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**Middle East Educations, Research,  
Training, and Support (MEERS)**



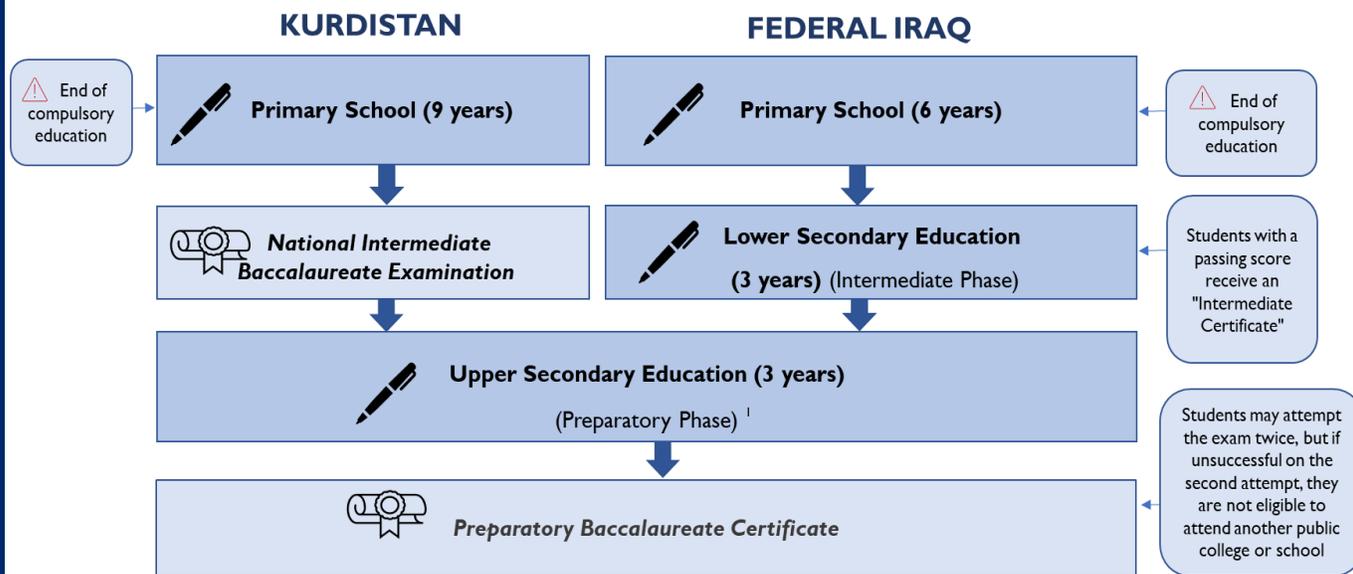
**IRAQ**

SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITION SNAPSHOT

This brief is part of a larger study investigating interventions that support lower and upper secondary school aged youths' transition through school to higher education (HE), to technical and vocational training (TVET), and/or to prepare youth (including out of school youth of secondary school age) to pursue career and livelihood pathways in 11 selected countries across the MENA region. This research does not examine the quality of education, but rather, the knowledge and skills needed to make successful transitions. Therefore, this study focuses on support that wraps around general and technical education curricula.

