Next Generation Iraq

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Contents:

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Research

Introduction

Next Generation Iraq is a landmark study examining the **experiences, perceptions and attitudes of 1,268 Iraqi young people aged between 18-30**, as part of the British Council's Next Generation research programme.

Next Generation objectives:

1. Understand youth attitudes and aspirations
2. Amplify youth voice
3. Support better youth policymaking

Insights are organised around 3 sections:

1. **Profiles**: How do the values, beliefs, and practices of young Iraqis shape their present lives and future aspirations?
2. **Perceptions**: What are the lived experiences and perceptions of global and personal challenges of young people?
3. **Pathways**: What are the enablers and barriers to young Iraqis reaching their full potential whether it be in the education, employment or political sphere?

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Methodology

Workstream 1:
Landscape analysis

Desk review of existing literature and three key informant interviews with youth experts.
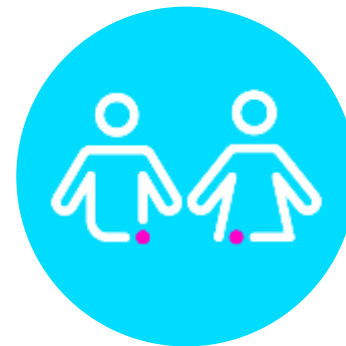
Workstream 2:
Nationally Representative Survey

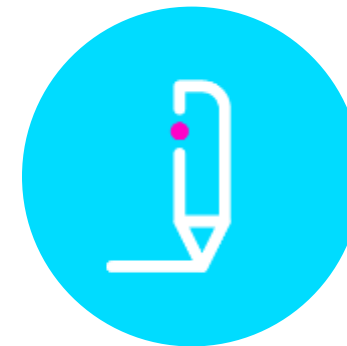Overall sample size of 1,268 (1000 main, 200 boost of marginalised groups).

Workstream 3:
Immersion Sessions

12 one-on-one immersion sessions conducted with young people aged 18-30.

Workstream 4:
Group Deep-Dives

Six group deep dive sessions with specific segments of Iraqi youth.

Workstream 5:
Youth Engagement Studio Sessions

Four young researchers from a previous British Council Iraq programme and four youth leaders from different sectors.

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Profiles

Young people are balancing traditional values with the challenges of modern life, but remain optimistic

Family is a key Iraqi value and continues to hold a central role for young Iraqis

73% Consider family **the most trustworthy source of information**

66% See family as **key to personal success and happiness**

63% See family as the biggest **influence on their views**

But **financial constraints and economic pressures** remain the main barrier for young people considering starting their own families and realising these goals.
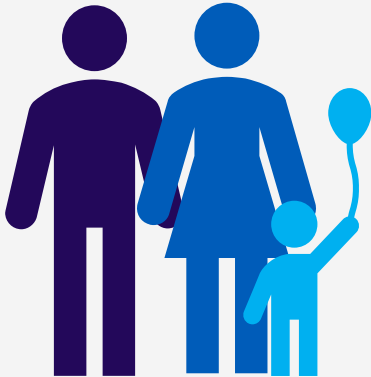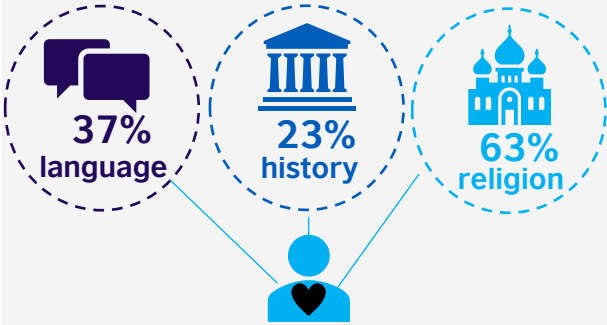
Despite economic difficulties, young people are optimistic about the future

54% are optimistic about their future careers

51% are optimistic about their future quality of life

And they are proud to be Iraqi citizens, largely due to their cultural heritage

**37%** language

23% history

63% religion

"I am proud of the Central Bank building. It's the tallest in Iraq and was designed by the famous architect Zaha Hadid."
(Male, Baghdad)

# Social media is an important source of information and vehicle for youth voice

Most young people are online, using social media not only as a source of information but as a vehicle for their voice

