



Field Report, 20 November 2022

- 1. Kurdistan Region – Thousands of Steel Workers May Lose Their Jobs Due to Imports1**
- 2. Saladin – A Charity Relieves the Poor’s Pain2**
- 3. Thi-Qar – Vocational Training a Key to Curb Growing Unemployment3**
- 4. Kerbala – Is the New Oil Refinery a Win-Win Deal?5**
- 5. Basra – Building a Culture of Safety and Health at Work 6**
- 6. Qadisiya – Online Learning is the Future.....8**



These Field Reports are prepared by the field staff of UNAMI’s Development Support Office (DSO), who are based in Iraq’s governorates, where they coordinate with local government officials, NGOs, community groups, and other development actors. They also monitor socio-economic and development trends to improve the UN’s understanding of events in Iraq.

1. Kurdistan Region – Thousands of Steel Workers May Lose Their Jobs Due to Imports



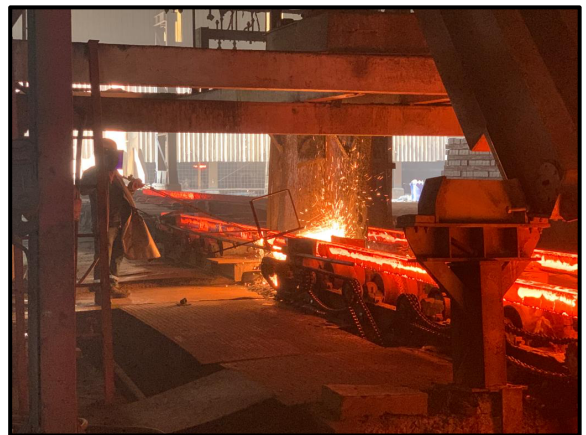
While the Kurdistan Region is witnessing remarkable growth in the housing and construction sector, there is a high demand in the local market for construction materials, especially steel bars. However, several steel companies have recently expressed their fears about the possibility of closing their companies and laying off thousands of workers due to the increasing imports of steel from outside Iraq.

DSO visited the Erbil Steel Company to find out more about how imported production affects their business.

Sabah Sallahaddin, the marketing manager, highlighted the increasing demand for imported steel bars, mainly from Iran. He pointed to the seriousness of this challenge that threatened steel companies in KRI with closure.

Sallahaddin noted that construction companies and contractors prefer Iranian steel simply because of its cheap price. The price of Iranian steel bars is about \$570 per ton, while the local product is about \$650 per ton.

At the same time, the government is not doing much to protect local production. “There should be an appropriate tariff imposed on imported steel to ensure fair competition in the local market. We might close, and thousands of workers and indirect beneficiaries will lose their livelihoods if no measures are taken in this regard” he said.



Steel bars manufacture © DSO-KRI

According to him, one of the main challenges is the lack of quality control at the borders, which allows traders to flood the local market with poor-quality products.

Many traders and construction contractors do not pay attention to the quality of materials used in construction projects. Using cheap and poor-quality materials shortens buildings’ lifespans and make them vulnerable to natural disasters that may lead to human and material losses. The collapse of the National Laboratories Building in Baghdad was one of the recent examples brought up in the discussion.



Quality control laboratory test © DSO-KRI

The Steel Manufacturers Association in Iraq and Kurdistan reported that the gross domestic production of steel bars in Iraq is about 4.1 million tons/per year. The Kurdistan Region has the biggest share, where there are nine steel companies that produce about 3.7 million tons of steel bars per year.

This represents 91 percent of the total annual production in Iraq. However, local production is threatened to shrink in the coming years due to the increased dependence on imported production that reached 830,000 tons per year.



Steel bars production © DSO-KRI

The steel companies in KRI called upon the Kurdistan Regional Government to protect local production. Their main demand is to impose quality-control tests and increase tariffs on imported products to ensure fair competition and promote local production.

They tried to make their voices heard through the High Board of Investment and Ministry of Industry, but no action was taken so far. They think that the government will not take any action because imported products are generating good customs revenues. However, if the government continues neglecting their demands, many of them might close within a few years, and nearly 10,000 employees and workers will find themselves jobless as a result of the government's failure to protect local steel production.

2. Saladin – A Charity Relieves the Poor's Pain



A group of college of medicine students initiated a charitable activity on behalf of senior doctors to treat poor people and 130 displaced families in the Al Dhuluiyah district south of Saladin, who are unable to return to their areas of origin due to security issues. A three-day free treatment activity started on 2 October 2022.

