to students with disabilities, and children in need of psychosocial support. As training is often provided by INGOs, teachers who have been selected to participate in INGO programs are more likely to receive training; teachers in urban areas also have more access to training opportunities; while participants are generally satisfied with these trainings, only a small portion of teachers have a chance to participate.

Broadly speaking, reintegration services for children who are out of school do exist in most areas, and some participants were aware of these services, including the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) and Accelerated Learning Centers (ALC), Alternative Learning Spaces, catch-up classes, remedial classes, evening classes, "external" education/exams, and others; only the ALP and ALC are accredited. However, these services are typically not accessible for most students, due to enrollment caps, age limits, and children having been out-of-school for too long. Notably, children with disabilities did not encounter additional barriers specific to accessing these services, other than the general barriers faced by all children and children with disabilities in the education system in general. In cases where students have access—or are given access by a specific NGO—they are typically eager to use these services. Children and their families are generally very satisfied with these services—especially the ALP and ALC programs—and they have a positive impact on children's education.

This research has shown that large gaps exist in the formal education sector in Iraq, largely due to lack of government funding to support basic education services, including rehabilitation of schools, and low teacher recruitment, retention and training. Compounding challenges over the last several years—including the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the protracted impact of conflict—have made it increasingly difficult for children in Iraq to access even basic education services. Barriers to access combined with quality issues within schools have resulted in a generation of under-educated children in the country who face a difficult future.

1. Introduction

The formal education system in Iraq has been significantly disrupted in recent years, resulting in a generation of young people who face an increasingly uncertain future. Indeed, lack of education is consistently the top protection risk reported for children in Iraq. While nearly 92% of children nationwide attend primary education, by the lower secondary level, 22% of all children are out-of-school (OOS), and by upper secondary 40% are OOS. At the end of 2019, it was estimated that 345,000 children remain OOS in Iraq; following the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be assumed this number has increased. Many populations also experience compounding vulnerabilities, including girls, children with disabilities, populations affected by displacement, families without civil documentation, and young people living in poverty. Significant proportions of children are also behind their expected age cohort in school, putting them at risk of dropping out—especially if schools are unable to offer quality education. Children who do not master basic skills in literacy and numeracy—at a minimum—will have limited employment opportunities, and will struggle to fully participate in Iraqi society. Lack of access to quality education is also a severe protection concern for children, increasing the risk of early marriage for girls and child labor for boys.

To address this educational crisis, the Education Consortium of Iraq (ECI)—comprised of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Save the Children (SCI), Mercy Corps (MC), and Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP)—is working to promote access to quality education for vulnerable children in Iraq. As part of this mandate, ECI has conducted a research study to better understand the gaps in provision of inclusive and equitable formal education. The research focused on the six governorates of Ninewa, Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Dohuk, Diyala and Kirkuk—governorates highly affected by conflict and displacement—and compared educational needs with current services, to identify gaps related to the existence, accessibility, and utilization of education services, users' satisfaction with those services, and the impact of those services on education. The study focused on three main components of formal education:

1) Education infrastructure: Years of conflict have led to extensive damage and destruction of education infrastructure; in many cases, schools are not available or are no longer suitable to safely host classes; there has been insufficient government investment in infrastructure reconstruction and rehabilitation to fully address this problem.

2) Education personnel: Iraq lacks sufficient numbers of trained teachers to provide quality education for students; in particular, stalled recruitment and limited training programs (both pre-service and in-service) for teachers and school staff have led to extensive gaps, often filled by untrained and unpaid volunteer teachers.

3) Reintegration into formal education: Many children affected by displacement have missed months or years of schooling, which has been further exacerbated due to school closures as a result of the pandemic. Required support to reconnect children with formal schools includes improved reintegration pathways, such as the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), pathways for school re-entry (e.g. placement tests), and more flexible documentation requirements.

1- Protection Monitoring System, Report 1. Protection Cluster, February 2021.
2- Iraq Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2018: Survey Finding Report, Vol. 1. UNICEF, February 2019.

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This research has shown that large gaps exist in the formal education sector in Iraq, largely due to lack of government funding to support basic education services, including rehabilitation of schools, and low teacher recruitment, retention and training. Compounding challenges over the last several years—including the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the protracted impact of conflict—have made it increasingly difficult for children in Iraq to access even basic education services. Barriers to access combined with quality issues within schools have resulted in a generation of under-educated children in the country who face a difficult future.



Awareness session for girls & Women on importance of education for girls and importance of women's participation in Salahaldeen.

2. Methodology

Introduction

The objective of this research study was to identify gaps in formal education service provision, especially for the most vulnerable (including refugee children, displaced children, and children with disabilities) that ECI is able to address through programming and advocacy.

Based on this objective, the following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the current and projected needs in the education sector in Iraq, including among the most vulnerable (including refugee children, displaced children, and children with disabilities)?
2. What education services and policies currently exist in Iraq, especially related to vulnerable populations?
3. What gaps exist in education service provision in Iraq that negatively affect access to quality education, especially for the most vulnerable?
4. What policies should be prioritized for ECI's advocacy?

In addition, the following cross-cutting themes were explored through the research:

1. Gender
2. Inclusive education for children with disabilities
3. Protection/Psychosocial support
4. COVID-19
5. Sustainability

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for the research outlines several dimensions of education service provision that were analyzed during the study (Table 1). Given the complex context in Iraq and the multi-dimensional nature of education needs and barriers, the research went beyond simply identifying services that exist, and which additional services are needed. The analytical framework shown below outlines four criteria—presence, accessibility, utilization, and satisfaction/impact—that were evaluated in the context of education services as part of this study.

Criteria	Guiding Questions	Explanation
Presence	What services exist, where, and for whom?	What services exist in each location and for different population groups (e.g. age, gender, displacement status).
Accessibility	Is the service accessible, especially for vulnerable populations? Why or why not?	Whether the service is accessible, especially for vulnerable populations, if they wish to access it. Analysis of accessibility will include barriers that users face when attempting to access the service.
Utilization	Is the service used by vulnerable populations? Why or why not?	Whether the service is currently utilized by vulnerable populations. Services that exist and are accessible, but not utilized, may not align with users' needs, and may need to be re-designed.
Satisfaction/ Impact	Are users satisfied with the service? Why or why not? What has been the impact of the service on access to and quality of education?	Whether users, and especially vulnerable populations, are satisfied with the service, and how the service has impacted access to and quality of education. Includes whether services meet the needs of vulnerable populations and whether users are satisfied with the experience of accessing the services.

Data Collection and Analysis

Following a desk-based literature review, ECI collected primary data through both qualitative and quantitative modalities, from late October – late November 2021. Qualitative data collection methods included key informant interviews (KIIs) with local and international NGO (INGO) and UN staff, ECI partners, community leaders, and staff at the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Department of Education (DoE); as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers, parents, and children. The breakdown of the qualitative data collection is shown in Table 2, below. Following the data collection, transcripts were coded using the MAXQDA software, using a coding framework developed based on the analytical framework.

Table 2. Breakdown of Data Collection

	Male	Female	Mixed	Anbar	Diyala	Dohuk	Kirkuk	Ninewa	SaD	TOTAL
KIIs										
MoE/DoE	7	2	0	1	1	3	1	1	1	9[3]
Community Leaders	10	2	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
UN/INGO	1	4[4]	0	N/A						5
Local NGOs[5]	3	1	0	1		1		1	1	4
ECI Partners	N/A			N/A						8
Total KIIs	*21*	*9*	*0*	*4*	*3*	*6*	*3*	*4*	*4*	*38*
FGDs										
Teachers	3	3	6	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Parents	6	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	12
Students	6	4	7	2	3	3	2	3	4	17
Total FGDs	*15*	*9*	*17*	*6*	*7*	*7*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*41*

In addition to the qualitative data, three sets of quantitative data were included in the analysis. First, a school infrastructure assessment was conducted as part of the primary data collection. Second, an existing dataset on learning outcomes from MC's Accelerated Learning Centers (ALC) was analyzed. Third, an existing dataset from NRC encompassing school assessments was analyzed. The analysis of the quantitative data took place in Excel. The following sections provide descriptive analysis of each of these datasets.

School Infrastructure Assessment

A quantitative survey of school infrastructure was conducted in 38 schools in which ECI partners operate, selected through purposive sampling. Descriptive statistics of this dataset are presented below, with relevant insights included in Section 3, within the key research findings. As sampling was not random and the sample itself was fairly small, findings are not necessarily statistically significant, and should not be extrapolated to other schools.

The school assessment was conducted in eight schools each in Anbar and Salah ad-Din, six each in Dohuk, Kirkuk, and Ninewa, and four in Diyala. This breakdown, including by district, is shown in Table 3. Of the six schools in Dohuk, five were located in refugee camps, and one was in an IDP camp. Of the 38 schools, 10 were boys' schools, 10 were girls' schools, and 18 were mixed; in Diyala, boys' schools were not surveyed, and in Dohuk, only mixed schools were surveyed. Of the 32 schools in Federal Iraq, 27 were primary schools (grades 1 – 6), two were lower secondary (grades 7 – 9), and three were upper secondary (grades 10 – 12). In Dohuk, all six schools were basic (grades 1 – 9). In terms of the student population of the schools, the most common group was returnee children, served in 32 of 38 schools; the full breakdown is presented in Figure 1. Most schools (22 of 38) ran two shifts, while 9 ran one shift, 5 schools ran three shifts, and 2 schools ran four shifts; all 7 schools running three or four shifts are in Salah ad-Din. As part of the survey, one shift was selected for which to conduct the assessment; the breakdown is as follows: first shift: 19 schools; second shift: 13 schools; third shift: 4 schools; fourth shift: 2 schools.

Table 3. School Infrastructure Assessment - Geographic Breakdown

Governorate	District	# of Schools Surveyed
Anbar	Ramadi	4
	Faluja	4
Diyala	Khanqeen	4
Dohuk	Bardarash	2
	Summel	3
	Zakho	1
Kirkuk	Hawija	6
Ninewa	Baaj	4
	Tel Kaif	2
Salah ad-Din	Baiji	3
	Shirqat	3
	Tikrit	2

The average number of students per school shift (data were only gathered for the specific shift being assessed) was 447; however, some school shifts had as few as 45 students (the fourth shift of a four-shift school in Shirqat), and some had as many as 1460 (the second shift of a three-shift school in Baiji). Girls' schools had an average of 412 students in the assessed shifts, while boys' schools had an average of 430 students in the assessed shifts; mixed schools had on average 216 girls and 234 boys in the assessed shifts.

3. A final KII with the MoE in Erbil was planned, but the MoE did not reply in time to conduct the KII.
4. In cases where two staff members joined the conversation, only the gender of the primary respondent is reflected.
5. Local NGOs included: Sorough (Salah ad-Din), Public Aid Organization (Ninewa), Bishkoreen (Dohuk), and Saba Sanabel (Anbar)
6. Similar datasets were requested from other partners. NP did not conduct similar school assessments; MC used a different approach to select schools that relied on the DoE to provide a list of schools; SCI did not respond to requests for this dataset.
7. The original sampling plan called for six assessments in each governorate, for a total of 36. SCI was assigned to conduct the assessments in Diyala, though SCI only works in four schools in Diyala for ECI. Therefore, SCI conducted two additional assessments in Salah ad-Din, bringing the total in that governorate to eight (in addition to the original six conducted by MC). NRC conducted an additional two assessments in Anbar, also bringing the total there to eight.

A total of 92 students with disabilities (48 with physical disabilities and 44 with mental/developmental disabilities) were registered in the assessed shifts; however, 15 of the 38 school shifts had no students with disabilities, while two school shifts had 11 students with disabilities each. All six school shifts in Dohuk included students with disabilities, as did six of the eight school shifts in Salah ad-Din. However, none of the school shifts offered separate classes for students with disabilities; while this may technically demonstrate inclusion, in reality, students with disabilities do not have sufficient support in school.

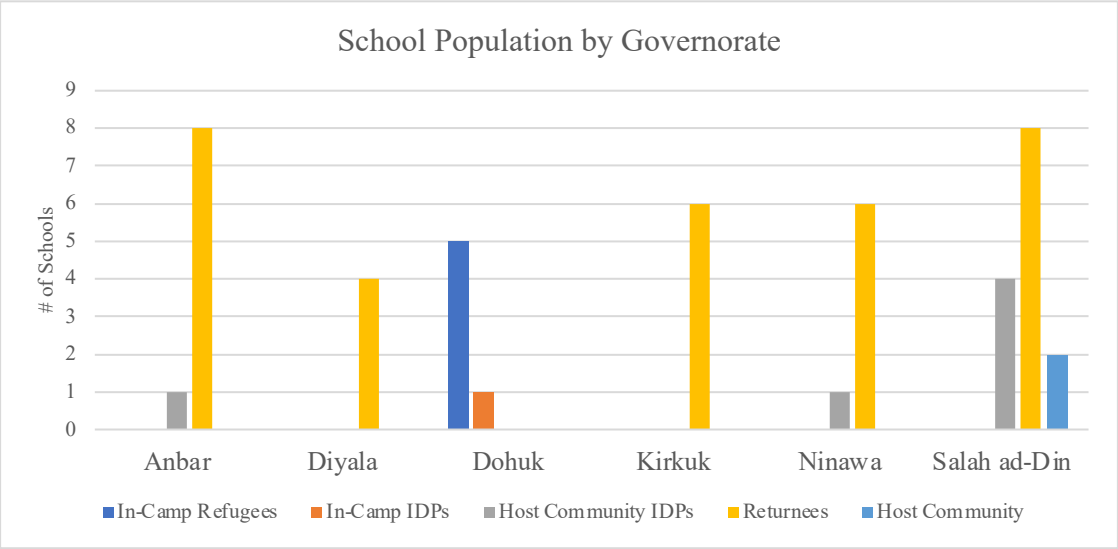


Figure 1. School Infrastructure Assessment - School Population

ALC Learning Outcomes Dataset (MC)

The dataset from MC covered the ALC academic year 2019 – 2020, including records from a total of 1570 students (1149 boys and 421 girls) who were enrolled in Level 3 of the program across 24 centers in Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewa. Findings are not necessarily statistically significant.

School Assessment Dataset (NRC)

NRC provided a dataset from an assessment that was used to select the schools NRC is working in for ECI year 2; for the purposes of this report, both selected and unselected schools are reflected in the analysis here and below. The assessment included 253 schools in Anbar (150), Ninewa (59), Kirkuk (23), and Dohuk (21)). There were 108 boys' schools (43%), 71 girls' schools (28%), and 74 mixed schools (29%); 138 (55%) schools were in urban areas, 90 schools (36%) were in rural areas, 17 (7%) were in camps, and 6 (2%) were in informal settlements. Of the 253 schools assessed, 185 (73%) were at the primary level, and 59 (23%) were at the secondary level; for six (2%) schools, the level was "other," and for three (1%) schools the level was not provided. For 122 (48%) schools, there was one school in the assessed site, for 94 (37%) schools there were two schools in the site, and for 20 (8%) schools there were three schools in the site; for 17 schools (5%), this question was not answered, or the answer was zero. Purposive sampling was used to select schools for the assessment, based on expected vulnerability. While reviewing the dataset, some missing or inconsistent data were identified that may have affected the analysis; in addition, findings are not necessarily statistically significant.

8- Substantially more schools were assessed in Anbar based on the specific workplan of the field team in that governorate, not because there are more schools, or more vulnerable schools, in Anbar.
9- For 2 schools, the specific neighborhood was provided in response to this question, instead of the provided options.
10- Including answer options "Primary," "Primary (G1- 6)," and "Basic (G1 – 9)."
11-Including answer options "Lower Secondary (G7 – 9)," "Lower Secondary," "All Secondary (G7 – 12), "Upper Secondary", "Intermediate," and "High (G10 – 12)."

Limitations and Challenges

The following limitations and challenges were encountered during the data collection:

Methodology

• **DoE consultations**: Based on initial conversations with ECI partners, it was planned to conduct a comprehensive mapping of all schools in the six governorates, through a survey distributed to DoE officials. Upon further discussion with the field teams, it was determined that the DoE would be unlikely to have the desired information. As an alternative, analysis of pre-existing datasets from ECI partners was conducted. In order to mitigate last minute changes to the methodology in future research studies, it is recommended to consult field teams from the start of the research design process, to fully understand what is feasible on the ground.