Top three sources of information

Social media 64%
Television 43%
Family 37%
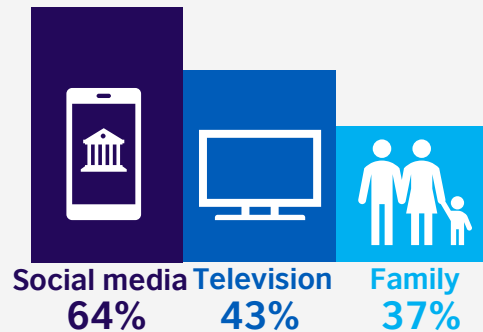
"Social media, especially Facebook, is a **really powerful tool for sharing what's on your mind about what's going wrong**, even if you're worried about speaking out."
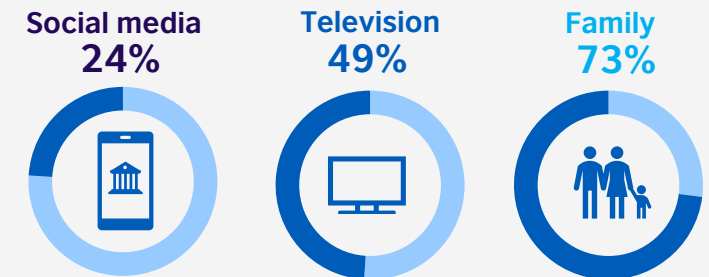(Female, Basra)

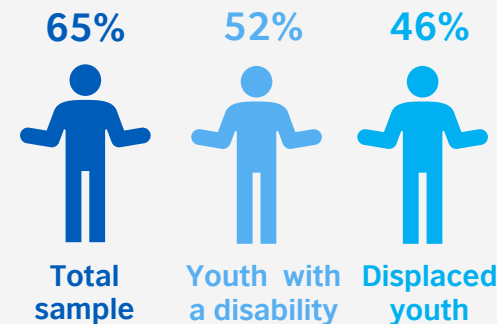### Most used social media sites daily

71% 72% 74%
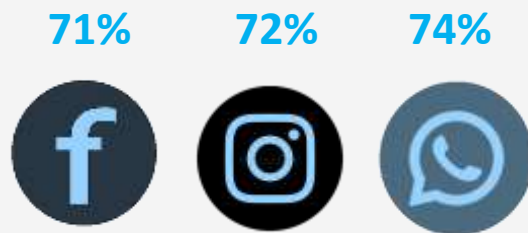
However, trust in social media remains low, access to internet is unequal and digital literacy is an issue

Aside from the benefits, young Iraqis are wary of the **risks and negative aspects of social media**, such as the impact of influencer culture in normalising drug use.

Trust in sources of information

Social media 24%
Television 49%
Family 73%

Social media as the most common source of information

65% **Total sample**
52% **Youth with a disability**
46% **Displaced youth**

Access to internet is inequal. **Marginalised youth,** including internally displaced and young disabled persons are **less likely to rely on social media as an information source due to accessibility issues**.

Four group profiles – key issues

Young Women

There are significant **gender disparities among young Iraqis** especially when it comes to employment.

Percentage of young people in employment by gender

23% Female

47% Male
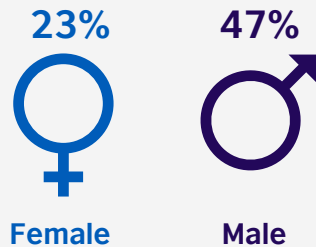
Gender disparity is also seen in **educational** and **entrepreneurial** opportunities, due to gendered barriers linked to societal constraints.

Disabled Persons

Educational attainment is lower for young disabled persons, stemming from accessibility issues.

Percentage of young people who completed only secondary education

43% Young disabled persons

20% Young people without disabilities

Accessibility issues in employment, coupled with social stigma and discrimination, contribute to young disabled persons feeling **more pessimistic** about their future careers **and increasingly drawn towards entrepreneurship**.

Regional Divides

Educational and employment disparities exist between the **three regions, with particularly high levels of vocational training in the Kurdistan region.**

Percentage of young people who completed short-cycle tertiary education

Short cycle tertiary education
- North/Western Iraq: 16%
- Southern Iraq: 24%
- Kurdistan Region: 33%
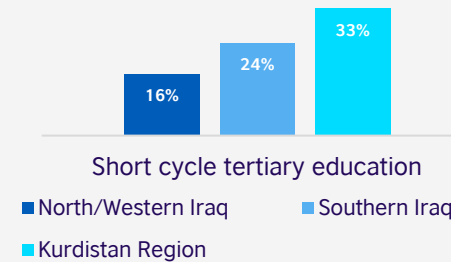
However, the Kurdistan region has the highest level of unemployment, along with the most pessimistic outlook, and the greatest tendency to view national political engagement as unimportant.