Both the doctors and medical students know how much medication costs poor people when they buy it from private pharmacies. The cost is about \$50 for tests and medication, while they provide the service at about \$2 for tests and medication through this initiative.

The initiative was the first of its kind in Saladin province, and it targeted displaced families from the Yathrib, Ishaqi, and Aziz Balad areas of south Saladin province. Those families are still living in Dhuluiyah. It included people from the local population who cannot afford private clinic visits. The total number of patients seen was 460 for the three days of activity, out of this number three hundred were from displaced families, and the others were from the local population.

The activity included various medical specializations like pediatrics, surgery, dentistry, pregnancy care, dermatology, and nephrology. Laboratory tests small units and a pharmacy were also provided.

The senior doctors conducted the tests and supervised the students. They chose a location near the general hospital in this area to be accessible to the population.

Local donors financed the activity by buying medications and renting the hall.

“Sometimes poor patients postpone their visit to private clinics, enduring pain, because of the highly expensive treatment. This initiative represents hope for those people if it is repeated,” said Dhuluiyah Mayor Hamza Riyadh.

The medication in government clinic centers and hospitals is often not good quality or sufficient.

Doctor Ahmed, the Al Dhuluiyah General Hospital manager contacted UNAMI-DSO for support and coordination with WHO, International Medical Corp (IMC), and Doctors Without Borders.

UNAMI-DSO Saladin contacted these agencies about support for next year, and they said that they may be able to do so in the future. These organizations have no set plan or programs to be implemented in this area, so the activity will again rely on the donations of rich people and the efforts of doctors in the area.



Volunteering medicine students at the festival © volunteering team.



A volunteering doctor checking patient ©volunteering team

3. Thi-Qar – Vocational Training a Key to Curb Growing Unemployment



Sahar Qassim, age 30, a housewife, says that social norms limit women from pursuing employment. Qassim’s husband did not find a job for a long time, so she decided to break the social taboo and lend a helping hand to support the family. She applied for many jobs but got nowhere.

Then Qassim found out about the Nasiriya Vocational Training Centre (VTC) and signed up for a baking course. Now she sells cakes, pastries, and sweets online through her home-based business, initially financed by her parents.

According to Fidela Hussein, Assistant Director of the VTC,¹ the center provides youth, especially fresh graduates, much-needed vocational training in various trades, capacity building, and skills to get employment or a startup.

¹ Nasiriya VTC set up in 1979 to focus on the young people who aspire to start up small business. The main task is to develop the trainees’ abilities and enable them to join government institutions and private sectors. The participants also receive daily allowance 5000 IQD during the training period



Qassim's struggle to find income is not unique. Thi-Qar's poverty rate is growing steadily, 40% in 2019 to 43% in 2021.² Thi-Qar is ranked first in the number of suicides and drug abuse and the fourth poorest Iraqi governorate. In 2021, the Iraqi Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) announced that 1.6 million unemployed persons, aged 15–50, across the country including 100,800 from Thi-Qar, were registered in the ministry's database.

Thi-Qar has seen civil unrest and large-scale demonstrations since October 2019, and unemployment is one of the main complaints of protesters. *Pipe Fitting course in Nassriya*
Since these protests began, 140 demonstrators were killed and *VTC © local media*
more than 4,000 injured.

Saad Harbiya, the Thi-Qar Police Chief, said recently that unemployment is linked with the growing unrest, violence, drug abuse, drug trafficking, suicides, theft, and other criminal offenses.

Falah Al-Zubeidi, an economist, said that unemployment is growing rapidly, especially among young graduates, attributed to rapid population growth and lack of employment opportunities in both public and private sectors.

Hussein of the VTC says that the Central Bank of Iraq has an initiative to reduce unemployment and poverty by supporting small, medium, and large enterprises and coordinating with the VTCs in all governorates to implement this initiative.³

Nasiriya VTC has twenty workshops to impart skills, including sewing, electricity, plumbing, electrical installations, pipe fitting, carpentering, food preparation, computer, hairdressing, and many other trades.

There is a total of nine VTCs in Thi-Qar. The four main ones have a capacity of seven hundred trainees per year, and the Nasiriya VTC intends to increase the capacity to one thousand trainees per year in 2023.

The Nasiriya VTC has received broad support since it was set up. The Iraqi Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MOLSA), international and local NGOs, such as the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), Haboubi organization, the Iraqi Red Crescent, and the Swedish Development Aid Organization (SWEDO) have all sponsored the VTC.

Firas Salem, the President of the South Youth Organization, says that the government and private sector need to be more responsive, willing, and able to provide more tailor-made vocational training opportunities.