• **Datasets**: The school infrastructure assessment did not feature random sampling, and only included 38 schools. While this was by design to provide a snapshot of school resources, the results of this assessment should not be extrapolated to schools outside the sample. Similar considerations apply for the two datasets analyzed from MC and NRC.

Data Collection

• **Timelines**: It was decided to delay the start of data collection due to elections held in Iraq in early October. In some cases, field teams did not start data collection when planned following the elections, due to other tasks. This left less time than initially planned for the analysis and report writing. At the time of the submission of this draft report, two KII transcripts from the MoE in Erbil and Baghdad are still pending.

• **Inclusion of children with disabilities:** CWD were not sufficiently represented in the FGDs in all areas. Based on feedback from the field teams, it was decided not to conduct separate FGDs with students with disabilities, in order to reflect the practice of inclusion. However, only 12 CWD were included in all 17 student FGDs (120 participants total), which is less than expected, though roughly in line with the Education Cluster's estimate that 10% of children have a disability. In several cases in which FGDs included CWDs, the transcripts provided by the field teams did not mention any opinions stated by that participant. Going forward, it is recommended to establish a minimum number of CWD (or other demographics of interest) to be included in each data collection activity.

• **OOS children and girls' representation**: In some cases, the field teams did not follow the sampling guidance for the data collection. For example, children under the age of 12 were included in some FGDs, despite the stated target age range of 12 – 18. In all except for one extra FGD conducted in Salah ad-Din, all children participants were currently enrolled in school, despite the guidance to include children with a range of educational experiences. As such, the perspectives of out-of-school (OOS) children and those who have dropped out are less represented in the data collection than originally anticipated; this limitation particularly affects the research theme on reintegration services, as OOS children would be the main target group for these services. The field teams were also not able to adhere to the sampling plan vis-à-vis gender of respondents, resulting in 15 male FGDs, 9 female FGDs, and 17 mixed FGDs (mixed FGDs were not include in the original data collection plans). Participant lists showed that in mixed FGDs, most participants were male. There were also more male than female participants (20 and 9 respectively) in the KIIs, though in these cases it may be understandably harder to identify female DoE staff and community leaders, for example, given the existing workforce gender breakdown. One option to ensure adherence to sampling criteria in the future would be to request that data collection teams submit their participant lists for approval in advance, or set specific quotas for key demographic groups. Another option is to have research enumerators resourced rather than relying on program staff or incentivized enumerators who may have required more training and specialized oversight.

Data Quality

• **Translation**: There were some errors in the translation of the data collection tools, which led to one question being mis-interpreted by the field team in Anbar. It is recommended to ensure that the translation service provider always delivers a backtranslation of the tools, to enable quality assurance of the translation.

• **Parallel quality assurance**: It was requested that data collection teams submit transcripts on a rolling basis, to facilitate quality assurance; however, this did not happen in practice, which also left far less room for corrective action vis-à-vis the sampling concerns mentioned above. In at least one case, it became clear after the fact that a member of the field team had not understood what was meant by the phrase "on a rolling basis." To mitigate this issue in the future, it is recommended that data collection teams be given the green light to proceed with full data collection only after the first transcript is received and approved. This arrangement should be made clear to the field teams in advance.

• **Recordings**: Recordings of the FGDs and KIIs were not conducted, due to sensitivity issues. This limited the detail included in the transcripts.

3. Key Findings

This section presents the key findings for each of the three components of the research: education infrastructure, personnel, and re-integration into formal education. The findings are structured in line with the analytical framework (satisfaction and impact are discussed throughout), and a summary chart is included at the end of each section. This section concludes with a discussion of other relevant topics that emerged from the research, including COVID-19.

Throughout the below sections, reflections from individual participants are included. Unless specifically noted, these are not direct quotations from participants, but rather a summary of their point of their point of view[12].

Education Infrastructure

Presence

Physical Infrastructure

There is a dire shortage both of school buildings and quality infrastructure in all governorates surveyed, and across all types of infrastructure. When community leaders and MoE and DoE officials were asked about their overall educational priorities, most cited infrastructure improvements, including for both physical infrastructure and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure. In terms of physical infrastructure, participants expressed the need to construct additional school buildings and classrooms, in order to safely and comfortably accommodate all students, including across all shifts. According to the World Bank, in August 2020 the MoE estimated that 10,000 new school buildings are needed to address existing gaps and accommodate the expected increase in students, and that 6961 of the existing 14,032 school buildings need rehabilitation to fulfill basic hygiene and safety standards[13].

12- The FGD and KII transcripts provided by the field teams included summary notes, but not direct quotations based on recordings. The only recordings available were from the KIIs conducted by the Consultant, with INGO and UN representatives.

13- "Building Forward Better To Ensure Learning for all Children in Iraq." The World Bank, 2021.

Results from the school infrastructure assessment show that schools have on average 13 classrooms (including those used, and unused), though schools in Dohuk had notably more, with 19 classrooms per school on average; the different number of classrooms in some schools may be due to the specific level, with primary/basic schools accommodating more grades than secondary schools. However, two classrooms in each school on average were not usable, due to damage and lack of maintenance. In order to properly accommodate all students—including taking into account safety measures for COVID-19—schools in Dohuk and Diyala needed about four additional classrooms each, while schools in Ninewa, Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din needed an additional two each; schools in Anbar did not need additional classrooms. According to the NRC dataset, of the 253 schools surveyed, 41% had at least one makeshift classroom, 33% had at least one classroom in a caravan, and one school in Anbar had five classrooms in tents. A DoE representative from Ramadi, Anbar mentioned that 450 additional, new schools are needed in the district to address overcrowding, including in double-shifted schools, in addition to rehabilitating 400 existing schools. The DoE in Summel, Dohuk, noted that more than 100 new schools are needed in that area. Of note, according to the school assessment, 28 schools (including all schools in Kirkuk) also had some or a lot of rubbish in the outdoor areas, decreasing the usability and safety of these areas too.

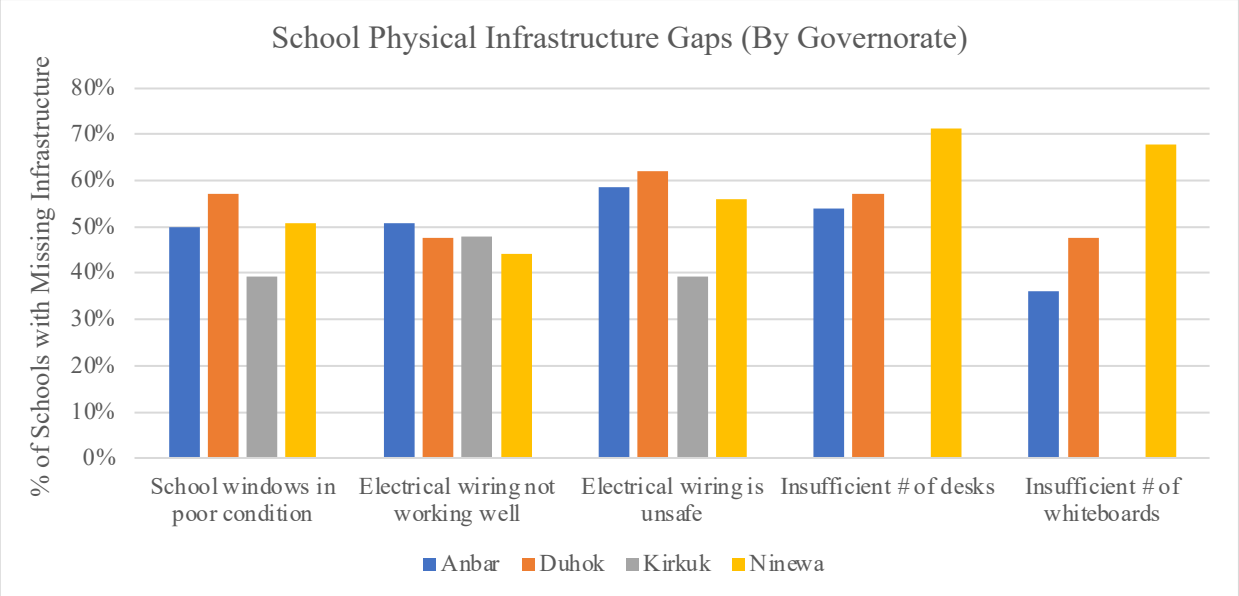
A Federal Iraq MoE representative in Dohuk emphasized that rehabilitation of schools for internally displaced persons (IDPs) is an urgent priority, as the existing schools currently cannot host students. The need for more "modern" school designs and infrastructure was also mentioned, as well as the need to upgrade some infrastructure to be more permanent, particularly in camp settings. A community leader from Chammishko camp, Dohuk explained that their schools are made from pre-fab containers and metal, but that materials such as concrete and brick would be preferred because they are more permanent and durable (this was also noted by students in the same area). Students in Salah ad-Din initially mentioned they were satisfied with their school infrastructure and felt safe in school, but, when asked, still mentioned several areas for improvement, including the needs cited above.

The Education Director from Jalawla, Diyala explained that in her district, school infrastructure is poor and, in some cases, non-existent, and there is no maintenance to sustain the infrastructure that does exist. She went on to note that several years ago many schools in Diyala were destroyed and have not been reconstructed; as a result, the same number of students must now use fewer schools, leading to over-crowding and, in turn, reduced quality of education. A female student in Kirkuk also noted that over-crowding has caused her school to be very noisy, which she doesn't like.

Specific infrastructure needs most often mentioned in FGDs and KIIs in all governorates included: building additional classrooms; upgrading and fixing physical infrastructure and WASH infrastructure; furniture (including for teachers); science laboratories; outdoor areas/gardens for students to relax, play, and practice sports; libraries; fixing windows, doors and roofs; and painting the walls. Teachers in Kirkuk specifically noted that because they do not have enough desks and classrooms, they split the students into two groups, and some students wait outside while others study inside, and then they switch. Similar needs were also reflected in the school infrastructure assessment: only four schools in the assessment (all in Ninewa) reported no rehabilitation needs. According to the assessment, damaged infrastructure in some or many places posed a safety hazard for students in 18 schools (8 in Anbar, 4 each in Dohuk and Kirkuk, and 1 each in Diyala and Salah ad-Din). Students in the FGDs also echoed these safety concerns. One female teacher in Anbar explained that teaching options are limited due to the lack of science laboratory equipment; this point was also noted by a refugee student with disabilities in Domiz.

While not specifically within the scope of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials were also commonly requested by participants, including textbooks and stationery. Also mentioned, though somewhat less commonly, was the need for desks, air conditioning and heating (though this was specifically mentioned by participants in Kirkuk), fences, a generator, and fixing broken electrical wires. Regarding heating and cooling, the NRC assessment found that 78 (31%) schools had none of the four key features of weatherization, and only 7 schools (3%) had all four. Air conditioning and heaters were most commonly missing, with 238 (94%) and (93%) of schools lacking these features, respectively. However, temperatures in Iraq regularly reach upwards of 45 degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit) in the summer, and dip to 0 degrees Celsius (32 Fahrenheit) or below in the winter. A teacher in Kirkuk noted that, in the winter, they sometimes have to send students home early because the school is too dark and cold. IDP teachers in Chammishko, Dohuk, explained that the lack of lighting during the winter makes it difficult for children to see the whiteboard during class, which impedes learning. Refugee students in Bardarash and IDP students in Chammishko also mentioned insufficient lighting for the afternoon shift.

In terms of general infrastructure gaps, as shown in Figure 2, the NRC assessment found that school windows and electrical wiring often needed maintenance, and desks and whiteboards were often insufficient (data from Kirkuk were not available for these last two features). By gender (Figure 3), girls' school were more likely to have insufficient desks (65%), and boys' schools were more likely to have issues with electrical wiring (55%).
The school infrastructure assessment showed that science labs, cafeterias, libraries, playgrounds/gymnasiums, and teachers' offices/break rooms were commonly damaged or in poor condition in Anbar, Dohuk, Kirkuk, and Salah ad-Din; in Diyala, the only observed needs were for improved teachers' offices/break rooms in two schools, and no schools in Ninewa had poor infrastructure among the mentioned categories (Figure 4); however, it should be noted that participants in the FGDs and KIIs clearly expressed the substantial school infrastructure needs in Ninewa.



School Physical Infrastructure Gaps (By Governorate)

14- 1) Rainproof roof; 2) all classrooms with working fans; 3) all classrooms with working air coolers/air conditioners; 4) all classrooms with working heaters.

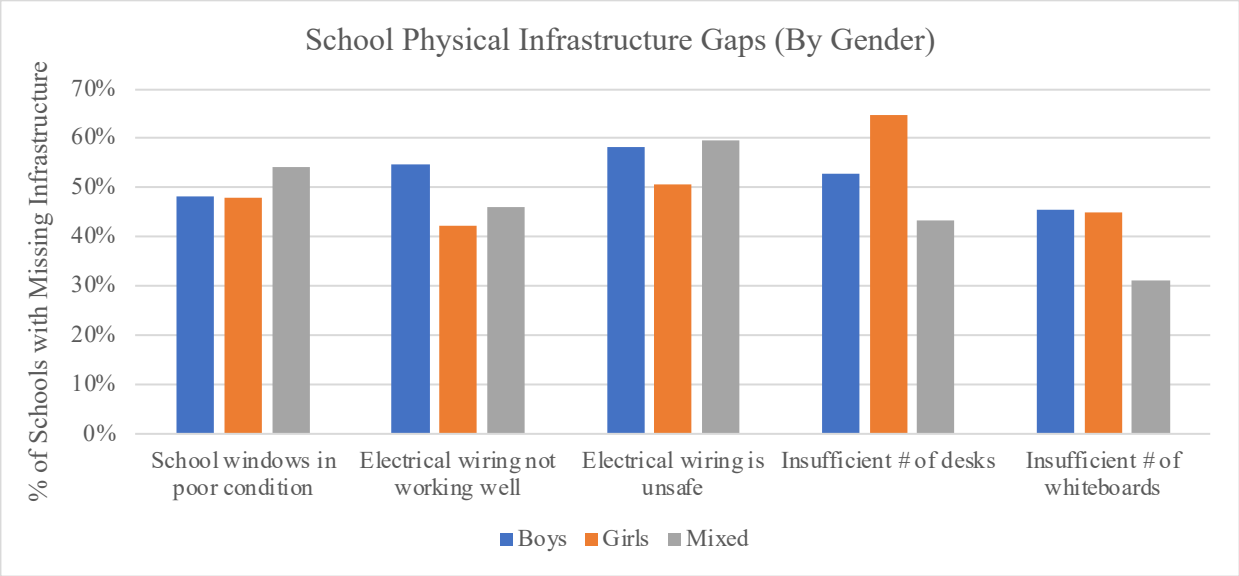


Figure 3. NRC Assessment - Physical Infrastructure Gaps (By Gender)

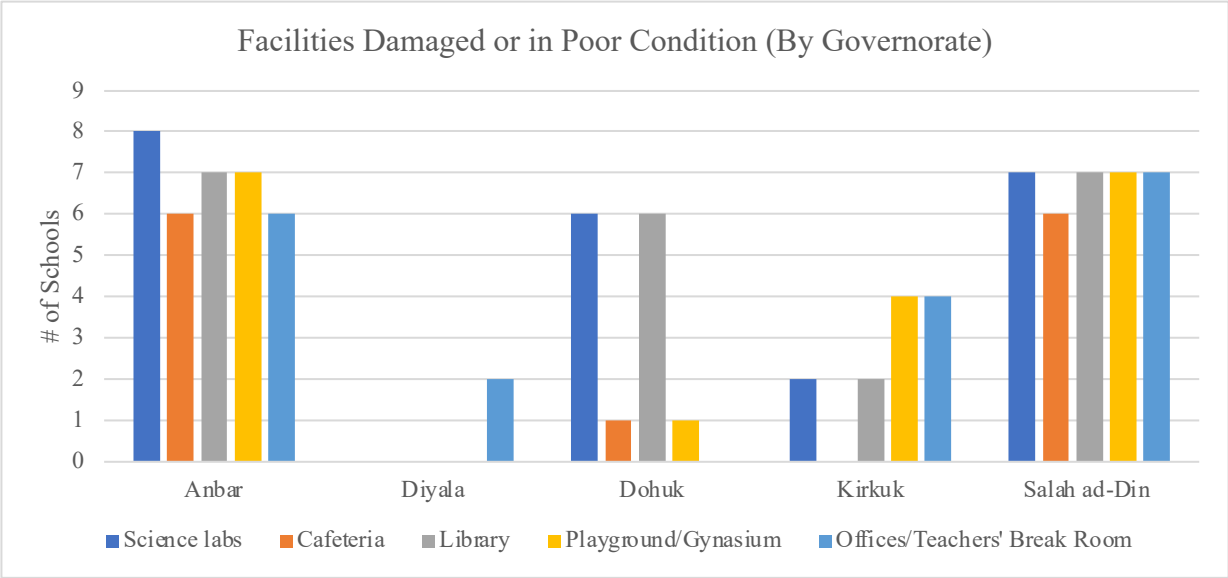


Figure 4. School Infrastructure Assessment - Facilities Damaged or in Poor Condition (By Governorate)

The need for better maintenance of existing infrastructure was also mentioned. A female teacher in Kirkuk explained that broken classroom doors cannot be closed, which both makes the classroom noisier during lessons, and makes it more difficult to control the temperature of the classroom. In follow-up conversations with the data collection teams, they explained that without proper maintenance, a school rehabilitation project may only be sustained for one year, before the infrastructure becomes unusable. Field teams in Dohuk noted that in some cases, students break into the schools after hours and deliberately vandalize toilets and other infrastructure, suggesting a need for awareness-raising campaigns and other measures to prevent such misuse and encourage a sense of community ownership of infrastructure.