Internally Displaced People

IDPs have significant differences in their **age, relationship status, and location**. They are significantly **more pessimistic about their standard of living.**

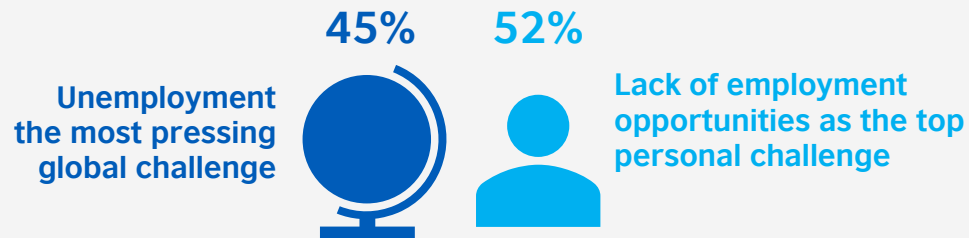Young people who rated their standard of living as "bad" or "very bad"

51% IDP youth

39% Non IDP youth
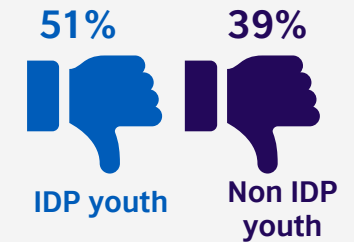
IDPs see **employment opportunities** and **quality of life** as crucial factors **influencing their attraction to international migration**.

Perceptions

Everyday pressures and economic challenges overshadow climate concerns

Across regions, gender, age, and disability status, young Iraqis consistently **identified employment-related concerns** as the top global and personal challenge

Despite not being the top priority, young people are concerned about **climate change, particularly as they experience** its impact locally

45%
Unemployment the most pressing global challenge

52%
Lack of employment opportunities as the top personal challenge

44% expressed concern about the environmental impact of climate change within their country

24% identified it as the most urgent global challenge.

The issues above are exacerbated by perceptions of **corruption and nepotism**, especially when it comes to state jobs.
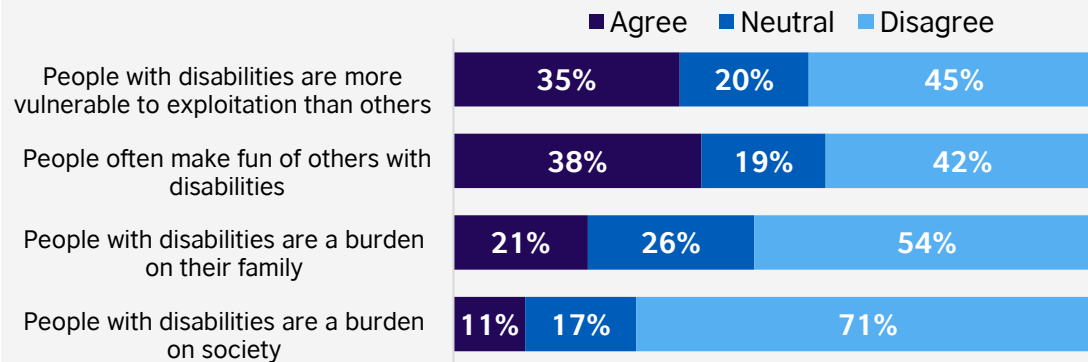
Young people have already felt the impact of climate change on their lives, citing concerns around **water related issues (20%)**, **air pollution (15%) and extreme heat (12%)** among others

For those who are employed,
- **low wages (56%) and corruption (41%)** are primary concerns

For **disabled persons,**
- issues of <u>accessibility in the workplace</u> take precedence

Disability-based discrimination and accessibility issues are prevalent but not demotivating

In general, there are positive perceptions of disabled persons, but the prevalence of discrimination is acknowledged and felt by young disabled persons

|	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
People with disabilities are more vulnerable to exploitation than others	35%	20%	45%
People often make fun of others with disabilities	38%	19%	42%
People with disabilities are a burden on their family	21%	26%	54%
People with disabilities are a burden on society	11%	17%	71%

Social stigma and doubts about their capabilities have a negative impact on young disabled persons - from **inclusion in the community** to **future relationship prospects** (e.g. marriage).

