Rebuilding Lives, Building Communities

IOM continues to support Syrian refugees in Iraq through livelihood initiatives

Erbil Governorate

20 motorbikes distributed
128 shops opened
302 families helped
13,000 Syrian refugees indirectly benefitted
OPENING CEREMONIES
Darashakran and Basirma Camps
April 24th and 27th, 2014
On April 24th and 27th, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with local government officials and representatives from UN agencies and NGOs, marked the opening of 128 shops and the distribution of 20 motorbikes to beneficiaries in Darashakran and Basirma Camps in northern Iraq.

This project was implemented under the auspices of Regional Response Plan 5 and used similar methodology to IOM’s Community Revitalization Program. This project aimed to enhance the livelihoods of Syrians in refugee camps throughout the Kurdish region of Iraq by helping them gain access to rewarding employment and regular income.

Each individual shop and motorbike is jointly owned and run by two beneficiaries, identified by IOM through assessments of their vulnerability, the needs of their community, and their skills in establishing their own small business. In February 2014, beneficiaries learned essential entrepreneurial and managerial skills through IOM’s Business Development Services (BDS) training. Working together with IOM trainers, beneficiaries received guidance and instructions about the types of small businesses they could open and how to design their business plan.

During the opening ceremonies, shop owners received toolkits that included the materials and equipment needed to run their small businesses. In each camp, the assortment of shops formed a marketplace that included groceries, restaurants, salons, shoe repair, smitheries, electric services, tailoring, mobile repair services, etc. These shops will contribute to the overall economy of the community, enhance the lives of its members, and provide sustainable income to the shop owners and their families.

Looking towards the future, IOM Iraq has established new centers for business training in each camp to provide continuous business counseling for the shop owners so that they can continue to improve and expand their shops.
DARASHAKRAN

April 24th, 2014

110 shops opened
242 families helped
10,000 Syrian refugees indirectly benefited

11 motorbikes distributed
Standing at the entrance of Darashakran Camp, the rows of gleaming shops hummed with the happy voices and laughter of the Syrian men, women, and children gathered to celebrate the joy and strength that these new shops will bring to their community.

Luz Tantaruna, Livelihood Program Manager of IOM Iraq, joined local government officials and representatives from UN agencies and local NGOs in welcoming the attendees.

“These shops promote self-sustainability while emphasizing the importance of working together,” Tantaruna said. “Building this synergy creates a lot of potential for further development and improvement. I hope we can continue to succeed in pursuing many other activities together.”

“This marketplace is a community center, but also so much more,” commented Susan Martin, UNAMI Hub Coordinator, who attended the opening ceremonies in both camps. “Men and women will gather at the barbershops, beauty salons, and cafeterias – this will provide the space for all the residents of the camp to talk about their experiences, share frustrations, and come up with ideas to support each other, ultimately strengthening bonds within the community. These shops will bring life back to these communities.”

Many of the shop owners had vocational skills they developed in Syria; others developed these skills when they reached Darashakran Camp. All have shown immense strength and resilience in the face of difficult times, and share the hope that through their shops, they can improve both the lives of their families and their community as a whole.

“I wanted to open a grocery partly because I have marketing skills from small businesses I worked with back home in Syria,” said Muhedi Kalo, a 40-year-old refugee from Malkiye, a small town in the northern Syrian province of Al-Hasakeh. “But most of all, I wanted to open this store to support my family and because I thought it was an important service that my community needed.”

“I have seven beautiful children – three

“...will provide the space for all the residents of the camp to talk about their experiences, share frustrations, and come up with ideas to support each other.”

Below, left: Auday Alawee, IOM Iraq Livelihood Program Assistant
Below, right: Marketplace in Darashakran Camp
boys and four girls. My youngest daughter suffers from polio. We regularly need to take her to the doctor for her to receive treatment. Although it was difficult to pay for her treatment while supporting my other children, I was able to make ends meet by working as a construction worker by day and a driver by night back home in Malkiye."

The increasing violence and worsening economic situation in Malkiye exacerbated Muhedi’s already difficult situation.

“Back home, each time we traveled outside to take my daughter to the doctor, I was afraid for her safety, especially when planes were flying overhead,” recalled Muhedi. “One by one, I lost both my jobs and was unable to find work anywhere else. We scrambled for any money—anything that we could use to pay for treatment. We sacrificed food and rent to make sure she could visit the doctor.”

“One day the hospital turned us away, saying there was no more medicine and treatment available. I remember my daughter crying because she was in so much pain. I felt completely helpless. I didn’t know what to do or who to turn to. There was no other medical center in the area I could take her to.”