Teachers, students, and parents described the negative impact of these infrastructure challenges, including reduced quality of education and student attendance, increased student drop-out, and students feeling unsafe. Along the same lines, a DoE representative in Ninewa noted that infrastructure issues deter some children from enrolling (or reintegrating) into education. A parent in Ninewa explained that their child is enrolled in school, but doesn't always attend because classrooms are overcrowded and there is no place to sit. Teachers in Diyala agreed that when they are preoccupied by safety concerns within the school due to poor infrastructure, they cannot focus properly on their lessons.

Students in Anbar noted that their younger siblings in primary school are afraid to enter the school because of the poor infrastructure. Participants frequently mentioned that students were not able to practice social distancing measures in response to the pandemic, due to overcrowded classrooms. For example, male teachers in Ninewa noted that there should not be more than 20 students in each class (which there often are), both in order to allow for social distancing, as well as to ensure that all students are able to hear and see the teacher, and fully participate in class; according to SCI, the MoE recommends that each class includes 20 – 40 students.

When asked how improved infrastructure would affect their education, students described the benefits very clearly. One female student in Anbar noted she would encourage her friends to enroll in school, because the building would be in good condition. Students also mentioned they would not have to fear being infected by COVID-19, schools would be accessible for students with disabilities, students would attend school more often, they would feel safer and more comfortable, and in general students would be able to have a positive future.

In nearly all cases, limited financial resources on the part of the government were cited as the main barrier to improving and maintaining school infrastructure. A representative from the Federal Iraq MoE office in Dohuk noted that MoE schools in the governorate require basic maintenance (such as for ceilings, doors, windows, water tanks, and furniture) every other year, but that this work cannot be completed because of lack of funding. The same representative also noted that COVID-19 has negatively impacted school construction and rehabilitation, as there were several projects ongoing that have been delayed or cancelled because of the pandemic. A representative from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) DoE in Dohuk noted that the KRG does not receive sufficient funding from Baghdad for their overall government budget. While not mentioned by the DoE representative, NRC explained that a compounding problem is that the KRG does not allocate sufficient funding to education from the budget they do receive. For Dohuk, the DoE representative also noted that in some cases maintenance could not be completed because schools are being used as IDP shelters.

The DoE representative in Ninewa cited barriers included limited funding, lack of land allocated for school infrastructure, and limited support from other stakeholders, including the DoE itself, NGOs, and the community. A community leader in Salah ad-Din mentioned there have been some efforts by NGOs and the community to contribute to infrastructure, but this is not sufficient; an NGO in Salah ad-Din also mentioned that more support is required for infrastructure in rural areas in particular. MC explained that a notable barrier to school rehabilitation in Salah ad-Din has been a legal dispute between the DoE and a contractor, who is requesting that the DoE refund the cost of their equipment that was stolen when ISIL took control of the areas in 2014.

The Education Cluster Coordinator noted that only light rehabilitation, but not full school rehabilitation, is included within the scope of the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), as full rehabilitation is considered a development need, not a humanitarian one; however, some INGOs still undertake large-scale rehabilitation outside of the scope of the HRP. Development actors such as UNDP and the World Bank are better positioned to mobilize funding to support comprehensive school infrastructure rehabilitation; under the UNDP Funding Facility for Stabilization, 581 schools have been rehabilitated since 2015[15]. At the same time, however, large-scale school rehabilitation and construction should be the responsibility of the government.

Another commonly mentioned explanation for poor infrastructure was lack of government follow-up and support, mentioned in all locations except Ninewa, including by the Director of the Hawija DoE, a representative from the DoE in Summel, and the Education Director in Jalawla; presumably, these DoE officials were referring to the lack of support provided by the MoE to the local DoEs. A community leader in Salah ad-Din explained that the DoE has neither a plan nor a clear vision to accommodate increasing numbers of students in schools.

17-"Funding Facility for Stabilization," UNDP. Accessed 13 December 2021.

A community leader in Chammishko, Dohuk, also mentioned that he believed NGOs were not supporting any schools. Community leaders in Kirkuk discussed that some companies contracted for school rehabilitation and construction did not have sufficient experience, and that their work was delayed; this issue was also mentioned by a community leader in Diyala, who cited corruption in the selection of contractors as a compounding factor. In Kirkuk and Diyala, the security situation was also identified as a barrier to school rehabilitation. In Kirkuk, one community leader mentioned he believed the government does not prioritize the needs of children with disabilities. A related problem, as noted by NRC, is that there are conflicting mandates between the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the MoE, both of which are expected to support children with disabilities, but often assume the other will take the lead.

Different estimates were given by the DoEs for the cost of school rehabilitation, though not all figures referred to the same scope, and representatives from Kirkuk and Salah ad-Din did not provide estimates[16]. The mentioned figures are summarized in Table 4, below. In 2018, the World Bank estimated that 632 million USD was needed for school rehabilitation in Ninewa, Anbar, Kirkuk, Salah ad-Din, Diyala, Baghdad, and Babil[17].

Table 4. Estimated Cost of School Infrastructure Construction and Rehabilitation

Area	Amount	Scope
Ramadi, Anbar	30 million IQD (about 20,000 USD)	Per school
Jalawla, Diyala	68,500 USD	Jalawla only
Dohuk (Federal Iraq MoE)	6700 USD	Per school
Dohuk (KRI DoE)	10,000 USD	Rehabilitation per existing school
	16 million USD	Rehabilitation of all 1600 schools in Dohuk managed by KRI MoE
	2 million USD	Construction of one new school with 18 classrooms
	1.3 million USD	Construction of one new school with 12 classrooms
	50 million USD	Total needs
Mosul, Ninewa	5 billion USD[18]	Total needs

As a final point to conclude this section, schools' multiple shifts (up to four) clearly result in over-use of infrastructure; at the same time, this infrastructure is still insufficient to accommodate all the students who need school buildings for different purposes. Table 5, below, shows how two schools in Salah ad-Din have set up their schedules to try to accommodate all the students who need to use the buildings.

18- The field team re-confirmed the DoE representative said 5 billion, not 5 million.

	Al-Sahil Al-Akhdar - Shirqat, Salah ad-Din		Al-Rashad - Baiji, Salah ad-Din	
	Day/Time	Description	Day/Time	Description
Shift 1	Weekdays, 8am – 11am	Boys' shift	Saturday, Sunday, Monday, 8am – 12pm; Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 12pm – 4pm	Boys' shift
Shift 2	Weekdays, 11am – 2pm	Girls' shift	Saturday, Sunday, Monday, 12pm – 4pm; Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, 8am – 12pm	Girls' shift
Shift 3	Weekdays, 2:30pm – 4:30pm	Secondary school (evening classes) mixed	Friday and Saturday, 8am – 1pm	ALC mixed
Shift 4	Friday and Saturday, 8am – 1pm	ALC mixed	N/A	

WASH Infrastructure

Overall, WASH infrastructure is another area of substantial need in schools, mentioned in nearly all FGDs and KIIs, by both students and teachers. Specific needs mentioned include general rehabilitation of toilets, provision of drinking water in schools, and improvements to the sewage system. The Education Director in Jalawla, Diyala, mentioned the need for improved coordination between government departments to follow-up on waste removal from schools. The cleanliness of WASH facilities was also a common concern, with many participants noting that toilets are not cleaned, and in some cases, there is no water or soap for handwashing. Students in Kirkuk linked poor WASH facilities to over-crowded schools, explaining that there are simply not enough toilets for all the students. Two parents in Ninewa noted that students sometimes leave school early because there are no toilets in school. No participants mentioned that WASH infrastructure was accessible specifically for students with disabilities, and this was a main need raised frequently by participants throughout all discussions.

In 29 schools included in the infrastructure assessments, the school did not have a toilet or handwashing facility that would be accessible for students with disabilities. The schools that did have these facilities included four schools each in Dohuk and Ninewa, and one in Diyala; however, these schools in Ninewa and Diyala did not have any students with disabilities enrolled, suggesting that there is a mismatch between school infrastructure and students' needs. The results of the NRC assessment confirmed these gaps (Figure 5). In nearly 100% of schools in Anbar, Kirkuk, and Ninewa, WASH facilities are not adapted for children with disabilities.

Compared to WASH facilities accessible for students with disabilities, separate toilets for male and female students were somewhat less commonly noted, though it can be assumed this is still a significant need, at least in mixed schools. In the NRC assessment, at least 70% of schools in every governorate, WASH facilities do not meet minimum standards (1:20 for girls, 1:30 for boys). Similar patterns can be seen when breaking down the results by gender (boys' schools, girls' schools, mixed schools), as shown in Figure 6, below. Of the 28 schools in the assessment serving female or mixed students, 25 do not have designated waste bins for students to dispose of menstrual hygiene products; of the ten boys' schools, seven did not have these waste bins.

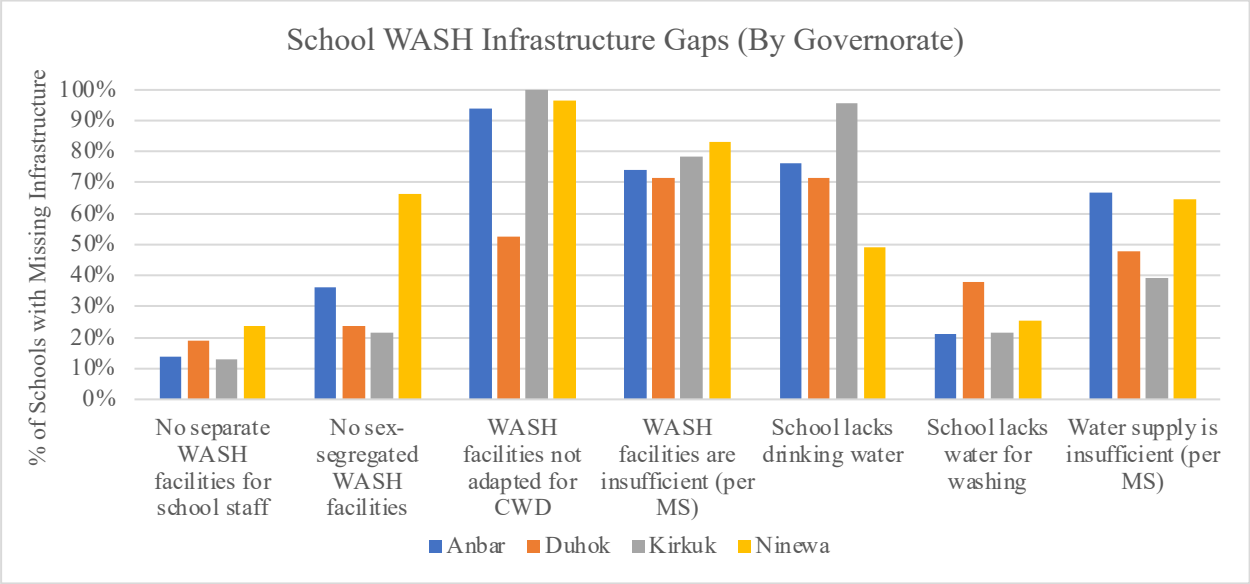


Figure 5. NRC Assessment - WASH Infrastructure Gaps (By Governorate).

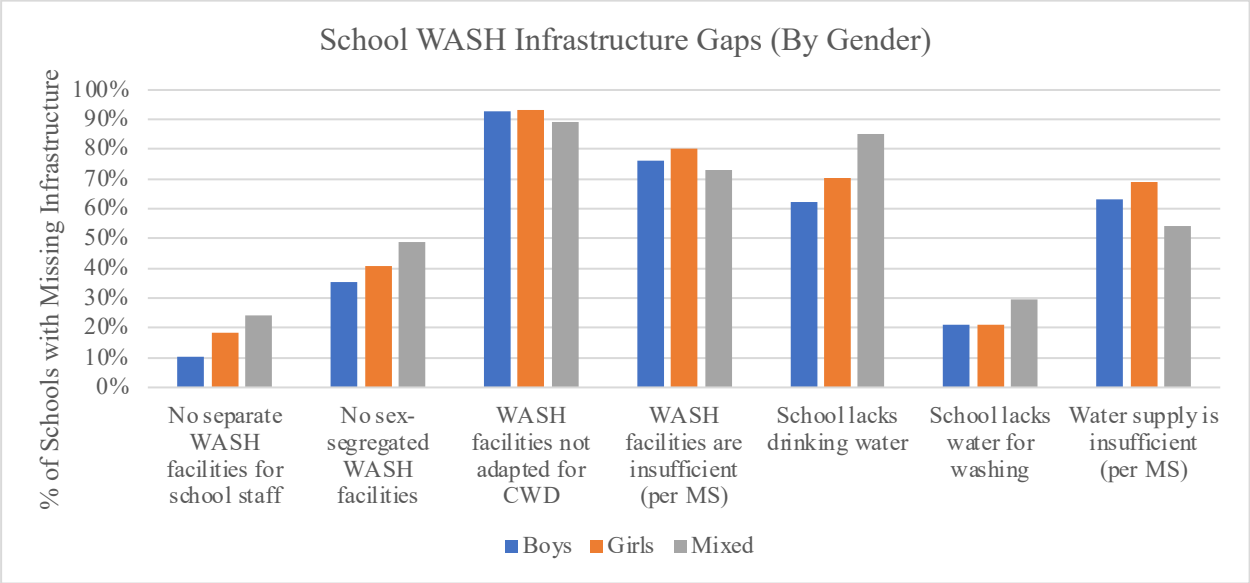


Figure 6. NRC Assessment - WASH Infrastructure Gaps (By Gender)

Of the 29 schools assessed with more than one shift, in 7 schools WASH facilities are divided between the shifts; in the 22 schools in which WASH facilities are shared between the shifts, in half (11) WASH facilities are in good condition, and in half (11) they are in poor condition. Overall, the school assessment confirmed the findings above; only 5 of the 38 schools surveyed reported they had no specific WASH needs.

19- Minimum Standards is abbreviated "MS" in the chart.

Technology Infrastructure

FGD participants also emphasized the need for improved technology, including both internet and computers, which were largely absent in schools. According to the school assessment, only four schools had access to internet, all in Diyala, though in all cases the internet was not strong enough for teachers and students to use it during lessons. In addition, 23 schools did not own any computers or laptops. However, the six schools in Dohuk collectively had 13 computers/laptops.

Many participants discussed this issue in the context of COVID-19, linking students' inability to access education during the pandemic to schools' lack of technology infrastructure. A representative from the MoE in Ramadi, Anbar noted that technology is critical to support digital learning even after the re-opening of schools following the pandemic, and emphasized that without such technology Iraq will not be able to keep up with other countries. A representative from the Federal Iraq MoE in Dohuk also mentioned that their office does not have internet, and that staff must use their own data.