"It's possible that not everyone would be willing to marry a disabled person when they have the option to marry someone without disabilities."
(Male, Basra)

Accessibility issues in employment and education make young disabled persons pessimistic about their future, but entrepreneurship offers an alternative

Young people who feel optimistic about their future careers by disability status

42% **56%**

Disabled youth   **Nondisabled youth**
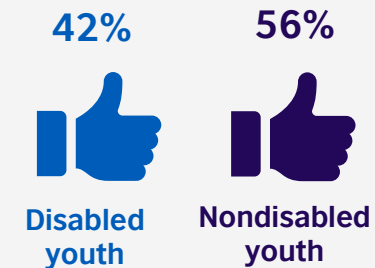
As such, young disabled persons see advantages in entrepreneurship, viewing it as a way of **tailor workspaces to accommodate their individual needs** often unmet in traditional workplaces.

"We can still be influential and show others that amazing things are achievable even if we have a disability."
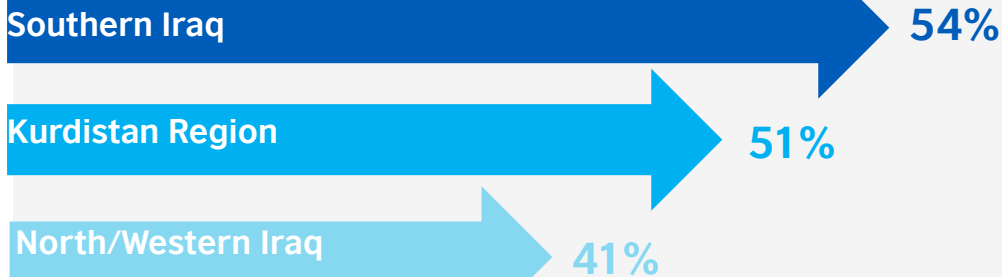(Male, Basra)

Pathways

# Young people prefer alternative paths of political engagement

Young Iraqis are not politically apathetic, despite scepticism with the electoral process and the political system

Percentage of young people who believe it is important to engage with national politics by region

Southern Iraq **54%**

Kurdistan Region **51%**

North/Western Iraq **41%**

Protest and social media are especially seen as powerful ways of getting youth voice heard.

"This idea of taking protest action really gives me hope, and I'm feeling optimistic about it." (Female, Basra)
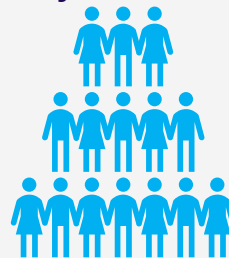
Better representation of youth opinions in politics would boost young people's political participation

Percentage of young people who would be more likely to increase their engagement with politics if their views and opinions were represented

20% **21%**

Total sample **Young disabled persons**
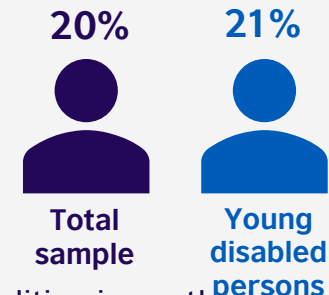
Dissatisfaction with politics is partly driven by **issues centred on employment and perceived unkept promises by politicians** which have previously triggered mass youth-organised protests in Iraq.

"We're making our voices heard in the only way left to us, by refusing to be part of a process that seems rigged against our interests from the start.' (Female, Ninewa)

Young Iraqis view education as crucial for societal change, but stress the need for alignment with the labour market

Education is highly valued by young Iraqis, yet improvements to the education system are urgently needed

70% View education as crucial for societal change

63% Feel society does not adequately reward educational achievements

The educational system's focus on **theoretical knowledge and exam grades**, rather than **practical skills and student interests**, fails to prepare students adequately for the labour market.

The top areas in need of improvement

23%

Improvements in curriculum

29%

Quality of teaching

Young Iraqis want practical employment skills that they feel are missing from their education

When it comes to career preparedness, young people value a range of skills including **creativity (38%)**, **problem solving (38%) and communication skills (28%)**

"Education is important (…) but sometimes, regular education doesn't fully prepare us for the practical side of jobs.' (Male, Basra)

They also highlight the importance of learning multiple languages, particularly English to enhance employability and engage with global cultures.