Several days after, a heavy wave of aerial bombardment struck their neighborhood, substantially damaging Muhedi’s house and killing their neighbor’s husband.

“That moment I knew we had to leave. My daughter was suffering from pain and could barely walk, and my whole family’s safety was in jeopardy. On August 22, 2013, we immediately packed the little we had and left to find safety.”

Muhedi hopes to work hard with his business partner to expand the store to provide a wider variety of items. “Whatever people need, whether it’s candy or soap, I want them to be able to find it in this store. Providing people with items needed for daily life will give them a sense of normalcy and help alleviate the pressures of our situation.”

“I am extremely grateful to IOM because they helped me find a way to support my family. With the income from this store, I hope to find a way to send my daughter abroad and get her the treatment she needs.”

“Providing people with items needed for daily life will help alleviate the pressures of our situation.”
Several shops away from Muhedi’s grocery, Rafet Hussein, a 40-year-old refugee from Quamishli, proudly arranged his scissors, combs, and razors in order on the counter in his barbershop.

“I carried each of these across the border with the hope that I could continue my business. I didn’t know how I would start a barbershop – I had no money, no resources, just these scissors – but I kept this dream. IOM helped me achieve what I thought was impossible.”

Afraid for the health and safety of his wife and four children and unable to find any source of income, Rafet crossed the border to Erbil in August 2013.

“Electricity and water were cut from my shop, and customers stopped coming because each step out of your home was dangerous. The sounds of planes constantly flying overhead and the threat of kidnapping made me wonder each day if I would be able to return home to my family in the evening.”

With his barbershop, Rafet hopes to rebuild his life and restore hope in his community. “Although I want to return to Syria and my barbershop there, this place is my home for now. I want to show my family and others that we still can have a future. While I am working, I don’t feel like a refugee—I feel like a real person again.”

As part of the celebration in Darashakran, schoolchildren identified by their teachers for their high academic performance received shirts and bags made by women from the camp. These women received a one-month technical workshop on bag weaving and handicraft production with IOM’s On-the-Job Training (OJT).

OJT provides beneficiaries with highly skilled trainers and the opportunity to gain technical expertise in a career with high demand, thus improving future financial stability and employability. These vocational training courses include English language training in addition to sewing.

“While I am working, I don’t feel like a refugee—I feel like a real person again.”
Syrian refugees indirectly benefitted

- 9 motorbikes distributed
- 18 shops opened
- 60 families helped
- 3,000 Syrian refugees indirectly benefitted
Shining in the afternoon sun and nestled in the green, rolling hills that surround Basirma Camp, the cluster of 18 beneficiary shops echoed with the excitement of Syrian refugees eagerly awaiting the opening ceremony. Children clamored over the nine polished red motorbikes propped in a line across from the decorated stage while IOM staff, government officials, and representatives from UN agencies and NGOs happily conversed with the attendees gathered around the stage.

“We are so happy to share this happiness together with the beneficiaries, their children, and the whole community,” said Tantaruna as she welcomed the attendees. “In both good and bad times, we must work together to strengthen our livelihoods and improve our situations. The best way to do this is to develop our capabilities.”

She added, “It is extremely important that you have the entrepreneurial skills and basic resources necessary to continue contributing to yourself, your family, and your community. IOM aims to create positive and creative opportunities to help you improve your situations.”

Mr. Suara, Mayor of Basirma, joined Tantaruna in welcoming the attendants. He emphasized the importance and benefits of joint efforts between the local government and IOM to improve the situation of Syrian refugees in Basirma.

“I am very impressed with this marketplace and am looking forward to further collaboration with IOM in the future,” Mayor Suara said.

After the speeches, a group of dancers dressed in colorful glittering outfits provided by IOM climbed on stage and performed a traditional Kurdish dance for the audience. Once the dancers filed off-stage, Tantaruna, accompanied by Mayor Suara, called the 42 beneficiaries to the stage and presented them with the keys to their shops and motorbikes.

With smiles on their faces and keys in hand, the beneficiaries stepped up to the doors of their shops, opened them for the first time, and began to examine their tool kits of resources and equipment.
“I am so happy to be able to use my sewing skills once again,” said Fatma, as she began unwrapping a new sewing machine. Born and raised in a small village in Hasaka, the 40-year-old mother of four has been the sole breadwinner of her family for the last decade. “My husband suffers from a brain disorder that prevents him from working,” she explained. “To support my family, I opened a sewing shop in my house back in Syria. I have good sewing skills, so I was able to make enough income to cover my husband’s medical expenses and provide for my children.”