**PROGRESSION AND DECISION-MAKING POINTS**

**GENERAL EDUCATION**



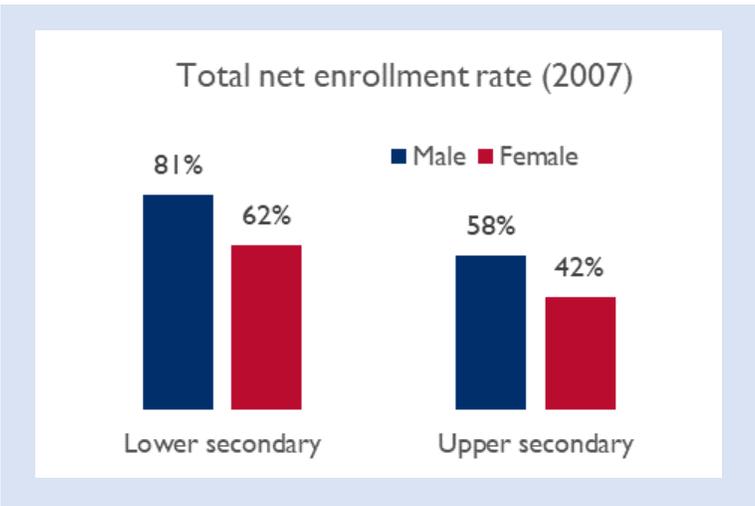
**TECHNICAL EDUCATION.** The choice between general and vocational education tracks occurs in the three-year upper secondary level education. Students following the vocational track can opt between commercial, agricultural, nursing, applied arts, and industrial. At the end of the Grade 12, secondary vocational students take the same national ministerial exam as secondary preparatory students do, covering the same academic subjects in addition to their occupational subject. Successful students receive the Preparatory Baccalaureate

Certificate. If their exam score is over 80 percent, students can continue with vocational tertiary education.<sup>2</sup>

**CAREER COUNSELING.** With the exception of the British Council's "Capacity Building in Primary and Secondary Education: Improving Quality and Equality," which is noted in the interventions section, there are no other identified examples of careers counseling at the secondary level.<sup>3</sup> The need to provide support for the transition to

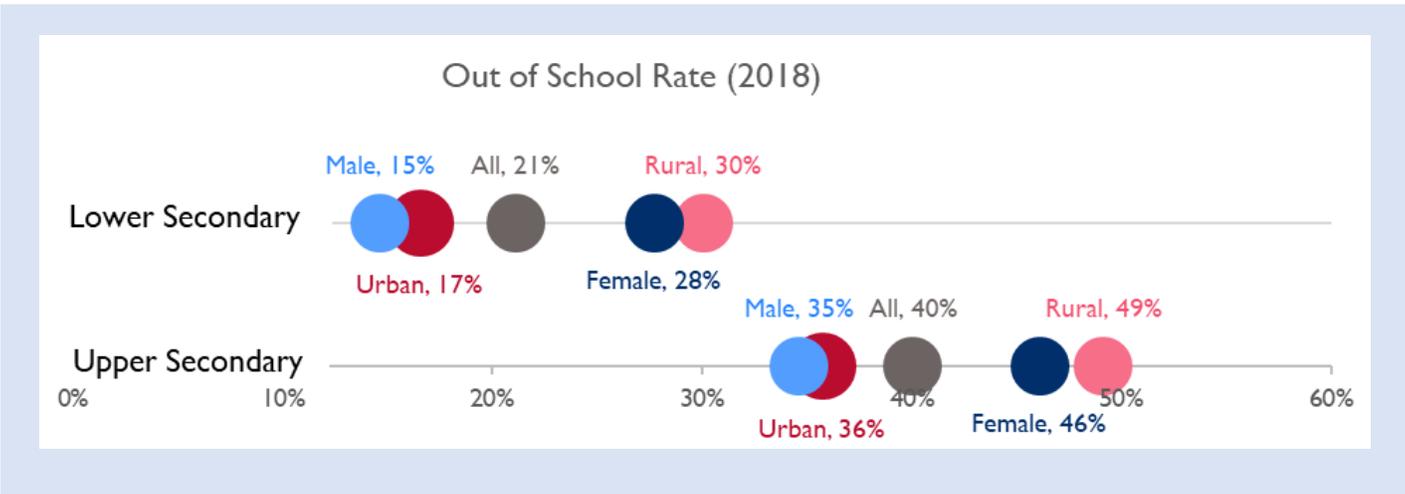
work, within education, is mentioned in various government documents, such as the Social Protection Law No 11/1014; the National Development Plan 2018–2022; the TVET Strategy (2014–2023) for Iraq and Kurdistan-Iraq (KR-I). To date, the only formal career guidance services exist at the tertiary education level and are a result of projects initiated with international donor support and financial funding, designed to improve employability outcomes of graduates of higher education.