Most desired language skills among young Iraqis
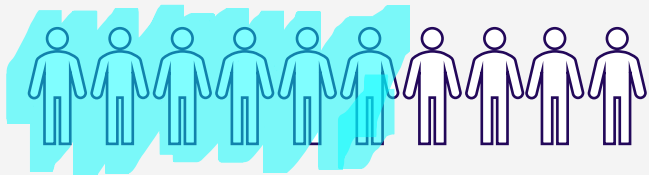
80% English

64% Arabic

10% Turkish

Entrepreneurship offers an alternative to employment, but barriers persist

Dissatisfaction with employment in Iraq is driving young Iraqis to consider entrepreneurship as a pathway

Six in ten young Iraqis **are interested in entrepreneurship** – seeing it as a challenging but rewarding pathway.

There is equal appetite for entrepreneurship amongst both young men and women, but a slight difference when it comes to urbanity.

Interest in entrepreneurship by urbanity.

62%
Urban

52%
Rural
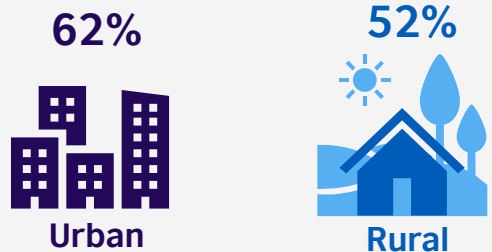
Despite equal appetite amongst young men and women, barriers to entrepreneurship are gendered.

Barriers to entrepreneurship ranged from difficulty **accessing start-up funding** to **social constraints**, with women particularly facing familial and societal pressures as key barriers.

Key barriers to entrepreneurship by gender

Lack of access to finance

44% Male
33%

Societal pressure as a barrier

3%
17% Female
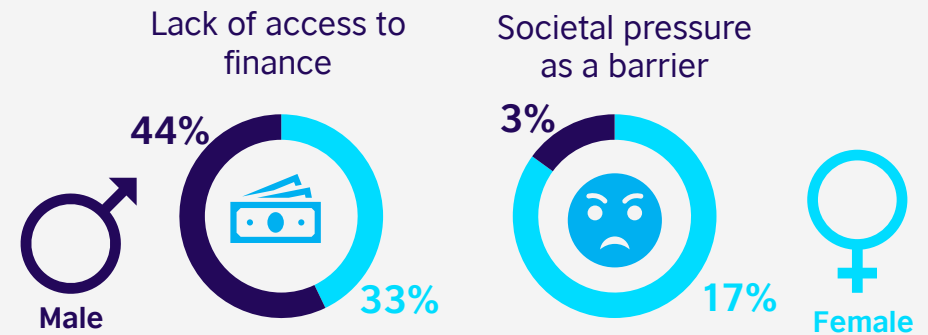
This societal pressure often revolves around expectations to marry young, which disproportionately affects young women, especially those in marginalised communities.

Recommendations

Key Recommendations

Profiles

Social Inclusion:
- Enhance accessibility in public spaces, workspaces and educational institutions and availability of assistive devices
- Promote inclusive education by training teachers to equip with the necessary skills and resources
- Develop gender and context-sensitive programming especially in areas where women face societal and familial pressure
- Strengthen legal protections and enforcement mechanisms to protect and encourage the rights of young disabled persons

Perceptions

Employment:
- Focus on skills development and experience through public-private collaboration
- Introduce accessibility initiatives to accommodate young disabled persons
- Promote rural employment
- Promote employment in the digital economy

Climate Change:
- Enhance climate education and awareness
- Promote sustainable livelihoods and green entrepreneurship
- Empower youth in environmental advocacy at all levels of government
- Build climate resiliency in education

Pathways

Political and civic engagement:
- Facilitate inclusive political discourse with youth friendly platforms
- Ensure online safety for political engagement
- Promote representation in political parties
- Foster youth centric policy-making

Education and Entrepreneurship:
- Reform the curriculum so it is more focused on practical skills
- Promote vocational training to offer pathways outside of university
- Improve access to education in rural areas
- Integrate career counselling into secondary education
- Improve access to finance and networks for aspiring entrepreneurs