Accessibility

In addition to school infrastructure being insufficient and, in many cases, simply absent, the infrastructure that does exist is often inaccessible, specifically for students with disabilities. The school infrastructure assessment found only 3 of the 38 schools had ramps or elevators to accommodate wheelchairs, though only in some places; in 13 schools (including all six schools in Dohuk), the hallways are not wide enough for a wheelchair to pass through. These and other accessibility-related findings are found in Figure 7, below. Assigning point values to the survey options (whereby Yes = 1; In some but not all places = 0.5, and No = 0, and the scores for each option are summed for each school)—the average score across all schools is 2.7 out of a maximum score of six, indicating that schools typically had less than three of these six features. Schools in Ninewa scored highest (4.9), followed by Diyala (4.8), Salah ad-Din (2.8), Kirkuk (2), Anbar (1.3), and Dohuk (1.5). Scores were relatively similar across girls', boys', and mixed schools, and scores did not vary greatly based on whether the first shift or later shifts were assessed.

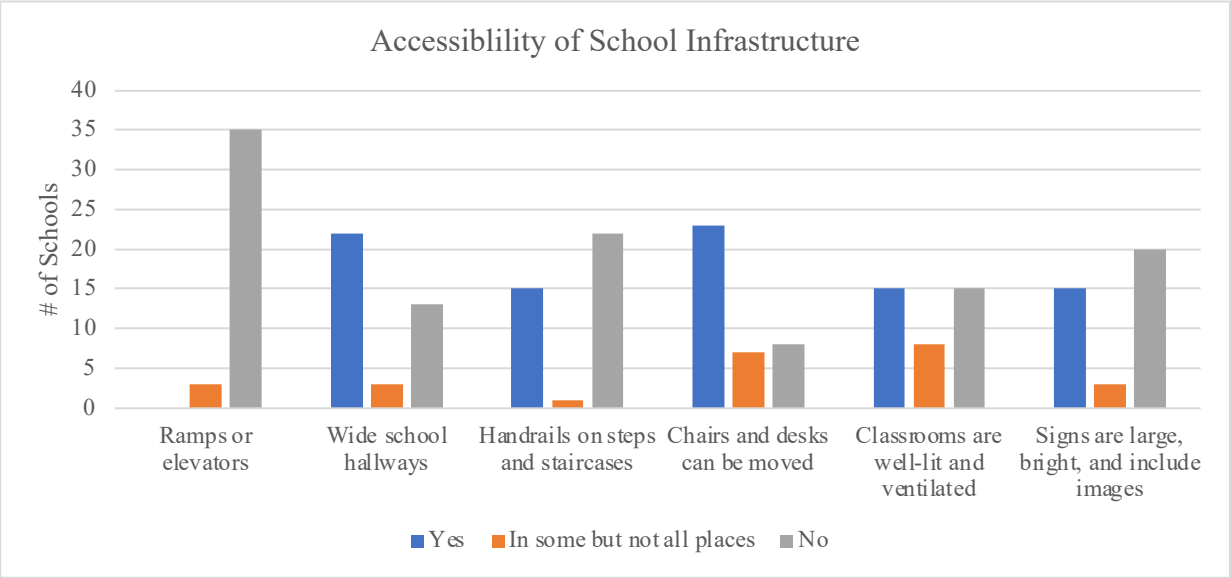


Figure 6. NRC Assessment - WASH Infrastructure Gaps (By Gender)

Ensuring infrastructure—and especially WASH facilities—are accessible for students with disabilities was a commonly mentioned concern, with nearly all participants confirming that current infrastructure is not inclusive, and mentioning this as a need. Notably, children with disabilities were more often cited as negatively affected by the poor or missing infrastructure (and again, especially WASH infrastructure) than female students (though it can be assumed that female students are also certainly negatively affected by this). The accessibility of more general physical infrastructure for students with disabilities was somewhat less mentioned, and when it was, it was most often discussed in broad terms, such as building classes for students with disabilities. A handful of participants did highlight, for example, the lack of ramps or elevators within classrooms, and the inaccessibility of roads surrounding schools. A Federal Iraq MoE representative in Dohuk mentioned that they have encouraged INGOs to build more inclusive infrastructure for schools; while this is of course an important area of need, it is notable that the government is encouraging INGOs to support school infrastructure, rather than perhaps acknowledging this as a responsibility of the government itself. A UNESCO representative also mentioned that her agency's school rehabilitation efforts prioritize general WASH infrastructure over infrastructure that is accessible for students with disabilities. She explained that a wheelchair accessible latrine takes up two or three times as much space compared to a standard latrine, implying that investing in accessible latrines may not be an efficient use of funds and space for the majority of students.

In terms of other cohorts with limited accessibility, in Anbar, a community leader noted that schools outside the city centers were more neglected, compared to schools in urban areas. A representative from the Federal Iraq MoE in Dohuk mentioned that IDP schools in Dohuk city receive more support from INGOs, while schools in camps receive less support. Parents in Dohuk (IDPs in Chammishko and refugees in Domiz) also noted that there is not always a school nearby to teach the desired curriculum, either Kurdish or Arabic.

Other important aspects of accessibility that were discussed included how students travel to school and any safety concerns they encounter along the way, whether there are checkpoints near the school, and whether school buildings have been used for purposes other than education. By far, the most common safety concern mentioned by FGD and KII participants—including students—was road accidents while walking to and from school. Often, students mentioned having to cross busy roads to reach the school, which increased the risk of accidents, especially when cars are speeding. NP explained that in Ninewa boys often try to hitch hike on the trunk of pick-up trucks and other vehicles, often without the driver's consent or knowledge. A parent in Dohuk mentioned that a local student recently died after a car accident on the way to school. Participants also noted a fear of stray dogs, and the poor (unpaved) conditions of roads, which make it difficult to reach school in rainy conditions during the winter. NP has explained that difficulties getting to school, and the time it takes to do so, means that students often arrive tired, and have trouble focusing on their lessons once in the classroom.

Bullying and harassment, particularly of girls, on the way to school was also mentioned as a notable safety issue; one student with a disability in Ninewa mentioned they were bullied on the way to school because of their disability. Parents in Dohuk noted that OOS youth sometimes harass students on their way to school. These concerns were shared among refugee, IDP, returnee, and host community FGD and KII participants. NP notes that in Ninewa, girls are often reluctant to identify the perpetrators of harassment, though in general the community does not trust security actors to guarantee students' (and in particular girls') safety. A community leader and the DoE in Salah ad-Din noted that schools should hire professional counsellors to address the issue of bullying and harassment. When students and parents specifically mentioned there were no safety concerns about travel to and from school, a common explanation was because they knew the people in the area.

Parents and students generally reported the school was near to their homes, though the farthest distances mentioned were 3km, and 60min travel time. In some cases, students had private transportation to school, which made the journey easier. However, in cases when transportation is needed, not all students are able to afford it, and lack of transportation was widely reported by FGD and KII participants as contributing to student drop out, especially among girls. Notably, explosive hazards were mentioned only once as a current safety issue, by parents in Kirkuk. However, these parents also explained that even in cases where explosive hazards are no longer a concern, the memory of past hazards is still frightening for them and their children. Parents in Kirkuk also noted as a safety concern that some students are using drugs, and in several instances the lack of a school fence was mentioned.

Participants also frequently mentioned that schools had been used to shelter IDPs—which in some cases has caused damage to school infrastructure—and for elections. There were mixed opinions on the use of schools for elections. In some areas, this was not perceived to be a disruption: schools were typically closed (or the start of school year was delayed) to host elections for only a few days, and there were no other negative effects. However, some parents in Kirkuk and Ninewa noted that the election-related security presence in schools was frightening for children; indeed, during this year's election, on October 10th, an attack by ISIL was reported on a polling station in Kirkuk. In Salah ad-Din, two teachers noted that furniture had been damaged when schools were used to host elections, though parents in this area generally thought the election did not have negative consequences on students' learning. Parents in Kirkuk also discussed that schools had been occupied by armed groups, which frightened children due to the presence of security forces. Even though armed groups no longer occupy the schools, students continue to be scared, due to the previous association of the school with military activities.

Checkpoints near schools can also be a cause for concern. One group of parents in Kirkuk noted that there is a check-point about 100m from the school, under the control of the Federal Police, which is a source of substantial fear among families and has led some students to drop-out. Children are frightened by the general military infrastructure, and families are worried that there might be an attack on the checkpoint, which could affect the school. Parents in Diyala shared these concerns about a checkpoint near the school. In Salah ad-Din, parents mentioned there are check-points near the school, but that it does not pose any safety concerns. Parents in Chammishko noted that the checkpoint at the entrance to the camp is sometimes crowded and can cause delays for students entering the camp to attend school, but that there are no safety issues. According to the school assessment, for 23 (60.5%) schools there were checkpoints within 2km of the schools.

Utilization

Students and teachers typically have no alternative but to use the infrastructure that does exist, even if it is very low quality. In some cases, students do not use WASH facilities because they are dirty and not functioning—this was reported by IDP students in Chammishko and refugee students in Domiz. However, as the next section discusses in more detail, using and being exposed to poor infrastructure has a negative impact on the quality of education students receive in schools, and can contribute to their decision to drop out of school

Best Practices

In terms of best practices and suggestions for improving school infrastructure, participants in Anbar, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din mentioned the possibility of parents, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), and NGOs collaborating with the school administration to improve infrastructure, such as conducting advocacy with school administrations to ensure that resources are used effectively; this approach was reportedly successful in Diyala, where the PTA worked with the school to solve an issue related to water pipes. PTAs were active in 234 (92%) of schools in the NRC assessment, though 9 (43%) schools in Dohuk did not have a PTA, and PTAs may not always meet regularly unless prompted by NGOs.

Community Leaders in Kirkuk and Diyala also mentioned the possibility of wealthy families donating land to build new schools, though also noted that the high costs of school construction would still be a barrier. Participants in Salah ad-Din suggested that school and classroom walls should be decorated with messages that encourage and motivate students; this is an appealing suggestion as it does not require substantial resources.

While not specifically mentioned by participants, campaigns to increase awareness among students and teachers of the importance of maintenance and keeping facilities in good condition may be useful in preventing vandalism and encouraging a sense of ownership over school infrastructure.

Conclusion

This section has described the status of school infrastructure. Physical infrastructure and WASH infrastructure is frequently insufficient to meet the needs of the school, while technology infrastructure is largely absent. In particular, students noted the absence of outdoor areas, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of proper and sufficient WASH facilities. The infrastructure that does exist is low quality, often due to lack of maintenance and overuse. School infrastructure—especially WASH facilities—are typically not accessible for children with disabilities, and children's safety is threatened en route to school by road accidents, stray dogs, checkpoints, and harassment. However, in most cases, students and teachers have no choice but to make do with the infrastructure that is present. Needless to say, all stakeholders are dissatisfied with school infrastructure, and the absence of needed infrastructure—as well as insufficient and low-quality infrastructure—limits access to and quality of education. The importance of addressing these concerns cannot be understated, as proper school infrastructure is an enabling factor for education. It is especially critical to improve and expand school infrastructure given that reintegration programs, if successful, would increase school enrollment. Reversely, poor and absent school infrastructure will continue to hinder efforts to reintegrate children into education, or even prompt drop-out—as well as diminish the perceived value of education in Iraqi society. These findings are summarized in Table 6, below.



Grade one students in Maimoona elementary school, Mosul. Photo: Alan Ayoubi/NRC

Presence	Accessibility	Utilization	Satisfaction and Impact	Best Practices
- Physical infrastructure, WASH infrastructure, and technology infrastructure is frequently **absent or insufficient and low quality.** In 18 of the 38 schools assessed in the infrastructure assessment, damaged infrastructure posed a safety hazard for students.	- School infrastructure, especially WASH facilities, are typically **not accessible for children with disabilities**. According to the NRC assessment, in nearly 100% of schools in Anbar, Kirkuk, and Ninewa, WASH facilities are not adapted for children with disabilities - Road accidents, stray dogs, checkpoints, and harassment threaten children's safety on the way to school.	- In most cases, students and teachers have **no choice** but to use the poor education infrastructure	- All stakeholder groups are **dissatisfied** with school infrastructure. - The absence of needed infrastructure, as well as insufficient, and low-quality infrastructure, **limits access to, continuity in, and quality of education.**	- Involve **parents and PTAs** in improving school infrastructure. - **Decorate walls** with students' work and words of encouragement. - Conduct awareness campaign to promote **collective maintenance of infrastructure** and prevent vandalism.

Table 6. Summary of School Infrastructure Findings

Education Personnel

The research component on education personnel examined both recruitment pathways, as well as pre- and in-service training for teachers. While recruitment and training are discussed separately below, it is important to note that these are interlinked issues that compound each other: overall, schools are experiencing a shortage of teachers, and the teachers that are employed do not have sufficient training. The limited number of qualified teachers directly affects children's education.

Presence

Recruitment

A clear discrepancy emerged between teachers who were recruited in the past few years, and those recruited earlier; several participants mentioned 2014 as the year hiring practices began to change. Previously, teachers reported they were appointed to full-time positions directly after graduation from their teaching program; these teachers were very satisfied with this process, which they described as a meritocratic system (despite some reports of general corruption within recruitment processes). However, in recent years, the MoE/DoE simply stopped recruiting new teachers; indeed, the teachers in the discussions who had been "recruited" after 2014 were mostly volunteer lecturers, rather than permanent, contracted staff. However, teachers (volunteer lecturers) recruited after 2014 were very dissatisfied with the acute lack of job security and permanent positions available, noting that there are many unemployed graduates who have been unable to find roles. MC noted that in Federal Iraq, some volunteer teachers with two to three years of experience have recently been given one-year contracts and a salary of 250,000 IQD (about 171 USD) per month. Participants also emphasized that teacher recruitment has been on hold despite current teachers continuing to retire, the large number of available graduates with teaching degrees, and the urgent shortage of teaching staff in classrooms, which is negatively affecting students' learning. Iraq's Education Cluster estimates that the 'teacher gap'—the percentage of missing teachers—is 32%; in Salah ad-Din, for example, 6000 additional teachers are needed.

A representative from People in Need (PIN) mentioned that recruitment may have increased in 2021 because it was an election year, implying that politicians may have tried to win votes by increasing recruitment; she noted that recruitment may only pick up again during the next election. However, this was not mentioned by teachers themselves in the discussions. Participants explained that the main barrier impeding teacher recruitment—including teachers with a variety of specializations—is the lack of funding to support new teaching positions. A MoE representative in Baghdad noted that the Ministry of Finance is responsible for providing the MoE with funding for teachers' salaries. The DoE in Ramadi, Anbar also noted that the MoE oversees recruitment, and that the DoE does not have control in this matter; an NGO in Anbar cited insecurity as a barrier to recruiting teachers for specific areas.

One contentious aspect of teacher recruitment is the location where teachers are asked to work. The Education Cluster Coordinator explained that teachers prefer to work in well-resourced schools and in urban areas, rather than in camps or rural areas; this is despite the fact that teachers in camps are likely to receive more training from international actors. In general, the MoE tries to spread teachers out over different areas, but the Coordinator mentioned that sometimes teachers will appeal to other politicians to change their assignment to a more desirable location. Along the same lines, IDP teachers in Chammishko explained they were not satisfied with the recruitment process because they were assigned based on their geographic location, not their specialization, so they are not teaching the subjects they have been trained on. In one case, a teacher who wished to change location said they are not able to submit the request until they have seven years of experience; it is unclear whether this is in line with official policy, or some form of corruption.

20- Education Cluster Strategy, Iraq Education Cluster, 2019.
21- Position Paper: Teacher Incentives. Iraq Education Cluster, January 2019.

The research school assessment in 38 schools found that school shifts have, on average, 18 teachers each, for an average student to teacher ratio of about 32:1. However, there are substantial disparities based on location, gender, and shift number. In Ninewa, there is one teacher for every 57 students, compared to one teacher for every 14 students in Dohuk. In girls' schools, the student to teacher ratio is 23:1, in mixed schools 29:1, and in boys' schools 45:1. In first shifts, the ratio is 26:1, compared to 37:1 for later shifts. These findings are shown in Figure 8, below. According to the Iraq Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, in emergency contexts the target teacher to student ratio should be 40:1; presumably, this ratio would improve as the context transitions from emergency to development. Of the 38 school shifts in the school infrastructure assessment, 8 (21%)—including five in Ninewa—did not meet this standard.