As the security and economic situation in her village worsened, work became scarce. Fatma said, “I needed work desperately, but no one was coming to my shop or buying my items. I could not pay for my husband’s medical expenses, and I could not feed my children. I had no one to turn to for support. In August 2013, I finally left my home to find a better life.”

“By giving me this opportunity to open a sewing shop, IOM has changed the lives of my family,” Fatma said. “IOM’s help has restored my peace of mind, and most importantly, has given my family hope.”

Fatma is jointly running this sewing shop with Shireen, a newly married 24-year-old. “In my hometown, Quamishli, there was no electricity, no services—nothing,” Shireen explained. “My husband was a tailor and taught me how to sew so that we could both make an income, but we could not find any work. By the time we left, I couldn’t even find a piece of bread for us to eat.”

Shireen hopes to use the skills she developed though the BDS training to expand the business. “The training was useful because I had no idea how to run a business. I now know about marketing, managing finances, and customer relations. I have a completely new idea of what I am capable of, and I have confidence in myself that I can build a bright future for my family, both here and hopefully one day back in Syria.”

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Next door, Naem and Hadeel, ages 27 and 25, stood proudly in front of their mobile phone repair shop. “We grew up together in Damascus,” said Naem. “We lived in the same neighborhood, and our families were close.” As they grew older, Hadeel studied computer science at a local university and began to work at an electronic store while Naem married, had three children, and opened a clothing store near his house.

In June 2013, their lives changed forever. “Our neighborhood was bombed. In one moment, both my house and my store were reduced to rubble,” recalls Naem. “Everything I and my family owned was gone.” Fearing for their lives, Naem and Hadeel took their family to Quamishli.

However, the situation in Quamishli was not much better. “We could not live even the most basic life,” said Naem. “On top of the constant threat of violence, we only had electricity for two hours each day. We often could not get drinking water or food. There were no doctors available for my children to visit when they were sick.”

“With the training and resources from IOM, I hope to work and rebuild our lives,” said Hadeel. “Of course I want to return to Syria, but I want to work hard here to expand my business and support our family.”

“With the training and resources from IOM, I hope to work and rebuild our lives.”

Above: Naem and Hadeel, IOM beneficiaries
Below: Beneficiaries receiving keys to their shops
A short distance away from the shops, Mohon Mohamed, a 30-year-old refugee from Quamishli, and Jasim Moho, a 34-year-old refugee from Malkiye, climbed on their new motorbike and started the engine.

The similarities between these business partners are striking. Both Mohon and Jasim worked as motorbike drivers in their respective towns, and although they never met prior to arriving in Basirma Camp, both men left their homes on the same day for the same reason.

“I remember the day I left Quamishli very clearly—August 21, 2013,” recalled Mohon. “The night before, my town was bombed. The street where I grew up was gone.”

“The same happened in my town,” added Jasim. “Overnight, my street turned from houses to piles of rubble. My family and I could barely believe it.”

When they were chosen to receive business training, Mohon and Jasim decided that they would partner and draw from their experience as motorbike drivers to begin a driving and delivery service to transport goods to and from their community in the camp.

“I immediately knew I wanted to work with Jasim,” said Mohon, as he smiled and put his arm around his friend. “He is a good man, and I would trust him as I would trust family. I hope that our motorbike service will help build more relationships between families like the friendship Jasim and I share.”

“We are very happy and thankful for this opportunity from IOM,” Jasim said as he laughed and clapped Mohon on the back. “The business training we received helped us gain managerial skills and gave us confidence in our abilities. Even though our
situation is difficult, IOM helped us, and in turn our community, step towards regaining our self-reliance and independence.”

Refugees living in the camp shared the excitement of the shop owners as they watched them unpack their materials and arrange their shops. “We are so happy that these shops are opening,” said Midia Mohammad as she sat overlooking the events. The 52-year-old mother of three fled from Quamishli after her house was destroyed in an air raid.

“We had no home, no money, nothing to support ourselves. The constant sound of airplanes made me nervous for my family’s safety. I knew we had to leave.”

Midia described life in Basirma camp, saying that although her family’s safety is now guaranteed, it is difficult to lead a normal life.

“With these shops, we now have access to washing machines, hairdressers, and other things I wouldn’t have even dreamt of being able to have a few months ago,” said Midia. “These shops will help us start over again, and I know my children will be happier—especially with that new sweet shop.”

“These shops will help us start over again.”