*Pipe Fitting course in Nassriya
VTC © local media*

² Thi-Qar Governor, Ahmed Ghani Al-Khafaji, October 2021.

³ In 2020, the Central bank of Iraq has started a package of financing initiatives supporting measures to provide financial support to economic sectors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Kerbala – Is the New Oil Refinery a Win-Win Deal?



Aziz Ibrahim is a 33-year-old taxi driver facing a daily challenge. “My taxi income is all used up because of fuel prices and shortages.”

He is not alone. Fuel shortages are a frequently encountered challenge for car owners, which impacts their economic security and well-being.

Iraq consumes petrol more than it produces and has to import it to fill the gap between demand and supply. One of the solutions to this challenge is to increase local petrol production by adding refinery units to national capacity.

Toward this end, a new oil refinery in Kerbala started two-month trial operations at the end of September 2022. The trial phase will start with 70,000 barrels of crude oil per day (BPD) and will increase to 140,000 BPD by 2023, which constitutes about 16% of the total national consumption of petroleum and other liquid fuels in 2021.⁴

The refinery is being built on a 6 km² plot of land located 35 km southwest of the city and is equipped with more than twenty processing units. It will produce liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), motor gasoline, aviation turbine kerosene, kerosene, diesel, heavy diesel, fuel oil, bitumen, and solid Sulphur.

The new refinery is now the 14th largest on the national list and is considered among the top five in terms of capacity (Basra being the largest with 210,000 BPD). It can be ranked near the Baji north, Kirkuk, and Mirsan refineries. The new refinery will increase the national production capacity of oil variants by about 15%, adding a stabilizing layer to the consumer economy.

The project started in 2009 with the design phase and the bidding process was completed in 2012. The refinery was built by a joint venture (JV) led by Hyundai Engineering & Construction (HEC) and many other international specialized companies. The JV was awarded to complete the engineering, procurement, and construction works in April 2013 with a total cost of \$6.04 bn. The construction process was delayed due to a budgetary crisis in 2014.



Trial production started at new oil refinery © Kerbala news

The refinery is part of a long-term national plan to meet the 3% growing annual domestic demand in Iraq through the construction of four new refineries in an effort to add 750,000 b/d of the country’s refining capacity. The other three new refineries are to be at Nasiriya, Maysan, and Kirkuk as announced in July 2022 by the Oil Ministry Planning Directorate.

The new refinery will add comforting stability to the fuel supply needed by domestic demand and save 60% of hard currencies consumed through importing diverse types of fuels. Ali Abdul Amir, oil production deputy manager, pointed out the link with power production, stating, “The production from the refinery will also be used to feed the Khayrat power station⁵ that supplies electricity to Karbala province.”

⁴ <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/IRQ>

⁵ <https://www.harlowinternational.com/al-khairat-power-plant/>

The facility created jobs during both construction and operations where an estimated 25,000 jobs will add financial security to the Kerbala community.

“I finally got my dream job!” happily declared Nori Jawad, a 29-year-old chemical engineer on his Facebook account after several years of unemployment.

Economic experts are optimistic about this refinery but not totally satisfied since Iraq is likely to remain a net importer of gasoline/gasoil until 2030 given the mismatch between product output and domestic demand, as Ahmed Mehdi, research associate at an international Institute for Energy Studies observes.



Karbala oil refinery © social media

The addition of the refinery to the industry chain will reduce the cost of production of many products that depend on fuel in many sectors like bricks, plastics, the pharmaceutical industry, automobiles, and factories. This event will kickstart new sequential emerging industries like aromatic and polyethylene products.

Although the official statements guaranteed taking all measures to eliminate the negative environmental impacts on the site and community, environmental NGO activist Mahmood Hadi voiced concerns about handling harmful waste products which later must be disposed of in specific ways, let alone that refineries create their own toxic wastes that must also be accounted for.

5. Basra – Building a Culture of Safety and Health at Work



Tariq Khalil was an ironworker at 24 years old. After a short two years of experience, he had a life-changing accident. He was working on the third story of a building when his footing slipped on a wet and oily surface, and he fell thirty feet.

Khalil broke his pelvic bone in three places and dislocated four fingers. Miraculously, he survived. Even more miraculously, he walked again. Wearing fall protection properly, no matter how uncomfortable or heavy, would have prevented this accident.

Today, in Basra the scope of occupational health and safety has evolved gradually in response to rapid social, industrial, and economic expansion. Nevertheless, unsafe, and unhealthy workplaces are often taken for granted. The majority of public and private work is far from complying with occupational health and safety standards.

May Taha, the Director of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Department in Basra shared with DSO that occupational accidents are constantly increasing over the years in the governorate.