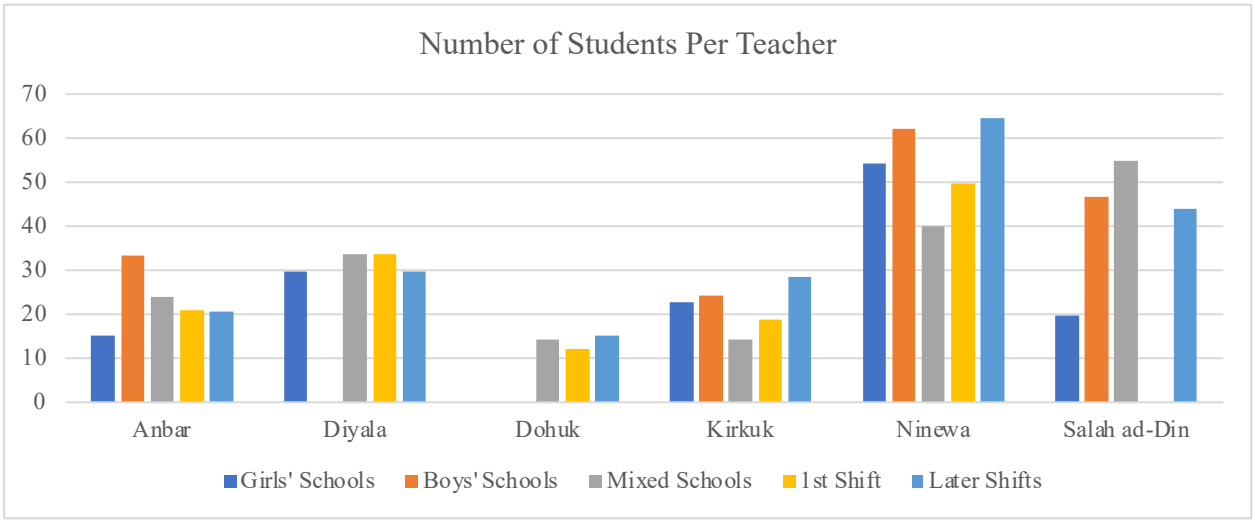


Figure 8. School Infrastructure Assessment - Number of Students per Teacher

Schools included in the NRC assessment had an average of 14 paid teachers and 7 volunteer lecturers each, shown in the left-hand y axis in Figure 9. This ratio was relatively consistent across governorates and gender of school, though Kirkuk had more volunteer lecturers relative to paid teachers. On average, the student to teacher ratio was 24:1—somewhat lower than in the school infrastructure assessment—though in Ninewa the ratio was notably higher, at 39:1; this is shown on the right-hand y-axis in Figure 9.

There is a need for teachers specialized in certain disciplines (in particular science and math) as well as teachers who are trained to support students with disabilities. A community leader in Ninewa mentioned the need for English and Mathematics teachers in particular, and a refugee student with a disability in Domiz camp requested that teachers be better trained to support and interact positively with children with disabilities. The DoE in Ramadi, Anbar noted the lack of teachers for early primary, and counseling staff. He also noted that newly recruited teachers are often not qualified—a somewhat disappointing observation, as one might hope that the MoE/DoE would be able to recruit the most qualified candidates, given the large pool of candidates for such a limited number of vacancies. However, these dynamics may also play out in the opposite way: the most qualified teachers may be those least willing to wait until a vacancy is available, and decide to pursue alternative employment.

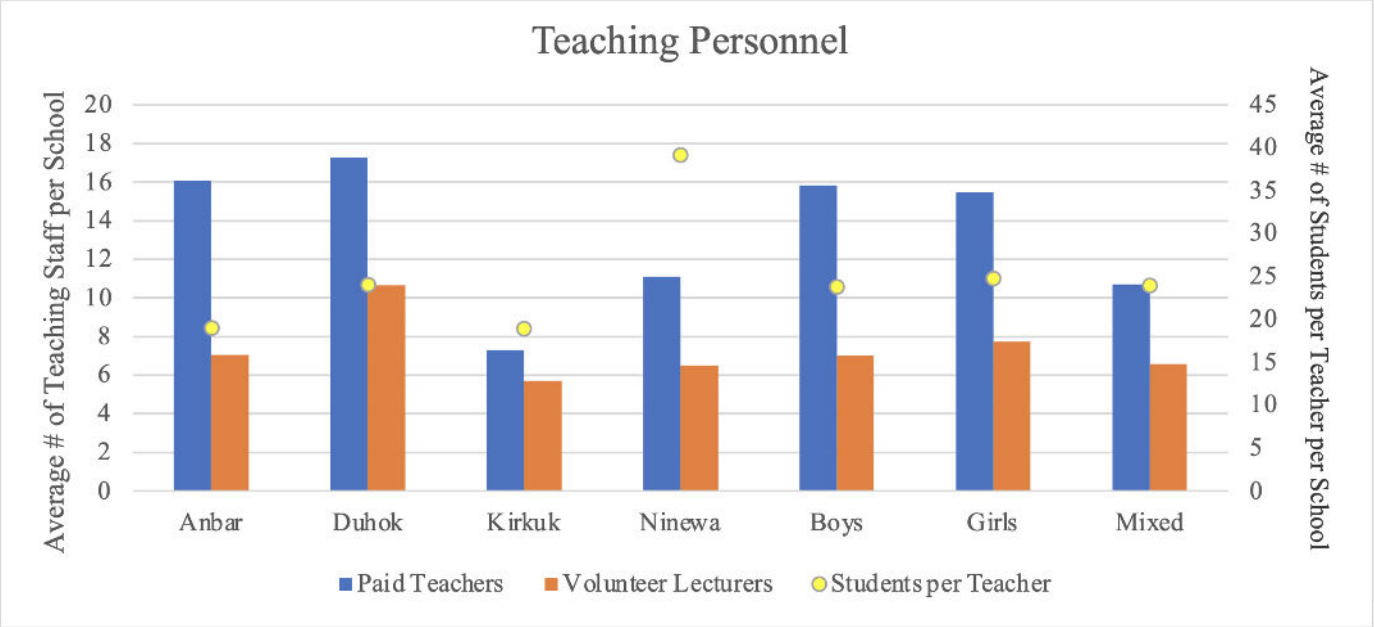


Figure 9. NRC Assessment – Teaching Personnel

The shortage of qualified teachers has substantial impacts both on teachers themselves, as well as students. A community leader in Jalawla explained that the lack of teachers increases the workload of current teachers, as they have to cover additional classes and students, reducing teachers' efficiency and increasing their stress. She noted that this pressure on teachers has a negative impact on students' learning. A representative from PIN also noted that due to lack of support from the government, teachers may become burned out. Teachers themselves expressed frustration as the often-difficult conditions of their job, low salary compared to their workload, and the poor perception of teachers within society—including by parents. As a result of the teacher shortage, the Federal Iraq MoE office in Dohuk noted that IDP schools in the governorate under their jurisdiction are mostly staffed by volunteer lecturers, which has a negative impact on students' learning. Lastly, an NGO in Ninewa noted that volunteer lecturers who do not receive a salary will look for other jobs, which will affect students' learning.

There was much discussion around the practice of INGOs paying salaries/incentives for teachers or volunteer lecturers; while this practice has now stopped, participants reported that the MoE/DoE has not resumed salary transfers, as they had agreed. A representative from UNHCR explained that the government agreed to resume payments because they did not have a choice, but in reality, do not have the funds to do so. Most participants acknowledged that INGOs' payment of salaries had benefits, in terms of both ensuring teachers were present in the classroom, motivating teachers, and providing employment for community members. However, they also recognized that the practice is unsustainable, and were clear about the need for a long-term solution. A UNHCR representative mentioned that the government did not pay teachers during COVID-19 because they were not physically in schools; it is unclear how widespread this practice was, and was not mentioned by teachers themselves. A community leader in Chammishko, Dohuk explained that in the past, community members had pooled funds to pay for lecturers' monthly salaries, but that this is not happening anymore due to the camp's difficult financial situation. In some cases, lecturers trained by INGOs may be more likely to be hired as full-time contract teachers; this was mentioned as a possibility by PIN, however this is not yet confirmed. Several teachers in Kirkuk explained they had been lecturing without payment in the school for several years, before being hired on permanent, paid contracts. The Federal Iraq MoE in Dohuk also noted that most of their schools (serving IDPs) in Dohuk are staffed by volunteer teachers, who hope to be prioritized for permanent contracts, if and when vacancies arise.

Refugee students in Dohuk (Bardarash and Domiz camps)) also urged the government to resume payments to teachers, whom the students report sometimes do not come to school due to the lack of salary; this was also mentioned by community leaders in Domiz. According to NRC, the KRG would prefer not to pay refugee teachers, and is requesting that international actors or the GoI do so instead. In October and November 2021, these issues resurfaced in the form of a teacher boycott in refugee schools in Dohuk (similar boycotts have also been reported in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah). As of the end of November, all 20 schools in refugee camps in Dohuk were on boycott, with lecturers (hourly-paid staff)—who comprise roughly 70% of teaching staff in a ffected schools—not coming to work because of delayed salary payments; nearly 14,000 students are affected by these boycotts.

While many teachers explained that they joined the profession because it is personally fulfilling to support students and help them realize their futures, some teachers noted that their main motivation was to have a salary; in one case, a teacher in Dohuk said they must sometimes look for other jobs to earn enough money to support their family.

Training

Similar to recruitment, teachers had different experiences with training, depending on when they were recruited, and would have received initial training; once again, 2014 was mentioned by several participants as the year practices changed. Participants who began their teaching careers earlier reported that they had received training from the MoE/DoE at the start of their assignments—sometimes up to three months of training—while those (volunteer lecturers) recruited after 2014 noted that they did not receive such training. Participants widely agreed that the quality and availability of teacher training has declined in recent years. In particular, there is a gap in trainings for teachers to support children with disabilities, on PSS (for students, as well as teacher's own well-being), as well as a lack of training for online learning—which was regarded as a substantial barrier to children's learning during the pandemic. SCI explained that teacher training is typically organized based on the needs identified by inspectors, who visit schools and observe teachers; the role of inspectors was not mentioned by participants.

Teacher training opportunities provided by the government are few and far between. Most often, FGD and KII participants explained that these trainings were provided in earlier years, and/or are not adequate to cover all teacher training needs. The DoE in Ramadi, Anbar agreed that when they have provided trainings, they are not sufficient. Teachers in Diyala shared this opinion, explaining that when the DoE has offered trainings, they do not reflect pedogeological best practices, and do not match the standards of trainings provided by INGOs. This perspective was also echoed by an NGO representative in Ninewa, who mentioned that teachers who have worked with INGOs have more knowledge and better capacity. A representative from the KRI DoE in Dohuk explained that training opportunities should be available in the fourth year of university study for a spiring teachers, as well as during the first few years of employment. However, he noted these trainings are only available when the DoE has adequate financial resources, which has not been the case since 2014. In several locations, trainings linked to updated curricula and textbooks seemed to be one of the only trainings provided by the government. Curricula may be changed as often as several times a year, and earlier changes may be reversed in the next edition; the field teams noted that the frequent changes may be due to parents' complaints, or because teachers have difficulty teaching the curricula.

When teacher trainings are available, they are most often provided by INGOs and UN agencies; these trainings were reported to include supporting children with disabilities, and PSS. A local NGO in Anbar noted they had provided online trainings to teachers, but that the DoE did not give the NGO a long-term contract to continue the trainings. The Education Coordinator explained that trainings are more common in IDP and refugee camps, where education actors operate; in part, this is because the camp environment is more conducive to organizing and delivering activities. According to a representative from the Federal Iraq MoE in Dohuk, UNICEF, World Vision, and NRC are providing online trainings, and UNICEF is providing in-person training to all teachers in Federal Iraq MoE schools in the governorate. This could not be fully confirmed by ECI partners. A representative from UNESCO noted that their regional office in Beirut has designed an online teacher training program based on materials developed during COVID-19, which could be useful for teachers in Iraq.

Overall, the lack of proper training was attributed to financial limitations on the part of the MoE/DoE. A community leader in Kirkuk mentioned that the government does not have a clear capacity building plan for teachers, and the DoE in Ramadi, Anbar noted that they struggle with logistical support, as well as the lack of teacher trainers. The DoE Director in Hawija, Kirkuk cited lack of curricula and training experts as main barriers, in addition to lack of funding. As a result, in some cases, communities are losing trust in the government. A community leader from Chammishko, Dohuk mentioned he doesn't believe that the government lacks the funding, and instead suggested that the government simply is not interested in supporting education. Teachers in Anbar described how during a visit to the school by the DoE, they raised the need for additional training and submitted a request to fill vacancies, but never received a reply from the DoE. An NGO in Salah ad-Din also explained that because many teachers are older (likely in part because new, younger teachers have not been recruited in previous years), they have not been able to keep up with developments in educational pedagogies—and perhaps technology as well.

Many respondents—including parents and students—mentioned poorly trained teachers as a central concern, and a contributing factor to drop-out. The DoE Director in Hawija, Kirkuk also noted that it is important to provide for teachers' needs and well-being, in order to retain qualified teachers that are currently employed. A community leader in Ninewa noted that without regular training, teachers may lose the skills they initially developed during their education.

Accessibility

Recruitment

Some participants—including the Education Director in Jalawla, Diyala—noted that the recruitment process is not always transparent, and that applicants with personal connections are more likely to be hired. A representative from PIN described how applicants must pay 20,000 USD if they want a guaranteed position as a teacher, though this could not be independently confirmed. While such a cost is exorbitant, she explained that the benefit of having a secure pension as a permanent teacher justifies the upfront cost for some applicants. However, this is obviously not financially possible for most aspiring teachers. One male teacher in Anbar mentioned that he was given a job because someone in his family was "martyred," and teachers in Salah ad-Din confirmed that they paid bribes to get their jobs, and that the process was not fair.

Training

For the trainings that do exist, there were few reports of teachers facing difficulties accessing them. One main barrier in terms of accessibility is likely the limited spots available in trainings provided by INGOs and the UN, and the targeting of such trainings to specific schools currently served by these actors. Teachers in more rural areas of Anbar and Kirkuk also noted that the DoE focuses on schools in the city centers, rather than schools in more rural areas, and so they do not have an opportunity to participate in trainings; this opinion was also mentioned by an NGO in Ninewa that noted teachers sometimes have not been able to attend trainings because they are too far away. The Education Director in Jalawla, Diyala noted that only teachers on contracts are eligible for trainings, even though volunteer lecturers are more eager to participate.

Utilization

Recruitment

Similar to school infrastructure, teachers often do not have a choice whether or not to utilize recruitment pathways. Those who do not use the recruitment pathways would not become teachers—however, it is likely that many potential candidates decided not to pursue teaching because of the mentioned issues with existing recruitment mechanisms. At the same time, in a sense, the MoE/DoE is not making use of available recruitment mechanisms, due to the halt of teacher hiring in many areas.

Training

In general, teachers in Diyala mentioned they received training from SCI, and teachers in Dohuk received training from SCI, NRC, and UNICEF. Teachers in Kirkuk, Ninewa, and Anbar reported not having participated in any training. Given the general lack of training opportunities described above, it is not surprising that teachers in several locations have not participated in trainings. For those that have, there were two main routes. First, teachers recruited in earlier years were given formal training from the DoE, prior to and during the start of their teaching assignments; as noted above, these training opportunities are no longer available. Second, a small number of teachers participate in training opportunities provided by INGOs or UN agencies, as mentioned above.

The results of the NRC assessment show that the majority of teachers currently in schools have not been recently trained. In 159 (63%) schools, teachers have not been trained in pedagogy and lesson planning in the last two academic years (Figure 10). In 186 (74%) schools, teachers have not been trained on PSS in the last two academic years (Figure 11). In 11 (4%) schools, teachers have received both of these trainings and in 151 (60%) schools, no teachers have received either training. According to SCI, new teachers should receive training every year, while more experienced teachers should receive training roughly every other year.

