

Employment Promotion 4.0

Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) for a Modern Youth in Iraq

The challenge

Iraq's population is one of the youngest in the world. Almost two thirds of all Iraqis are under the age of 25, many of whom are internally displaced persons in their own country, or refugees from neighbouring countries. The majority has hardly any employment prospects; every fifth of them is unemployed.

Job opportunities in the traditional sectors of the Iraqi economy, such as the oil industry and public services, are decreasing. More than half of the working population is currently employed in the public sector, but with decreasing government revenues due to declining oil prices, these jobs don't offer long-term perspectives. The private sector, however, has hardly developed until now.

Young Iraqis are becoming increasingly interested in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) as a possible field of employment. The basic requirements for this sector are comparatively good in Iraq: Mobile Internet in broadband quality is accessible almost everywhere in the country, which allows a mobile and flexible way of working. However, neither the available technology trainings nor the curricula of relevant study programs at universities meet the requirements of the Iraqi labor market. Starting an own business often fails due to a lack of practical skills in ICT and entrepreneurship, as well as missing governmental support structures, and limited access to loans or capital from investors.

Our approach

The project aims at building a tech ecosystem in Iraq, and supports the establishment of a sustainable infrastructure and environment for technology applications and entrepreneurship. Innovation hubs in selected urban areas are set up and offer trainings, coworking and makerspaces, where young people can enhance their practical skills, have access to a broad network of peers and

are supported by experienced mentors in developing their business ideas. The trainings focus on practice-oriented skills in ICT, entrepreneurship and soft skills, and improve the overall employability of young Iraqis. Therefore, employment prospects are created for both entrepreneurs and job seekers.

Project Name	ICT – Perspectives for the Modern Youth in Iraq
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project Region	Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Anbar
National Partner	Ministry of Planning, Iraq
Duration	12/2017 – 11/2020

Furthermore, the matchmaking process between the supply and demand side on the ICT market is an integral part of the project. Access to finance and investments is a major burden for startups and their growth prospects. During and after the training programmes, attendees and entrepreneurs are paired with suitable investors, potential employers and customers to create long-term employment opportunities.

Impact

Since 2018, five innovation hubs were set up and expanded in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. The hubs provide coworking- and/or makerspaces, which are equipped with modern machinery, such as 3D printers, laser cutters and CNC machines. Each innovation hub has a specific technical expertise that is complementary within the overall tech ecosystem. The trainings offered focus on startup promotion, such as incubator and accelerator programmes, and specific tech qualifications in programming, coding, robotics, and electronics. Trainings are also provided outside of the innovation hubs, for example during events for entrepreneurship promotion in the region of Anbar.

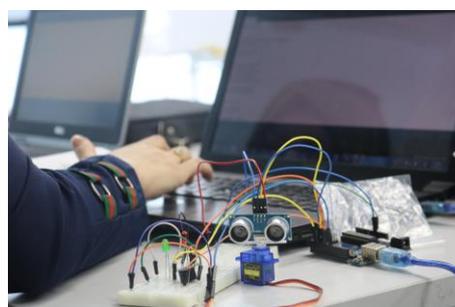


Photo left: More than 750 young tech enthusiasts from 18 different cities came together in the nationwide 'Innovation Hackathon', to develop digital solutions for cross-border challenges in Iraq.

Photo right: University graduates attend trainings in Mosul to strengthen their practical skills in ICT and develop prototypes based on their own ideas.

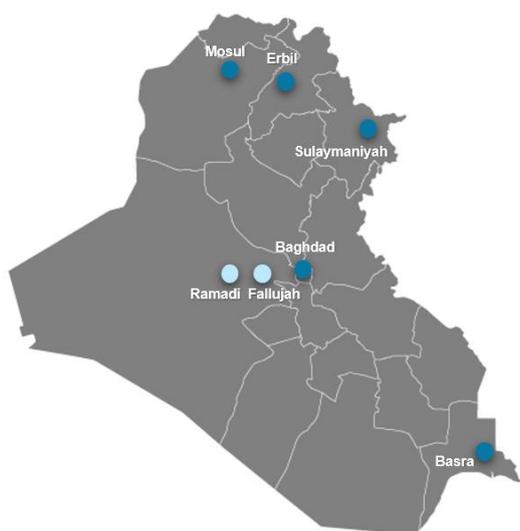
Inga Niere
Inga.niere@giz.de



Photo left: Entrepreneurs in Baghdad use coworking spaces to exchange with peers on their business ideas.

Photo right: In Erbil, 3D-printing at the makerspace is used to develop custom-made solutions for local needs.

In 2019, more than 90 trainings on ICT and entrepreneurship skills were conducted through the five innovation hubs. More than 1,500 young Iraqis participated in the trainings, among them around 30 per cent women.



Iraq Map: ● Innovation Hubs ● Training Activities

Apart from serving as training facilities, the hubs provide community spaces for the local youth to exchange with like-minded peers. They offer a safe environment, and a unique platform for young entrepreneurs in Iraq to network with potential partners and promote their own startups.

So far, more than 5,250 participants directly benefitted from trainings, events and activities, that the project supported since 2018. By the end of 2019, more than 45 startups, among which 30 per cent were female founders, were actively using the hubs as working spaces.

An example from the field

The project supports the 'Iraq Innovation Alliance' (IIA), an umbrella organization formed by all five Innovation Hubs and other ICT relevant actors, to strengthen collaboration among the tech ecosystem in Iraq. As a kick-off event, the first countrywide 'Iraq Innovation Hackathon' was conducted in April 2019.

The hackathon was hosted simultaneously in all five innovation hubs, and it was the first tech event of this size that took place in Central Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq at the same time. For 48 hours, young Iraqis from all over the country worked together on technology-based solutions to cross-regional problems, such as 'How can single-use plastic products and packaging be reduced and reused?'. The event was broadcasted live on Facebook, which also enabled the participation of tech-enthusiasts from outside of the urban hubs, bringing the outreach to 18 Iraqi cities in total. 731 young participants registered countrywide for the hackathon and worked together in 57 teams to solve the presented problems. For many participants, the hackathon marked their first steps into a career as an entrepreneur. Abdulrahman, a participant from Mosul, was highly satisfied with the outcome of the event, stating 'I never imagined I would meet my identical business partner, but through the Hackathon I did'.

Another aim of the hackathon was to unite conflicting regions in Iraq, and to overcome the fragmentation of ecosystems, by jointly tackling transborder challenges. Working together on shared problems puts a focus on common goals rather than local conflicts and establishes a joint vision for the future. This promotes dialogue among the population and helps to react better to cross-border challenges in the future.

Published by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices: Bonn and Eschborn, Germany
GIZ Office Iraq
World Trade Center, Erbil, Iraq

Contact person Inga Niere
inga.niere@giz.de

As at January 2020

Photo credits GIZ / Re:coded / Mosul Space / Field Ready

Author Buse Aysen Çubuk

On behalf of Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

In cooperation with Ministry of Planning, Iraq