**KEY STATISTICS.** The decades-long conflict situation and lack of investment have severely impacted the national education system and made Iraqi children’s access to quality learning incredibly difficult. As of 2013, nearly 1.2 million children (aged five to 14) were out of school, which is 20.3% of total school aged children in Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Overall, 40 percent of all children of upper secondary school age are out-of-school, and close to 46 percent of females and 50 percent of rural children are out of school.<sup>5</sup> The most recent UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) enrollment data are from 2007 and indicate a large gender disparity. While 81 percent of lower secondary school aged boys were enrolled in lower secondary school, only 61 percent of lower secondary school-aged females were enrolled. Also, only 42 percent of females were enrolled in upper secondary school.<sup>6</sup>



**TVET STATISTICS.** Little data were available on the TVET sector in Iraq, and what was available were dated. For example, the number of secondary students choosing vocational education was low, with just 70,900 students enrolled in vocational programs, of which 12 percent were female, as of 2007.<sup>7</sup>

Numerous **systems-wide factors impact youth transitions and the interventions designed to support youth through this period.** Notable strengths and weaknesses related to the general and technical education systems include:





## Strengths and Weaknesses of General and Technical Education Systems

### Strengths

-  The U.S. Department of State (DoS) supports university level career guidance (with IREX) that could be mined for potential to support secondary level students.<sup>8</sup>
-  Universities in Iraq have a history of advanced Research and Development (R&D) that could be revitalized.
-  The National TVET strategy (2014–2023) expands the relevance and quality of TVET with EU support from the British Council.
-  An increase in the public sector revenue due to higher oil production could be used to increase the education budget.<sup>9</sup>

### Weaknesses

-  Infrastructure destroyed by conflict multi-shift system for students affects achievement levels.
-  The education system is not unified: Kurdistan has a distinct system.
-  Vocational training suffers due to being perceived as low status, or second choice to general education.
-  There is strong desire among youth to pursue career in the public sector, in which positions available are decreasing.
-  There is no history of career counseling at the secondary school level.
-  Corruption prevents needed reforms in the education system.<sup>10</sup>

Macro-environment factors impact the lived experiences and decision making of secondary age youth, including the political and economic context, conflict/crisis, demographics, environmental constraints, etc. A selection of key factors include:



## Opportunities and Threats of the Macro-Environment

### Opportunities

-  Civil society may be able to play a more active role in enhancing educational and political reforms.
-  Increasing interest by donors in reforming and strengthening TVET and career guidance, especially at higher education level.<sup>11</sup>
-  Opportunities in industries related to construction and rebuilding (infrastructure, logistics) as recovery from recent conflicts.
-  Water and irrigation are key economic challenges – new green methods of irrigation may offer space for growth of related businesses and related training opportunities.

### Threats

-  Stability is threatened by the reemergence of ISIS in Mosul.
-  Negative perceptions of TVET are deeply engrained and difficult to shift.
-  Labor market is dysfunctional: insufficient public sector jobs to fulfill demand and private sector seen as less attractive.
-  Stubborn high post-conflict high unemployment rates mean high competition for few positions.
-  Climate change expected to impact water and agriculture sectors, both critical for economic growth.<sup>12</sup>
-  Iraq ranks 154 out of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, which assesses progress towards gender parity.<sup>13</sup>

## Interventions targeting the secondary school age group in Iraq focus on:

**QUALITY OF LEARNING FOR YOUTH AND CHILDREN.** Programs focus on increased relevancy of curriculum in key sectors such as agriculture, construction, hospitality, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Donors emphasize building the capacity of the Ministry of Education's staff to support reform, introduce new policies, and enhance education systems. Their aims include providing safe and child-friendly learning spaces, encouraging the enrollment of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs)/returnees, and improving stakeholder's capacity to ensure the quality of education, including life skills. Programs offer a second-chance opportunity to complete formal education for out-of-school youth and children. There is significant emphasis on developing textbook materials, training teachers, involving parents, teachers, and community members in the decision process, including a focus on creating Management Committees and Parents and Teacher Associations (PTAs). Efforts are underway to enhance the Iraqi Technical-Vocational Qualifications Framework (TVQF).