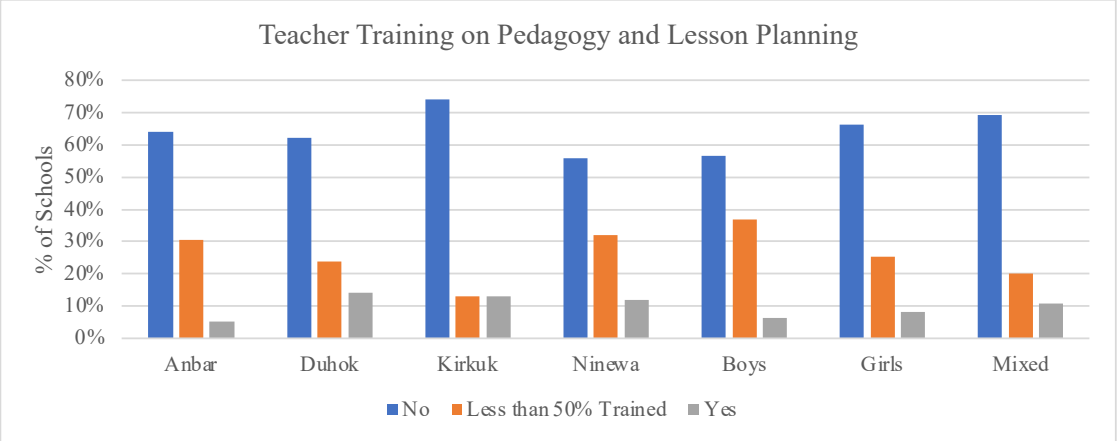


Figure 10. NRC Assessment - Teacher Training on Pedagogy and Lesson Planning

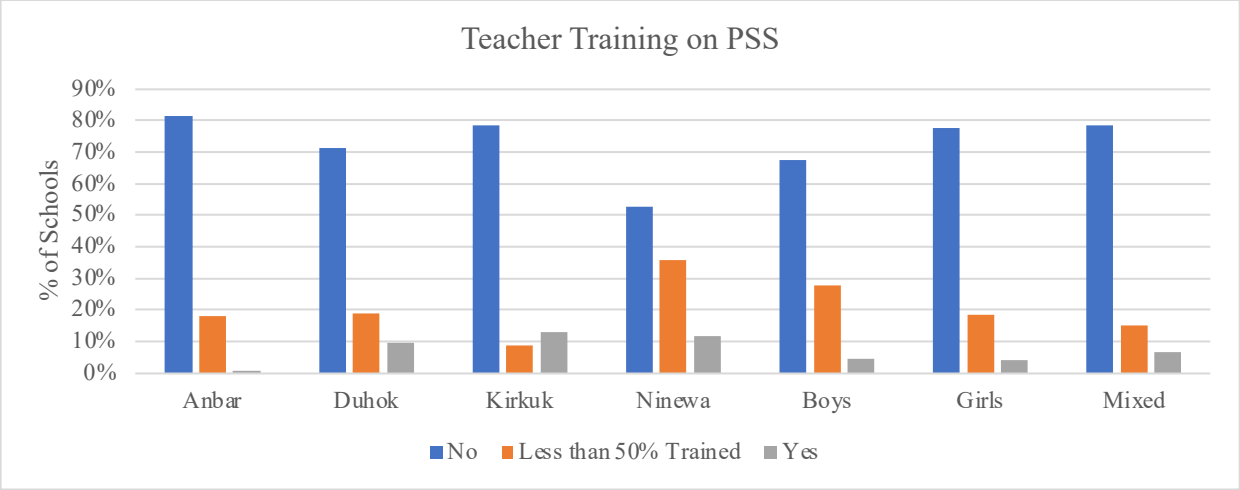


Figure 11. NRC Assessment - Teacher Training on PSS

Best Practices

Recruitment

A DoE representative in Ramadi, Anbar suggested that recruitment be decentralized, and be coordinated at the governorate level; a representative from the MoE in Baghdad echoed this recommendation. Suggestions from Ninewa and Kirkuk included assigning teachers to work in their own area of specialization, and in schools in their own community—especially for rural areas, to reduce the chance that teachers will move to another (i.e. more urban) location. The Education Coordinator agreed on this, and added that if teachers are recruited from their own communities, they may be more likely to be personally invested in their students.

Training

In general, the Education Coordinator reiterated that teacher training is a necessary component of any education intervention, and that parents and PTAs should also be provided with capacity building. Teachers from Salah ad-Din recommended that per diems be provided on training days, and that an appropriate training location and training hours be selected; they also noted the need for a clear training agenda. An NGO representative from Ninewa mentioned as a best practice that they conduct classroom observations of teachers, and then provide feedback afterwards. Finally, a DoE representative from Ninewa noted that teacher trainings on PSS has worked well for supporting students after conflict.

Conclusion

For both teacher recruitment and teacher training, government processes were functional prior to about 2014, when conflict broke out in Iraq. Since then, these services have stalled. In general, teacher recruitment has been put on hold; teachers that are "hired" are typically in temporary and un-paid roles as volunteer lecturers. Teacher training is now mainly provided by INGOs and the UN, though these services are not sufficient to meet the needs. In terms of accessibility, in the past and currently, recruitment pathways were less accessible for candidates who did not pay bribes, and those without personal connections. Training is more accessible for teachers participating in INGO programming, as well as those in urban areas. The government is not making use of potential recruitment pathways to hire teachers, though aspiring teachers themselves do not have an option not to use whatever pathways do exist. When training is available and accessible for teachers, they have typically used the services, though this may represent a small portion of teachers overall. Teachers recruited

prior to 2014 were satisfied with their recruitment, though teachers recruited after were not. Teachers who have participated in trainings are generally satisfied, though many have not had an opportunity to participate. Limited teacher recruitment has a highly negative impact on children's education, as schools are understaffed. At the same time, existing staff are often underqualified, due to the lack of trainings. These findings are summarized in Table 7, below.

Presence	Accessibility	Utilization	Satisfaction and Impact	Best Practices
Recruitment: - Prior to 2014, teacher **recruitment was streamlined** via the government. - In recent years, teacher **recruitment has been put on hold.** - New teachers often have **temporary contracts** and are **not fully paid.** *Training:* - Prior to 2014, the government provided a **basic level of teacher training**. - In recent years, the government has **not provided sufficient training** for teachers. According to the NRC assessment, in 151 (60%) schools, no teachers have received training in the past two years. - Most existing trainings are **provided by INGOs and the UN,** but this is **not sufficient.** - There is limited teacher training to support **students with disabilities.**	*Recruitment:* - In the past and currently, recruitment pathways were **less accessible** for candidates who did not pay bribes, and those without personal connections. *Training:* - When training is provided, it is typically **only accessible for specific cohorts** of teachers participating in INGO programming, and those in urban areas.	*Recruitment:* - The government is **not using existing recruitment pathways.** - For aspiring teachers, there is **no option** *not* to use recruitment pathways. *Training:* - Teachers for whom training was offered and accessible, have **participated in trainings.**	*Recruitment:* - Teachers recruited prior to 2014 were **satisfied** with recruitment. - Teachers recruited after 2014 were **not satisfied** with recruitment. - Limited recruitment has a **negative impact** on children's education. *Training:* - Teachers who have participated in trainings are **satisfied**, though many have not participated. - Limited training opportunities **negatively impact** children's education	*Recruitment:* - **Decentralize recruitment** to give DoEs more control over hiring. - **Recruit teachers from local areas**, and based on their specializations. *Training:* - Participants should be given a **per diem** when attending trainings. - **Training locations, timetables, and agendas** should be given careful consideration. - When possible, include **teacher observations and feedback** within training programs.

Reintegration into Formal Education

The final main theme of the research covered educational services supporting students' reintegration into formal education for children who are out of school (OOS). As mentioned in the limitations section, most child participants in the FGDs were enrolled in school, indicating that the data collection may not have fully captured the experiences of children most in need of—or who have not been able to access—these reintegration services. Many child participants—as well as parents and teachers—discussed the experiences of OOS children in general, though this cannot fully replace the value of students speaking about their own lived realities.

Because child FGD participants were nearly all enrolled in schools, many discussions of reintegration services also referred to education services more generally, and the overall barriers that students may encounter when accessing education. While barriers to accessing education and barriers to accessing reintegration services are not precisely the same, there is some overlap.

Reintegration programs target students who have not enrolled in, or dropped-out of school. The NRC dataset provides an indication of the prevalence of drop-out: a total of 4187 students (including 2387 males and 1800 females) dropped out in the 2020 – 2021 school year; this is 3.6% of all students (including, notably, the same percentage of male and female students). Overall, 111 (44%) schools experienced no drop-out. In Anbar, 67 (45%) schools experienced drop out; in Dohuk, 20 (95%) schools, in Kirkuk 9 (39%) schools, and in Ninewa 46 (78%) schools experienced drop-out.

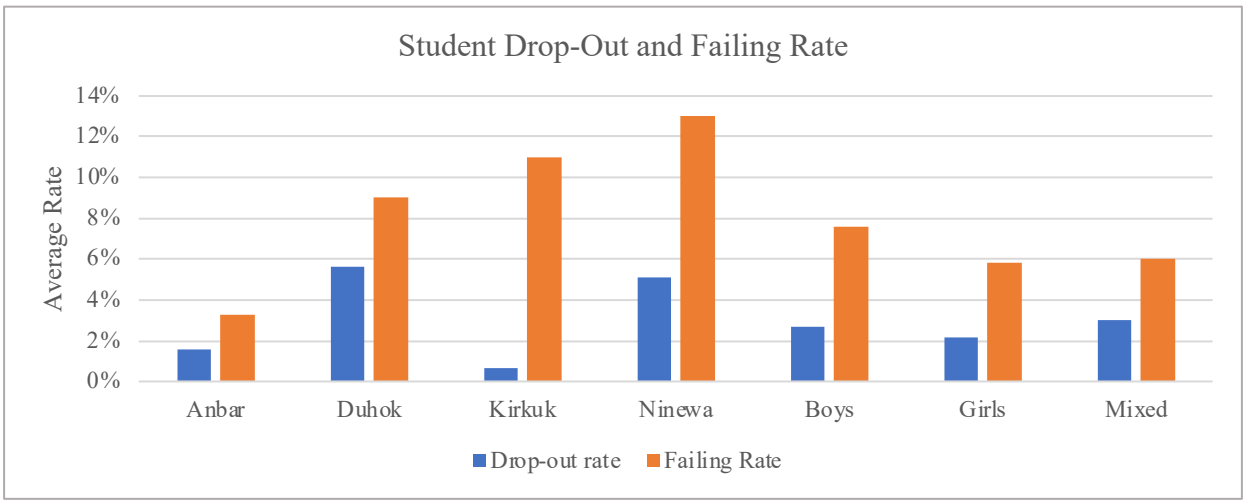


Figure 12. NRC Assessment - Student Drop-Out and Failing Rate

Often, poor academic performance is a precursor to student drop-out. Within the NRC dataset, a total of 10,468 students (3787 females and 6681 males) failed one or more subjects during the last school year; this is 9% of all students, including 10% of male students and 8% of female students. Only 92 (36%) schools had no students failing; schools that did have failing students included 71 (47%) schools in Anbar, 21 (100%) schools in Dohuk, 18 (78%) schools in Kirkuk, and 51 (86%) schools in Ninewa. Examining both drop-out and failing students, only 71 (28%) schools had neither. These statistics are summarized at the student level in Figure 12, above. Ninewa has the highest failing rate (13%), and the second highest drop-out rate (5%), while Dohuk has the highest drop-out rate (6%). While boys are slightly more likely than girls to fail subjects, they both drop out at similar rates.

Reintegration programs are obviously a critical lifeline for students who have dropped out. As a representative from PIN explained, some students who drop out of formal education may decide to return later on, after realizing that it is very difficult to get a job—even in the army or police—without an educational certificate at the secondary level.

Presence

By way of introduction to this section, it should be noted that the below description of available reintegration services should not be interpreted as a formal mapping. Rather, the below describes participants' awareness of such services, which may be influenced by a number of factors, and in some cases may represent conflicting accounts. Many participants, including children, were aware of some reintegration services in their community.

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However, many of these services did not provide a specific pathway back into formal education, but rather tried to mitigate some of the barriers and effects of school drop out that families face. For example, commonly mentioned services included recreational activities, remedial lessons (for children currently in school), provision of school supplies, financial support, and encouragement for students. While not certified pathways per se, discussion of these services emphasizes the complex nature of drop-out and school reintegration, and programs to promote the latter should seek to address multiple barriers.

Students in Domiz camp, Dohuk, noted that Alternative Learning Spaces (ALS)[22] were present in their schools, parents said that ALP/ALC[23] is not available in Domiz, but that NRC is providing general education services. A local NGO in Dohuk, Bishkoreen, reported that they have catch-up classes for IDPs in Bersive 1 and 2 and Chammishko camp, and NRC has run back to school campaigns in Dohuk. IDP students in Chammishko camp said SCI is providing catch-up classes, and SWEDO is operating a child-friendly space (CFS). Refugee students in Bardarash reported that SCI and NRC provide catch-up classes, while ACTED provides CFS. On the other hand, the DoE in Summel and several participants from Chammishko noted that ALP/ALC and evening classes[24] are not available for students in camps, especially if they are too old to re-enter formal school. A community leader in Domiz mentioned that Kurdish schools are not available in the camp. The DoE in Summel also mentioned that "external" school/exams are available in some but not all locations in Summel[25]. The DoE in Summel also noted that for IDP and refugee children who had lost documentation and were OOS, the DoE/MoE would previously enroll them in a short course, and then give them a placement exam to determine what grade they should be in. However, this service is no longer available in Summel, but is available in Bardarash, as, according to the field teams, there are new refugees there.

In Diyala, "external" education/exams are available. The Director of Education in Jalawla also noted that throughout the governorate the DoE is opening special classes for drop-outs and children affected by conflict; it is unclear if this is under a specific, existing reintegration program. Catch-up classes provided by SCI, the ALP/ALC, and evening classes were also reported by some to be available in Diyala (others said there were no evening classes available), as well as awareness campaigns to promote education, and financial support.

22- As described by the SCI field team, ALS is a child-friendly space run by two teachers that utilizes play-based learning and other similar pedagogies. The teachers are not formal contracted teachers, but are university graduates with a few years of experience, and have received training from INGOs; they receive incentive payments from INGOs for their work. Vulnerable children both enrolled in school and OOS are eligible for ALS, such as children with disabilities, children who lost one or both parents, children who are struggling in school, and children from child-headed households.

23- To note, ALP is provided by the MoE, while Alternative Learning Centers (ALC) are provided by MC. Both programs essentially function the same, and both provide a certified pathway back into formal education.

24- As explained by the MC field team, evening classes are essentially afternoon shifts in schools for students who are 18 years or older. Evening classes encompass a two year, accelerated program, at the end of which students take an exam that allows them to re-enter formal education (the law was recently changed to allow this) if they are not too old to do so. Students who do not pass this exam still have the option to enroll in "external" education/exams.

25- As explained by the MC field team, these exams are offered to children as a last option, if they have not succeeded in evening school. Students are allowed to take a final exam for a given level of education, and, if they pass, they receive the certificate corresponding to that level of education. However, students often must study independently for these exams.

In Ninewa, the ALP/ALC program was mentioned, as well as evening classes, support to obtain civil documentation, and financial support. In Anbar, the NGO Sabaa Sanabel had been providing remedial lessons for primary school children, though their program is now on hold. Remedial lessons were also reported to be available, as well as evening classes, and financial support. However, parents in Anbar noted that no reintegration services are available in their area except for private education, which is too expensive. In Kirkuk, services reported to be available include: literacy centers, the ALP/ALC, youth education centers (for ages 10 – 15), evening classes, catch-up centers, financial support, and support to obtain civil documentation.

Students in Anbar and Diyala reported that teachers are providing extra lessons outside of school, in their own homes. Students reported this is one of the most popular programs available and that it is very effective in supporting their academic work. However, teachers are charging students for these extra lessons. The field teams explained that teachers are trying to earn extra income, and sometimes do not fully teach the lessons in school—either because they are unable to cover the full curriculum, or because they seek to pressure students to pay for extra lessons. This is a worrying trend that warrants further investigation.

In Salah ad-Din, participants mentioned that some NGOs provide support for families to obtain civil documentation. ALCs are provided through MC, and other available services include ALP, catch-up classes, youth education, literacy programs, evening classes, "external" education/exams and PSS support. In particular, one community leader mentioned that ALC centers have enabled students with disabilities to return to education. However, one focus group of students was entirely unaware of any such services offered in their community.

When asked what reintegration services were available in their communities, participants also mentioned that parents must encourage their children to study and stay in school. While not a "service" per se, this response speaks to the recognized importance of the family in supporting education—and perhaps the reality that not all families believe in the value of education. One community leader in Anbar mentioned that such encouragement on the part of the community was the only "service" available to reintegrate children into formal education.

According to the school infrastructure assessment, in Salah ad-Din, six schools provided ALP/ALC, one school ran evening classes, and one school ran remedial education. In Ninewa, two schools provided ALP/ALC. In Dohuk, six schools provided catch-up classes. In Diyala, four schools provided "other" programs, which was ALS, implemented by SCI. No reintegration programs were present in the schools in Anbar and Kirkuk.

