

## **Wasta Mars Mosul "Jobs Scheme"**

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Connections not qualifications were the key to getting work under a CPA-sponsored employment programme.

Muhammed Adil had what some would consider to be a dream job.

The 24-year-old law school graduate popped into his office at a local electricity company twice a week, staying just long enough to sign an attendance form.

Adil did no work, because there wasn't any to do. His company didn't even have a legal department.

The Mosul resident is one of many in this northern Iraqi city who got their jobs courtesy of wasta, an Arabic word meaning influence or connections.

It is a common phenomenon in Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, and in Adil's case that connection was a friend's associate.

"It is nice to get a monthly salary without any work, even if it is a small amount," said Adil. "Although I usually felt bad every time I went to work, because this is not my specialty ... this is how life is."

Adil's job came courtesy of Mosul's labour agency, an employment office that administered a Coalition Provisional Authority-sponsored programme to give 40,000 residents six-month government jobs on a salary of 60 US dollars a month.

The programme was set up in early 2004 by the CPA to help reduce unemployment in Mosul, which has been a volatile area.

But many who got jobs under this programme - which recently ended - said they obtained their employment through wasta, not their skills and qualifications.

Ali Ali, 28, who has a diploma in machinery, is employed as a teacher in the Technical Institute, a position that fell under the labour agency jobs programme. He admits that he got the post through a friend, who is a university lecturer.

"Wasta is important in our daily life," he said. "My friend helped me because he knew the difficult situation I was going through. Without him, I could not get a job."

A labour agency official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, admitted wasta was involved in some of the employment contracts, but said that most jobs went to "poor people who were in need of work".

"These contracts were a good initiative by the CPA to decrease unemployment," said the official. "Besides, wasta is available all over the world."

Nofal Adil, who has an electronics diploma, found that his lack of connections worked against him when applying for a job under the CPA's employment programme. He said that he and a friend applied three times but "we were not accepted because we didn't have any wasta".

Waid Ibraheem, who has a doctorate in sociology, agrees that those who don't have the right connections find life to be difficult. He got his job in the media department of the Ninewa Governorate, a labour agency position, through an acquaintance.

"Wasta is the most important thing," he said. "It makes everything possible."

A former member of the provincial council, Amina Mahmoud, agreed wasta played an "obvious and tangible role in giving out the employment contracts".

"Even some members of the governorate council used wasta for some people," said Mahmoud, who resigned after receiving threats from insurgents.

"But there were no detailed reports about this phenomenon by the administrative corruption office. That's why we couldn't take any action."

Hisham Muhammed is an IWPR trainee in Mosul.

**Location:** Middle East  
Palestine  
Israel  
Syria

**Focus:** Iraq

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