



IOM IRAQ

International Organization for Migration in Iraq

The Story of Zahra'a

Zahra'a is an Iraqi woman from Baghdad who was happily married with two children. Her and her husband, who worked for the Iraqi government, had recently bought a small flat of their own, and had planned a bright future for themselves and their children.

One day in 2005, however, the world came crashing down for Zahra'a when her husband was kidnapped and never heard from again. She was left alone to fend for herself and her children.



Soon after her husband's disappearance, Zahra'a received threats and had to abandon her flat. Broken and lost, she returned to her family home with her children. Her family embraced her and the children, and tried to support her as best they could, but she still felt like she was a burden on them.

In 2007, after finally losing any hope of her husband's return, Zahra'a decided she had to try to do something to help herself, her children, and her family. A natural cook, she started a small business in her home preparing ready-made food. Unfortunately, Zahra'a lacked the proper equipment and materials to make decent profits, and her business stumbled.

The following year, however, Zahra'a became aware of IOM's Programme for Human Security and Stabilization (PHSS), which helps Iraqis like herself to improve their livelihoods through grants, training, and other resources. After applying for and receiving a PHSS grant, Zahra'a worked with IOM staff to determine the exact support she needed to improve her business. Zahra'a received a stove, a large freezer, a generator, a refrigerator, and a food processor, along with other equipment to help her business grow.

Zahra'a today

Zahra'a greets visitors to her humble residence with a warm smile. In weather as dusty as Baghdad's, the cleanliness of the house where she operates her small factory is the first thing that strikes guests. It has been a year since Zahra'a received her PHSS grant, and the progress she has made is remarkable.

Zahra'a has named her products "Nima," which means "Prosper." She has now 6 to 7 employees working with her, and she pays them each a daily salary of \$13 dollars. They purchase the necessary materials, cook the food, and wrap it into attractive packages. The house is like a beehive and the 7 of them work 7 hours a day, even during Ramadan. Her net profit is roughly \$13 dollars per day.



Once ready to distribute, the food made by Zahra'a and her team never stays in the freezer for long. She has made deals to sell her products at five supermarkets in busy parts of Baghdad. Her neighbors and relatives market her food through word-of-mouth and gain the company new customers. The delicious kabbabs, cubba, and boorag made by Zahra'a have become famous in the city, and she has even received an offer to provide catering for the Ministry of Defense.

The lives of Zahra'a and her family have been transformed by the success of her business. She does not have to struggle to provide for her two children, and is proud that she can help them to continue their studies. Zahra'a is no longer the broken woman she once was. She is now confident, happy, and well-regarded in her community, and she is thankful that there are people who care enough to support women like her.

Program for Human Security and Stabilization (PHSS)

Through the Program for Human Security and Stabilization, IOM Iraq is working closely with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) to develop a wide-ranging set of grassroots economic development programs.

PHSS currently operates in the governorates of Baghdad, Ninewa, Diyala, Babil, Wassit, and Missan, with plans to expand to Anbar, Basra, Erbil, and Sulaymania. PHSS programmes support the efforts of Iraqis to rebuild their local economies and encourage locally focused, broad-based economic development.

Small businesses are the backbone of any economy, and PHSS is assisting small businesses in Iraq to develop their markets, expand their workforce through business and skills training for employees, and providing grants for equipment to enable businesses to offer a greater number of quality services to their customers.

These activities are the first steps in what IOM expects to become an Iraq-wide initiative to provide skills, tools, and materials to the people of Iraq to enable them to create economic opportunity for themselves and their families and to begin to rebuild their communities, their society, and their country.

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