In cases where reintegration services are absent, participants cited the government's lack of funding as a main reason. The Education Cluster Coordinator explained that one issue is that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) may not be allocated enough funds from the Government of Iraq (GoI) for education services in Kurdistan, especially in light of the expected integration of Syrian students; the Coordinator noted that the Cluster and UN partners will help the KRG advocate with the GoI to ensure they have sufficient funding. Regarding reintegration services specifically targeting children with disabilities, or girls, there was generally little discussion.

Accessibility

In only a few cases were reintegration services specifically described as accessible. This included students in Ninewa who reported that ALP/ALC was easy and free to enroll in, and accessible to everyone. SCI catch-up classes in Chammishko camp and Diyala were also mentioned as accessible. On the other hand, participants cited many reasons why services were not—or would not be—accessible. In particular, the lack of financial resources to enroll or pay for transportation was a major barrier, as well as age restrictions that make it difficult for students who are too old or have been OOS for too long to re-enter formal education. Missing civil documentation was also considered a significant barrier—specifically for children born in ISIL-controlled areas, and Syrian refugees who do not have certificates from their previous study in Syria. As a representative from UNHCR explained, children who completed their primary education in Syria and then came to Iraq need to present a certificate confirming this; Syrian students who begin their education in Iraq do not face this difficulty. The Education Cluster Coordinator described the barrier of civil documentation as "extremely frustrating." As noted in previous literature, policies regarding students' documentation are often not uniformly enforced. Indeed, both Education Cluster Coordinators (from UNICEF and SCI) noted that individuals within the DoE or head teachers often make such decisions on a case-by-case basis.

According to the NRC assessment data, 702 students (372 girls and 330 boys) enrolled in the 2020 – 2021 school year were attending without documentation, roughly 0.4% of the 117,381 students enrolled in all 253 schools; about 0.5% of female students and 0.4% of male students did not have documentation. However, these students without documentation were concentrated in 47 (19%) schools, 22 of which were in Anbar, and 19 of which were in Ninewa; 427 (61%) of the 702 students without documentation are attending school in Ninewa. The most obvious interpretation of this data is that students without documentation have a very difficult time enrolling in schools, which has also been documented through previous research conducted by ECI partners.

Refugee children in Domiz pointed out that only a limited number of children can enroll in ALS at one time, so interested students must wait in order to participate in the program, and even then, can only participate for a limited period of time, before the next cohort of students is due to enter. While this arrangement contributes to the high quality of education found in these services due to the low student to teacher ratio, enabling more children to enroll in these services was a common recommendation from participants.

In Kirkuk, mothers noted that reintegration services are accessible in Hawija, but not in their village, outside the city center. Parents in Anbar and Diyala also noted this gap in more rural areas, and parents in Ninewa mentioned lack of transportation might be an issue for families living far away from the center. Participants in Salah ad-Din explained that, in general, services may not be provided close enough to families' homes. The DoE in Summel, Dohuk also cited the lack of an Arabic curriculum for ALP/ALC within refugee camps as a barrier for those students to access the program.

Students in Salah ad-Din noted that they found ALC particularly accessible, because students only attend two days per week, which enables participants to continue working to support their families. However, a community leader from the governorate mentioned that extra follow-up and support is needed to encourage these students to continue attending ALP/ALC, given that they are already working. Participants also mentioned they found the ALP/ALC program to be particularly accessible because it's free, near to their homes, available for students with disabilities and girls, and that textbooks and stationery are provided to students. However, age limits were noted as a barrier to enrolled in ALP/ALC. In Ninewa, parents mentioned that transportation support was needed for the ALP/ALC program.

26- One outlier and obviously incorrect data point, which reported that 2000% of female students did not have documentation, was excluded from the analysis.

The accessibility of reintegration services for children with disabilities wasn't commonly discussed. In one case, the Director of the Hawija DoE noted that the ALP/ALC program is a good option specifically for children with disabilities. A community leader in Salah ad-Din noted that ALP/ALC has enabled students with disabilities to return to education, though some parents thought that children with disabilities would not be able to access ALP/ALC. MC explained that the ALC program does not have classrooms specifically for children with disabilities, as such classrooms require specially trained staff, whom the MoE are unable to provide. The SCI field teams also mentioned that the ALS program in Dohuk does target children with disabilities. However, as noted in the previous section on infrastructure, the lack of accessible infrastructure for students with special needs is an overall barrier affecting these children's access to education of any kind. Lastly, the Education Cluster Coordinator described how social cohesion is still a concern in some communities, which may make it difficult for minorities to reintegrate into the education system.

Students who were unable to access these services often mentioned that they were very eager to do so, given the expected educational benefits. As one group of parents from Anbar described, such services would make their children very happy—and if their children are happy, they are happy. A female student from Kirkuk mentioned that more and better reintegration services would reduce early marriage and school drop-out. Several students in Kirkuk noted that such services would increase school enrollment in general. Along the same lines, participants cited perceived negative consequences of poor education and drop-out, such as poverty. Parents in Kirkuk mentioned other specific consequences, including engaging with terrorist groups, discrimination against people who are uneducated, and use of drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes.

Utilization

In general, participants in Dohuk—and specifically in IDP and refugee camps—more commonly reported that they utilized reintegration services (though this may also be due to how participants were selected for the data collection). Parents and students in Domiz camp confirmed they are attending the ALS program (including one student with a disability), and some students in Domiz have attended the ACTED CFS. Students in Bardarash attended the SCI catch-up program, as well as services offered by NRC and ACTED. IDP students in Chammishko camp also attended SCI catch-up classes. Outside of Dohuk, students in Diyala mentioned using reintegration services because they needed additional academic support. Lastly, parents in Ninewa noted that children do use reintegration services—in particular the ALC program offered by MC (students agreed on this point)—though it may be hard for students to re-adapt to school after missing several years of education.

FGD participants who have utilized reintegration services are mostly satisfied, and they discussed the positive impact of these opportunities on their, or their children's, education. Parents in Ninewa specifically mentioned the value of these programs in a context affected by conflict, and noted that the ALC offered by MC succeeded in supporting OOS children, especially girls, to re-enter formal education. Students in Ninewa confirmed the value of the ALP/ALC, noting that it is nearby, free, and it provides a certified pathway back to formal education. A community leader in Anbar noted that ALP was one of the best programs provided by the MoE for reintegrating children into formal education. According to data from MC for the ALC academic year 2019 – 2020, a total of 1570 students (1149 boys and 421 girls) were enrolled in Level 3 of the program across 24 centers in Anbar, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, and Ninewa. Of those enrolled, 90% (91% of boys and 87% of girls) completed the academic year, and on average 83% of enrolled students (83% of boys and 79% of girls) passed the exams. These completion and success rates are fairly impressive, given that these students previously dropped out of formal school.

Parents in Chammishko described how ALS has supported children who were not succeeding in formal education due to over-crowded classrooms, and encourages students to continue learning[27]. The presence of art and other activities in ALS that are not offered in formal schools also contributed to the positive impact. Parents in Domiz camp, Dohuk noted that the teacher in ALS is very supportive of the children, and that children are encouraged to attend through regular follow-up. The smaller class sizes in ALS were also a popular feature among parents and students, which allowed students to receive more personal attention from teachers. One parent reported that their grade-4 children had not been able to read, but the ALS program helped the children learn basic literacy skills. During COVID-19, parents in Domiz also described how the centers shared lessons on WhatsApp to keep students engaged, which helped children stay motived and kept their spirits high during lockdowns.

Students generally shared the parents' positive opinions of reintegration services. Refugee students in Bardarash mentioned that they enjoyed catch-up classes because they're free, and students are given stationery and sanitary products. During COVID-19, students mentioned that SCI provided online classes, which they enjoyed. IDP students in Chammishko explained that they liked the SCI catch-up classes because they are held in a clean space, the teacher is very friendly, and they provide art activities, as well as stationery. Several students reported that after attending the SCI center, they earned top marks in their class. A disabled refugee student in Domiz noted that they enjoyed the ALS program because they are treated the same as other children, by the teacher and peers. Another disabled child noted the ALS program has helped them attend formal education, like any other student. Domiz students were also pleased that the ALS teachers helped them catch-up when they missed lessons during the pandemic. Student in Diyala were pleased that remedial lessons from SCI and private lessons offered by teachers have improved their academic level. Students in Salah ad-Din enrolled in ALP/ALC were very satisfied with the program, in particular because it was highly accessible, enabled them to continue working, and provided a high quality of education; on the other hand, two boys requested that the program be expanded to more than two days per week.

However, not all participants were satisfied with reintegration services. The experience of one mother in Kirkuk provides an illuminating example of the challenges faced regarding reintegrating children into formal education. She explained that her children are not enrolled in formal school because they are too old, and the MoE doesn't allow them to join the morning shift. They were transferred to remote evening classes, but the program didn't have teaching staff, which was very difficult for her children. As a result, her children are now OOS, and while they've attempted to take exams (to either re-enter formal education at the proper grade or earn a certificate), they haven't passed. She says her children have lost their confidence, and have continued to get older, meaning few and few options are available to them. She is at a loss of how to solve these problems, and requests support. Teachers in Bardarash, Dohuk noted that they are not satisfied by the educational services provided by SCI, NRC, and ACTED, as they cannot see any impact of these programs. The field teams noted that there is impact, though the results of such programs are not always properly shared with communities. This perhaps indicates the need to improve downward accountability and communication with communities, in order to ensure buy-in and support for such programs. Another common concern was that children who have been OOS may have a difficult time adapting to educational environments again—especially for the ALP/ALC program, as children must be OOS for two years before being eligible to join the program.

27- For this section, it is important to note that all FGDs in Dohuk were conducted by SCI, including FGDs in which participants discussed their level of satisfaction with programs implemented by SCI.

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However, in some cases, families decide not to use services that are available and accessible, due to several reasons. A community leader from Anbar mentioned that the lack of awareness among parents of the need for education is a barrier, indicating that some parents may not utilize available services because they do not value education. Parents' fear of COVID-19 was also identified as a barrier, though it's unclear how common this is and if there has been a quantifiable shift in take up of the service since the outbreak of the pandemic. An NGO in Anbar mentioned that the need for children to contribute to the family's income also affects decision-making around education, and parents in Diyala mentioned child marriage as a barrier for girls. However, child labor and early marriage were not as frequently discussed as might be expected. A DoE representative in Ninewa noted that children are discouraged from attending school because the government has stopped distributing textbooks and stationery, due to budget cuts.

In some cases, cultural and social norms affect families' decision not to enroll their children in reintegration programs (or to access school more generally). A female student from Kirkuk noted that some families, including her own, do not let their daughters participate in such programs—a decision which she agrees with; she considers the program a waste of time, mentioned a family member would need to accompany her to the program, and that she would not be allowed to work anyway, if and when she graduates.

For Syrian refugees, the language in which the curriculum is offered may affect their decision to enroll their children. Some Syrians who plan to return to Syria prefer that their children be educated in Arabic, and curricula are offered in Arabic for these families. However, discussions are ongoing vis-a-vis fully reintegrating refugees into the KRI formal education system (the Education Cluster Coordinator explained that the school integration plan is awaiting approval by the Ministerial council, but will hopefully be implemented soon). Support would be provided for Syrian students to transition from an Arabic curriculum to a Kurdish curriculum. In Chammishko camp (for IDPs), one parent noted that some families are confused as to which curriculum they should enroll their children in. Two parents in the camp explained that some families don't enroll their children at all because they are planning to emigrate to Europe.

The group of OOS children in Salah ad-Din (the only FGD conducted with OOS children) also mentioned many of the above themes as reasons why they were not enrolled in school. One child noted the school is far from their house; two participants said they felt unsafe at schools, including due to bullying; one participant mentioned they do not have the needed documents; three participants noted the poor economic situation of their families.

A broader criticism mentioned about education in Iraq in general was that education is not valuable, and that even educated graduates have a hard time finding a job. Therefore, some participants expressed, it is not worth it for families to invest time and money in education—including (and perhaps especially) reintegration services. A community leader in Chammishko, Dohuk noted that his son who graduated from university cannot find a job, while many uneducated people in the community are employed; according to him, many people don't think education will provide any benefits for them. Many participants also noted dissatisfaction with education in general, and while the concerns they mentioned—for example, unqualified teachers—were not specific to reintegration services, poor quality formal education may dissuade some families from trying to re-enroll their children.

As a last point, it is also worth noting that corporeal punishment was reported by some students in Anbar, Ninewa, and Dohuk. A refugee student in Bardarash mentioned that teachers' use of corporeal punishment contributes to student drop-out, and is something they would like to change in their school. Parents in Chammishko and Domiz, and a student in Bardarash also mentioned that violence in schools dissuades children from attending formal education. NP has observed that corporal punishment is perceived to be widespread in Ninewa (in particular Sinjar and Ba'aj); contributing factors include tribal animosities, underpaid teachers, poor school infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, as well as lack of support for teachers who have suffered trauma themselves. While both Federal Iraq and the KRG have some legal provisions in place that can be interpreted to prohibit corporal punishment, policies are often contradictory, and poorly enforced. In 2015, government officials from both Baghdad and Erbil signed an agreement with UNICEF that corporal punishment would be eliminated in all primary and basic education schools by 2022[28].

28- "Corporal Punishment of Children: Human Rights Watch's Index for the Middle East and North Africa." Human Rights Watch, 2020.

Best Practices

Given the success of reintegration services, an obvious best practice is to expand the capacity of these programs to take on more children—especially the ALP/ALC, which was repeatedly mentioned as very impactful. Participants also suggested to re-establish placement exams for IDP and refugee children to allow them to re-enroll in formal education (if they meet certain criteria related to age and number of years OOS). A community leader in Diyala recommended providing afternoon shifts in schools that only currently have a morning/one shift, for students who cannot attend the morning shift because they are too old for their grade level; these afternoon shifts can initially be run by international organizations, before being handed over to the government. The Director of Education in Jalawla, Diyala cited collaboration between the government and international organizations as a best practice, as well as providing government support to families with working children – presumably to replace the income provided by the children, so they can attend school instead.

Some participants also spoke more broadly about their recommendations for providing an appropriate learning environment. These suggestions included providing PSS support, assisting children with disabilities, treating all children equally, and reducing tension between students and teachers. One group of teachers in Anbar recommended to leverage technology for learning, including digital learning and improved science laboratory equipment. Parents in Ninewa and participants in Salah ad-Din also mentioned the need to provide education services for students up to age 22, as there are many youth who are not able to access programs intended for younger children[29]. In addition, teachers in Kirkuk mentioned that advocacy with the government was needed to ensure all OOS children are able to access education.

Regarding refugee education, a representative from UNHCR explained that in her experience, refugee education was not streamlined within the priorities of the Education Cluster, compared to practices in other countries. She described how refugee education was "only on the shoulders of UNHCR and its implementing partners," and that this concern can be difficult to raise within the Cluster as a whole.

Lastly, it is worth noting that while reintegration services do exist, they exist within a complex web of specific requirements and pathways for each program, which may be confusing for children and families (though this was not explicitly noted by participants as a barrier). One potential best practice is simply to give families more and clearer information about these services, and how to access them. The MC field team explained that they have distributed thousands of booklets summarizing these reintegration services to communities, which seems to have increased awareness—and utilization.

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, reintegration services do exist in most areas, and participants were mostly aware of these services, including the ALP/ALC, ALS, catch-up classes, evening classes, "external" education/exams, remedial education, and others. However, these services are typically not accessible for most students, due to enrollment caps, age limits, and having been OOS for too long. Notably, children with disabilities did not encounter specific barriers to accessing these services, other than the general barriers faced by all children. In cases where students have access—or are given access by a specific NGO—they are typically eager to use these services. Children and their families are very satisfied with these services, and they have a positive impact on children's education. These findings are summarized below in Table 8.

29- According to the MC field team, evening classes and external exams are available for youth of this age bracket, though the ALP/ALC program is only for youth up to 18 years old.