**UPSKILLING, TRAINING & EMPLOYMENT.** Programs create opportunities for youth to help them consider career pathways or offer apprenticeships to reduce vulnerable participation in subversive activities. Also, youth-led community activities are in place to enhance soft skills, provide psychosocial support – with a focus on children who have experienced trauma, as well as business/ entrepreneurship training for youth startup and mentorship. Most programs focus on technical, vocational, and entrepreneurial skills training and internship placement. Others focus on providing IDPs, women and vulnerable youth with upskilling and employment opportunities, as well as counseling to support children make informed decisions and offer curriculum around civic and peace education.



## KEY GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION AND FOUNDATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS

### Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), UNICEF

- Dated program (from 2005), aims to provide a fast-track second-chance opportunity to complete formal education to out of school youth and children (aged 12–18).
- Creates educational opportunities for youth, helping youth think of their career pathway and reducing vulnerable participation in subversive activities.
- 90 percent of ALP graduates continued either in secondary education or studying in other programs, e.g., joining an apprenticeship scheme or finding employment.<sup>14</sup>

### School Based Management (SBM), UNICEF

- Aims to improve school governance and develop School Improvement Plans (SIPs), with the support of school block grants.
- Involves parents and community members as well as teachers and headteachers in the decision process, creating School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parents and Teacher Associations (PTAs).
- Supports decentralization to the school level by engaging local communities, aiming to participate in solving local issues, including enhancing the education quality.<sup>15</sup>

### **Mainstream life skills into the teaching and learning system, UNICEF**

- Promotes the development of core skills, learning frameworks, and materials — including textbooks, resource materials — and is developing qualitative assessment tools to measure the life skills program.
- Focus on making school environments safer and improving the learning quality. Attention to psychosocial training, positive discipline, and civic education for social cohesion.<sup>16</sup>

### **Improving access to quality and inclusive education with gender equality for out-of-school children in Iraq, UNESCO**

- Aims to provide access to quality and inclusive education with gender equality for out-of-school children (OOSC) in Iraq.
- The three main objectives; 1) providing safe and child-friendly learning spaces; 2) the enrollment of OOSC (including IDPs/returnees); and 3) improving all national stakeholders capacity and ensuring the quality of the deliverables.<sup>17</sup>

### **EU Schools Program, British Council**

- Supports the enrolment and learning of children focusing on girls in rural areas, children with disability, and children who suffered from war and displacement.
- Builds capacity of senior officials and practitioners in the education system to design and introduce new policies and plans.
- Aims to enhance enrolment, support school counselors in their roles of supporting children, focusing on traumatized children, and develop the curriculum with a special eye on civic and peace education.<sup>18</sup>

## **KEY SECONDARY-LEVEL TVET AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS**

### **Reforming TVET in Iraq, UNESCO**

- Under the Iraqi Technical-Vocational Qualifications Framework (TVQF), the project increases access to the TVET system, enhances quality, ensures that it is demand-driven to the labor market, and links TVET to Iraq's economic growth, with the aim to increase employment and social cohesion.
- Components include refurbishment of workshops, increased relevancy of curriculum in key sectors: agriculture, construction, hospitality, and ICT.<sup>19</sup>

### **Promoting the Inclusion of Conflict-Affected Iraqi Youth, World Bank**

- Program offers entrepreneurship and youth-led community development activities with piloted local approaches to: soft skills training and psychosocial support and trainings and grants for youth-led development activities, as well as business development training, grants for business startup, and post-grant mentorship for youth (ages 15–29).<sup>20</sup>

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