The OHS accidents occurred mainly when workers are exposed to digging tools, flammable chemicals/fuel, construction materials, and hazardous waste. Furthermore, cases of heat-related accidents were frequently reported, such as heat stroke and heat exhaustion also pose a risk to construction workers.

Farmers, animal breeders, cleaners, and construction daily-wage workers are directly impacted by the hot and dry climate being experienced in the southern part of Iraq; where the temperature hits 60° C (140 F) in summer.

Adel Ali from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs says that the OHS department is works closely with other departments and the Iraqi Red Crescent to raise awareness on occupational safety and health requirements. Together they provided a series of trainings to workers and employers on occupational health and safety requirements in 2022.



Occupational incidents are daily reported in the private sector

While these efforts are a step in the right direction, those efforts cannot hope to cover all the subject areas in this vast field.

The messy assortment of laws and regulations is also a big challenge. There are several safety and health-related laws and regulations that need to be activated, such as instructions no. 12 of 2016 on occupational health and safety requirements, and labor law no. 37, and others.⁶

However, there are several challenges that OHS still faces on a daily basis, such as the lack of the community's common culture of occupational health and safety. Weak rule of law, lack of statistical data received and poor reporting on accidents and injuries are other problems.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) started this year to develop tools and methodologies to improve the working conditions of informal workers through training, raising awareness, and other means.

In Basra, ILO is implementing two projects that will contribute to socio-economic development by enhancing the application of international labor standards and national labor. The projects also aim to improve working conditions and respond to decent work priorities at the national level and labor market governance.



Workers in oil companies stick more to the OHS requirements

The Iraqi Organization of Occupational Health and Safety also provides a series of safety training to employees and employers. The organization has recently provided a series of seminars and workshops on safety and risks associated with the industrial and electricity sectors in Basra.

Taha of OHS concluded that occupational and industrial accidents remain one of the burning issues that need to be addressed at all levels. All accidents are caused by preventable factors, which could be eliminated by implementing already known and available measures and methods.

⁶For more information, please see the link <https://www.moj.gov.iq/view.3805/>

A national system for occupational safety and health must be established. Such a system must include all the mechanisms and elements necessary to build and maintain a preventive safety and health culture. The national system must be maintained, progressively developed, and periodically reviewed.

6. Qadisiya – Online Learning is the Future



Ahmed Abbas is a math teacher who struggled to provide online learning during the COVID-19 crisis. He tried to reach his students via distance-based learning approaches, but he failed due to many obstacles such as poor skills in online training and limited internet access.

He then registered for a training program that was implemented by UNESCO and UNICEF and funded by the European Union.

Marking World Teachers' Day⁷ on October 5th, he and 1,000 other teachers finalized their training on improved e-pedagogy⁸ in Qadisiya governorate.

The main objective of the training program is to use interactive online teaching and learning methodologies to enhance teachers' e-skills, enabling them to implement newly acquired knowledge to support children during crises.

Sheema Sen Gupta, UNICEF Representative in Iraq said, "This training, about to be finalized by 4,000⁹ teachers, is a milestone in strengthening the resilience of Iraq's education system, by providing digital tools to teachers to deliver quality and inclusive education, even at the time when face-to-face learning might be challenged by natural or manmade hazards."

She added, "Let World Teacher's Day serve to affirm UNICEF's commitment to support the Ministry of Education in mainstreaming e-pedagogy as a strategic tool for every teacher in Iraq."

To ensure that learning continues even in the event of an emergency like COVID-19, which might prevent access to face-to-face instruction, UNESCO is assisting the Ministry of Education in Iraq in developing teachers' knowledge, abilities, and competencies in ICT-based distance teaching and learning methodologies.

To activate online learning platforms, introduce blended learning (face-to-face and ICT-based distance) approaches and tools for teachers, and support the delivery of training to 4,000 teachers in partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO has enlisted the assistance of international partners, particularly the European Union.

It is so important to enhance collaboration to take advantage of all available learning



Teachers participated in the program © UNICEF

⁷ Theme of World Teachers' Day in 2022.

⁸ Approach to teaching, is the theory and practice of learning, and how this process influences and is influenced by the social, political, and psychological development of learners.

⁹ This training included 4,000 teachers in four governorates.



opportunities and to use the latest methods and applications.

Zainab Ahmed, a biology high school teacher, who participated in the training said, "it was a great addition to our teaching expertise as sometimes face-to-face learning approach may be hard, so gaining the necessary knowledge and skills in online training will be a good backup plan to achieve curricula for the students from a distance."