The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation founded in 1956 that works in more than 40 countries throughout the world. DRC fulfils its mandate by providing direct assistance to conflict-affected populations – refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and host communities in the conflict areas of the world and by advocating on their behalf internationally and in Denmark.
## Brief project description

This case study analysed a one-year project in Duhok and Erbil, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), which included a component of employment support through job centres. Clients registered at the job centre, were referred to a vocational training (VT) course (e.g. sewing, hair dressing, air conditioning maintenance, etc.) and then to a 2-month subsidised internship. The project aimed at increasing access to the labour market, and success was measured by retention in a job after 6 months.

The Theory of Change / Impact Chain for the VT & internship component is briefly outlined below.

In total, 74 people benefited from the VT / internship programme.

### Observations and findings

1. **Market information:** A lot of resources and time were invested at the beginning of the project to collect labour market information, because the authorities had limited data. It was, however, challenging for the staff to use the market information, e.g. in identifying viable internship opportunities.

2. **Legal framework:** There are no specific employment restrictions for refugees or IDPs. In some cases, Iraqi Arabs face more difficulties than refugees, especially because they do not speak Kurdish.

3. **Vocational Training:** VT in Kurdistan is under the umbrella of Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) but the latter does not seem to invest much in coordination and harmonization. Curricula are not harmonized, and the validity of the certificates delivered by different service providers is questionable. DRC takes responsibility for ensuring that clients are trained in marketable skills, given that the VT centres have limited linkages with private sector actors and capacity to facilitate labour market integration.

4. **Training:** Nearly everyone completed the training. The few who dropped out did so because they found a job or because of health or security issues. The training was also appreciated for the contacts it helped people make, and many trainees have stayed in touch with each other, sharing experience and information through social media.

5. **Distance to the VTC** was a main challenge in attending the training. A transportation allowance was provided, though it was not based on an accurate price assessment and was higher than the actual cost.
6. **Identification of employment opportunities:** As a result of the economic crisis in KRI, open vacancies are scarce, necessitating great effort from DRC and/or the job seeker to identify hiring opportunities. DRC played a leading role in identifying employment opportunities, using criteria such as the match with the training received, or proximity to the clients’ home (especially for women). In some cases, DRC had not considered whether there was a potential for longer-term employment at the internship place, which made it impossible from the start for the client to access a long-term job.

7. **Internship stipend:** In one of the cities, the amount of the stipend (c. US$450) was above the market average wage, creating tensions with other employees. This increased the risk of dropout after the internship period, when wages were likely to be reduced to the market norm. The stipend from DRC also created unfair competition with regular job seekers, because employers obviously preferred hiring free interns, so the net impact may only be that a DRC client replaces another young job seeker.

8. **"Wasta" (nepotism and connections):** Much in economic life in the region as a whole, including job recruitment, is shaped by social connections or wasta. Wasta was felt more in Duhok than in a larger city such as Erbil. Wasta tends to penalise younger people more, as they have a limited network.

9. **Factors facilitating labour market integration:** When interviewed, project clients, employers and DRC staff all failed to mention skills as a factor in facilitating integration into the labour market, which everyone felt depended mainly on relationships. The project design, though, is based on a more Western model of employment where giving people skills is the most useful way to help them to work.

### DAC criteria assessment

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<tr>
<th>DAC CRITERIA</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
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<td><strong>RELEVANCE</strong></td>
<td>Given the permissive legal framework in KRI, fostering access to employment for displaced people is an appropriate objective. The economic crisis, combined with a state-led economy, hinders this form of programming, especially in smaller cities like Duhok.</td>
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<td><strong>COST-EFFICIENCY</strong></td>
<td>No analysis has been conducted yet of the cost-efficiency of this project or of alternative strategies to reach these objectives. Some of the necessary activities (e.g. collecting relevant labour market information, reaching out to potential employers) have been identified as labour and time intensive. It is expected that over time, resources needed to effectively perform these activities will reduce, as is already starting to be seen.</td>
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<td><strong>EFFECTIVENESS &amp; IMPACT</strong></td>
<td>It is too early to judge the impact of the project, though some lessons are already emerging. In Erbil, people who stayed in the job were typically paid the minimum wage (about US$350).</td>
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<td><strong>SUSTAINABILITY</strong></td>
<td>It is still too early to assess sustainability, but this should be reviewed during 2018, some months after the internships have ended. It may be possible and appropriate to increase sustainability by working with public and private sector actors to provide quality employment support over time.</td>
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<td><strong>COVERAGE</strong></td>
<td>Compared with the total number of applicants (several thousand across the two cities), DRC was able to reach a very limited number of people (74). There will be some potential for scale up, as DRC Iraq increases its understanding of labour market opportunities. The overall potential for increasing the number of placements will be limited by local economic conditions.</td>
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Main take-aways

- DRC needs to reflect on alternative ways of understanding markets in real time, both through helping staff to collect data and by supporting clients in identifying for themselves what skills would be most useful to them and what job opportunities they can find.

- As a medium-term exit strategy, DRC, with other NGOs, could play a facilitator role to help improve coordination among actors providing employment support in KRI. Linking public and private service providers and fostering increased harmonisation of curricula, information sharing, network building would result in enhanced quality of services overall.

- DRC should further investigate the role financial incentives (for the job seekers and for the employers) play in job retention.