



Introduction:

In the Nineveh Plains, the main concern for youth is their exclusion from decision-making processes by both political and community

leaders. The Nineveh Plains have yet to fully recover from the various political and economic hardships they experienced under the Islamic State (IS). Yet despite being most affected by these issues, young people have been significantly neglected and/or excluded from decision-making processes, particularly on matters that directly concern them, such as a lack of employment opportunities, lack of community support, lack of freedom of expression, and uncertainty about the future of the region.

As part of the larger USAID-funded project, ‘Support to Traditional Cultural Practices in Northern Iraq’, this research identified and assessed policies and issues relevant to youth in the Nineveh Plains. It focused on the role of youth in social cohesion and the issue of restoring trust among the religious and ethnic groups affected by IS’ brutal acts. The collected data show that young people are marginalized and excluded from current political, administrative, and community institutions. Improved inclusion of youth would give them confidence and a feeling that their community embraces them. It would supplement the work of political leaders and administrators by utilizing the energy, innovation, and

Key Takeaways

- Current decision-making processes neglect Iraq’s youth
- Youth interviewed discussed their lack of job opportunities, lack of support from the state, and lack of free speech
- Some said these frustrations made their cohort an easy target for extremist groups recruitment
- If officials do not respond to the youth’s needs, these needs may become a major obstacle to peace

untapped skills of youth. This can directly boost the economy, improve educational outcomes, and strengthen community relationships.

Political and community leadership needs to support and strengthen the role young people play in various areas such as social cohesion and peaceful coexistence of different groups.

Findings:

This research worked to understand the role of youth in promoting social cohesion in the Nineveh Plain. Key data was collected via an awareness and accountability session on 30/05/2023. The session was attended by young people representing all ethnic and religious groups in the Nineveh Plains, including Christians, Turkmen, Shabaks, Yazidis, and Kakais. To facilitate dialogue, attendees were divided into four main groups, with each group containing a representative of each ethnic and religious community. During the session, participants freely expressed their opinions on the current peacebuilding-related issues, and then shared their views on how such issues should be solved. Moreover, further data was collected through 10 individual and 3 small group interviews and meetings between March and April 2023.



The collected data suggest that the unequal distribution of job opportunities among young people from different communities leads to social fragmentation. One community has most of the military jobs, while government jobs are mostly doled out to the dominant community. Additionally, the region lacks a robust private sector or industrial projects that could generate employment opportunities for youth. Furthermore, young people are not represented in local councils and do not hold key government positions, so their participation in decision-making processes in many areas of life is weak. On top of this, an increasingly militarized society means youth join the security forces for the high economic benefits. These factors could become major obstacles to future peace if authorities do not properly meet the demands of young people.



Recommendations:

The Governorate of Nineveh, local governments, and NGOs have important roles to play in minimizing youth problems and enhancing their role in political and social life.

Our results suggest that **policymakers need to work to include young people in important decision-making processes**. Moreover, programs should be developed to encourage young people to participate in issues of social cohesion in a range of contexts, from the family to the community and beyond. Guaranteeing youth participation in the decision-making process will mean establishing communication with the dominant political and social actors in society, particularly with community leaders like politicians, clerics, and tribal chiefs. Indeed, this is not possible without the engagement of the government.

In addition, the government needs to work with non-governmental organizations to **support private enterprise** that boosts economic growth and reduces youth unemployment. This could include supplying favorable loans and capital terms to the youth population. This could greatly increase youth employment and minimize migration.

Additionally, the government should open youth centers aimed at encouraging young people to embrace the spirit of citizenship and avoid anything that might upset the ranks between the members of the various communities.

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Photos: Youth Awareness Session, Event facilitator with participants. Credit: research team