Presence	Accessibility	Utilization	Satisfaction and Impact	Best Practices
- A variety of reintegration **services exist** in most areas.	- These services are only accessible for a **limited population**. Children who do not meet age criteria, who have been OOS for too long, or outside city centers have less access to these programs.	- Children who have access are **eager to utilize** these services.	- Children and their families are **very satisfied** with these services, and they have a **positive impact** on children's education. Among the children enrolled in MC's ALC program in the 2019 – 2020 academic year, 90% completed the academic year, and 83% of enrolled students passed the exams.	- **Expand the capacity** of reintegration services. - Offer such services to **older students**. - I**mprove the learning environment** in schools, to ease students' transition back to education. - Provide families with **clear information** about reintegration services, the requirements, and how to access them.

Other Key Findings

COVID-19

Not surprisingly, the overwhelming opinion of participants was that remote learning during the pandemic was not effective, as the vast majority of families do not have the devices (or enough for all family members) and internet needed to access online resources. The lack of teacher training on online learning and the associated platforms was also an issue. A representative from PIN noted that her sister, a student, was never able to access the GoI's online Newton platform, because it was too "heavy" for the network. A representative from UNESCO also mentioned that refugee teachers were initially not given the required code to log-onto the KRI online learning platform. It appears these problems were common. On the other hand, the KRG MoE negotiated with telecommunications companies to offer free access to their online platform, Ewane; as a result, a SIM card was sufficient to access the KRG online platform, without families having to bear costs for internet connectivity. As with any crisis, there were also unexpected challenges: a representative from UNESCO described how the Federal Iraq MoE tried to hire a sign language translator to appear on their educational TV show, but no one in the MoE was trained to administer a sign language test to candidates, so they could not be sure any of the applicants were qualified, and in the end did not hire anyone. For this and likely many other reasons, the MoE did not reach as many children with disabilities during the pandemic as they had hoped to.

UNHCR did describe one pandemic success story: WhatsApp groups for parents supporting their children's online learning that provided guidance such as how to maintain a regular schedule for children while at home; this practice would likely also be successful to support in-person learning. In addition, online learning seemed slightly more successful in IDP and refugee camps, especially for children enrolled in programs provided by INGOs. Parents and students reported that teachers from these programs regularly followed up with children and provided learning materials through WhatsApp. Reintegration programs have also proved critical in helping children catch-up to their expected grade level after nearly two years of missed learning.

In terms of the re-opening of schools, many participants noted that children are pleased to be back in school and to see their friends, though the general sense is that children have missed a substantial amount of learning, and may struggle to catch-up and readapt to the classroom. Indeed, students have been promoted to the next grade, but it is unlikely they have mastered content from the previous grades that they missed during the pandemic. An NGO in Dohuk gave the example that students enrolled in grade 1 at the start of the pandemic have now missed most of grades 1 and 2, and are supposed to be in grade 3. However, their grade 3 teachers must try to cover grades 1 and 2, as the grade 3 content is presumably too advanced. This challenge is likely especially acute in the early primary grades, when students must develop basic literacy and numeracy skills in order to succeed in higher grades. In some cases, children expressed being frustrated at their low learning levels, and at the pressure to catch-up. Female students in Kirkuk noted that their teachers are giving them a great deal of homework, and they do not remember much information from last year. Two students said that they are hungry and need time to rest and eat, but their teachers keep giving them lessons.

A few parents in Kirkuk mentioned enrolling their children in private remedial classes in order to make up for the lost learning during the pandemic, though most families likely could not afford this option. A representative from PIN also noted that children have been exposed to a great deal of stress over the past two years, and will need PSS support in schools to prevent drop-out. Teachers were also generally pleased to be back in the classroom, albeit very aware that children are behind. As one teacher in Chammishko, Dohuk explained, "What I delivered during this month is much more than what I've delivered during the whole school year last year."

In a few cases, participants discussed how the pandemic could contribute to the development of alternative learning approaches. The Education Cluster Coordinator mentioned that the pandemic has resulted in the development of many digital and online learning resources—which could be leveraged to support different modalities of learning for students who cannot or do not wish to attend full-time, in-person (such as children who are working, or those with disabilities). She mentioned TV education in KRI as one option, as nearly all families in Kurdistan have a TV, and would just need to be encouraged to allow children to watch educational programs. However, a representative from UNESCO cautioned that for TV learning, it is difficult to monitor who is accessing content, how often, and if they are learning. Of course, barriers in terms of access to devices and internet for non-TV learning modalities still exist (the UNESCO representative noted that internet is limited even in the UN compound). The Education Cluster Coordinator explained that an additional challenge would be communities' perception that education must and only happen in a school building, and that online or remote education is not seen as real education. A few participants noted the potential of social media to support learning going forward. According to UNESCO, these platforms had been used in Federal Iraq to disseminate educational content. Viber and WhatsApp were identified as promising platforms. However, there are no concrete plans for schools to utilize blended learning approaches going forward.

There are also other lingering challenges from the pandemic: there has been confusion around the opening of schools this year, including lack of proper communication with communities, which was not an issue before COVID-19. In addition, the Education Director in Jalawla, Diyala reported that the MoE has not fully prepared textbooks for this academic year, leaving children without basic materials at a time when they should be most focused on their studies (the lack of textbooks was a general challenge mentioned throughout the discussions). Implementing COVID-19 safety measures in schools is likely to be very difficult, especially among younger children, and especially given over-crowded classrooms.

Private Schools

Due to an issue with translation/interpretation, the field teams in Anbar asked a question about participants' perceptions of private schools, rather than about schools re-opening after the pandemic. While not necessarily within the scope of the research, participants' responses to these questions provide additional context on the education system as a whole.

In general, participants noted that private schools have many more resources than government schools, including in terms of infrastructure, equipment, technology, recreational activities, trained teachers (including for specific subjects), and better conditions overall in terms of cleanliness, safety, and no over-crowding. One group of students mentioned that in private schools, teachers do not use corporeal punishment; the same group of students cited corporeal punishment as one aspect of their current school they would like to change. Some students noted that if their families had enough money, they would want to attend private schools. Indeed, money was—not surprisingly—identified as the main barrier to accessing private education.

However, other participants held quite a negative view of private education, believing that students ¬were not held to high academic standards, precisely because they were paying money to attend the school. One male parent in Anbar mentioned that he thinks private schools fail because students are not accountable for their actions—again because they pay money to attend—and are not punished for misbehaving. One group of teachers agreed with this point, and noted that students who joined public schools after attending private schools did not succeed academically in the former, because private schools are not obligated to cover the entire curriculum. Several teachers also described private schools as an unfair system that allowed wealthier families to access better education. Another teacher noted that private schools utilize resources that could otherwise support the public education system, which in the long-term will weaken the government's capacity to fulfill its responsibility to provide education to all children.

Role and Responsibility of the Government

Several participants noted that, for a variety of reasons, the government (both KRG and GoI) are not well-prepared to take on responsibility for, and demonstrate ownership of, the full scope of education services in Iraq. The Education Cluster Coordinator explained that the government (mainly the KRG, due to her focus on KRI) is not stepping up to address education in emergencies in Iraq. She explained that the MoE should be leading the Education Cluster, but that is not happening in practice. The root causes are complex. In some cases, nepotism ("wasta") is an issue; in other cases, MoE staff are not up to speed on issues that require a decision, or staff rotate too often, making it difficult to maintain political will for specific initiatives. The general capacity of the MoE, as well as communication and coordination mechanisms, were also a commonly-cited gap, which affects provision of all services. Lack of coordination and general lack of decision-making was also noted by teachers, community leaders, and in some cases DoE staff themselves. Indeed, there appears to be a lack of communication and coordination between DoE and MoE staff in some cases; overall, the DoE staff described the MoE as not supporting their work and priorities.

A representative from PIN described how the MoE does not have sufficient resources to properly identify and address needs, even in terms of research experts to conduct assessments. She gave the example of the MoE assigning teachers to schools that were no longer operating due to conflict-related damage, as the MoE was not aware that the schools were not functioning. As an overall, related problem, the Education Cluster Coordinator noted that as Iraq shifts from a humanitarian emergency to a development context, there is reduced funding coming into the country.

30- The English FGD guides used the term "in-person education"—in the context of the return to in-person education after the pandemic—which it seems was translated as "personal" or "private" education in the Arabic guides, and which led to the question about private schools.

This research study has investigated gaps in formal education service provision in Iraq, focusing on three main components of education: infrastructure, education personnel, and reintegration services. Within school infrastructure, profound gaps exist in terms of the presence, quality, and accessibility of infrastructure, and nearly all stakeholders are dissatisfied with the current state of infrastructure. Regarding education personnel, the recruitment of new teachers has essentially been put on hold by the government in most areas, leaving unpaid or low-paid volunteer lecturers to fill the slots. The majority of teacher training programs currently offered are provided by INGOs, though even these only reach a small portion of teachers. There are a number of reintegration pathways available for students of different ages and educational needs, and most families who access them are very satisfied. However, barriers to access limit students' utilization of these services, including caps on how many children can enroll at a given time, specific criteria regarding age or time out of school, and the need for civil documentation (either to access the services, or ultimately re-enroll in formal school).



Two boys walking from home to their school in Al-Qa'im, Anbar. Photo: Alan Ayoubi/NRC

This research has come at a unique time of intersecting dynamics in Iraq. The legacy of conflict and ISIL occupation still lingers within communities, continuing to impede access to education for already-vulnerable families. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic—and move to online education—led to nearly two years of lost learning for Iraq's students. As children now return to school, the issue of whether the education system is able to catch them up is a latent crisis-in-waiting. These challenges call for deep and extended support to the Iraqi education system. However, as several stakeholders mentioned during the course of this research, Iraq is no longer considered an urgent emergency context in the traditional sense, and funding flows are recalibrating in turn. There is now more emphasis on government responsibility and ownership to fulfill educational needs that were once addressed by INGOs; however, whether the government has the capacity—not to mention the funding—to do so, is still in question.

While considered as separate thematic topics for the purposes of this research, education infrastructure, personnel, and reintegration services are acutely interlinked—and the gaps in each of these areas have compounded to collectively limit both access to and quality of education. Poor or absent infrastructure, and insufficient and untrained teaching staff are main factors leading to student drop-out or lack of enrollment—and in turn increasing the cohort of young people in need of reintegration services. However, students may be hesitant to utilize reintegration services that do exist because they do not wish to re-enter schools with poor infrastructure and limited teaching staff—and children who do re-enter formal schools are inadvertently adding pressure on already over-burdened infrastructure and school personnel. While some reintegration programs are considered successful by communities—especially the ALP/ALC program—these programs only have capacity to serve a fraction of the students who need them.

Underlying all these concerns is the reality that education is not necessarily seen as a pathway to a good future for all young people in Iraq—due to both the overall low quality of education provided, as well as the nature of the current job market. A parallel concern, highlighted by a recent World Bank report, is that the education system is not efficient. A child in Iraq will complete on average 6.9 years of schooling, but this represents only four years of quality education—meaning that 40% of the time a student spends in school does not provide useful skills that can be utilized in the labor market.

What's more, many of the teacher training and reintegration services currently being provided are implemented by INGOs, raising the question of whether the government would have the capacity and funding to eventually take these on. In 2019, the national education budget comprised 9.7% of government spending, excluding KRI, though the Iraq Education Cluster has advocated for increasing the national education budget allocation to 15%, in line with international standards. At the same time, the budget that is allocated for education is rarely fully spent—since 2015, less than 40% of the allocated budget has been implemented —and the money that is spent is often used inefficiently, such as to make repeated changes to the curriculum. The following and final section of this report presents recommendations for ECI's advocacy and programming based on the findings of this research.

31- "Building Forward Better To Ensure Learning for all Children in Iraq." The World Bank, 2021.
32- "Building Forward Better To Ensure Learning for all Children in Iraq." The World Bank, 2021.
33- Education Cluster Strategy. Iraq Education Cluster, 2019.
34- "Building Forward Better To Ensure Learning for all Children in Iraq." The World Bank, 2021.

5. Advocacy and Programming Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for ECI's advocacy and programming, to address the gaps in education service provision identified by this research.

Advocacy Recommendations

General

1. For the Government of Iraq: Allocate at least 15% of the government budget to education in all Iraq—and in particular for infrastructure and teacher recruitment/payment.

2. For Institutional and Bilateral Donors: Allocate additional development funding for education, particularly collaborative funding channels across the humanitarian-development transition in Iraq, in particular in support of the government's budget, to reach the target of 15% of the budget allocated for education.

3. For the Government of Iraq: Enforce policies prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, including the agreement with UNICEF to end corporal punishment by 2022.

4. For Education Actors: Improve coordination by seeking lessons learned from the Education Cannot Wait Multi-Year Resilience Program Fund, which pivots around the nexus.

Education Infrastructure

1. For the Government of Iraq: Avoid holding elections in school building, and take steps to reassure children and families following elections and the presence of security personnel in schools.

2. For Development Donors: Dedicate resources on school rehabilitation and construction to meet the MoE's stated needs of 10,000 additional schools.

3. For the Government of Iraq: Ensure that school construction and rehabilitation provides infrastructure that is safely accessible for girls and students with disabilities, including WASH facilities.

4. For the Government of Iraq: Involve parents and PTAs in developing plans to rehabilitate infrastructure and advocacy efforts with local authorities.

Education Personnel

1. For the Government of Iraq: Decentralize recruitment, so that DoEs have more control over teacher hiring.

2. For the Government of Iraq: Resume teacher recruitment and payment of salaries as soon as possible.

3. For the Government of Iraq: Provide volunteer lecturers with the same training given to contract teachers, in cases where training to contract teachers is available

Reintegration Services

1. For the Government of Iraq: Increase the eligible age range for students seeking to access reintegration services; in particular, the eligible age for the ALP should be increased to 24 to accommodate children who have experienced extended learning gaps.

2. For the Government of Iraq: Expand successful reintegration programs, and in particular the ALP program.

3. For the Government of Iraq: Provide more flexible pathways for students without documentation to access reintegration services and formal education, and to sit for final exams.

4. For the Government of Iraq: Support access to education for Syrian refugee students, including by easing documentation requirements and age restrictions for reintegration programs and formal education; and ensuring Syrians are supported to adjust to a Kurdish curriculum or continue their education in Arabic.

Programming Recommendations

General

1. Support capacity building of the MoE/DoE, including through staff training, and improving communication and coordination channels.

2. Where feasible, work with schools and teachers to leverage the online learning materials developed during the pandemic to support in-person/blended learning, as schools may remain at risk of recurring closures with fluctuations of COVID-19 and other threats.

3. Consider targeting areas outside of city centers for programming—including infrastructure rehabilitation, teacher training, and reintegration services—which are typically underserved.

4. Continue to ensure programming is equitably accessible for girls and students with disabilities.

5. Create WhatsApp groups for parents, to provide them with tips on how to support children's learning.

<u>Education Infrastructure</u>

1. Make schools more welcoming and encouraging for children by posting student work on classroom walls, and painting classroom and external walls, including with words of motivation; this is recommended as a "quick win" to improve school infrastructure that does not require substantial additional resources.
2. Support schools to involve PTAs in improving school infrastructure, including capacity building for school-staff and PTA members.

3. Conduct awareness campaigns to encourage collective maintenance of school infrastructure among students and teachers, and to prevent vandalism.

Education Personnel

1. All teaching staff recruited to serve in reintegration or other programs offered by ECI partners should be recruited from the local area, and as per their designated specialization; collaborate with DoE to encourage the recruitment of teachers from local areas.

2. Ensure teachers attending trainings are always provided with a per diem; that the training takes place in a convenient location, at a convenient time; and that an agenda is available.

3. Provide trainings for teachers that focus on PSS for children affected by trauma, how to integrate children with disabilities into classrooms, and positive discipline practices.

4. Further investigate the practice of teachers providing additional lessons for students outside of school, and charging them for this service.

5. Include teacher observation and feedback within training programs, to support teachers to implement new knowledge and skills in the classroom.

Reintegration Services

1. Expand and increase the capacity of reintegration services provided by ECI partners to reach more children.

2. Ensure that communities are aware of the reintegration services offered (by ECI partners and others), the specific requirements, and how to access them.

3. Increase the ages eligible for ALC up to 24, to accommodate children who have suffered extended learning gaps.

Annex 1: List of INGO/UN KII Participants

The INGO and UN participants interviewed as part of this study are shown in Table 9, below. All participants gave consent to participate in the study, though were not asked to confirm how they prefer to be identified in any public version of this report. If any comments from these stakeholders are included in a publicly-available version of this report, it is recommended to follow-up with these key informants to confirm how they prefer to be identified, and confirm if their comments can be shared publicly.

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