

From Displacement to Resilience: Aid, Economic Recovery, and Social Cohesion in Post-War Iraq

Part I: Baseline Findings – Impact Evaluation of Individual Livelihoods Assistance

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Research team introduction



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With particular thanks to **Mathilde Roze** + all others who made this study possible, particularly **IOM Iraq Livelihoods Technical Team + TRD Operations units.**



Background and approach

Individual Livelihoods Assistance

- Focus on microenterprise component – Business Development Grants worth 2,000 USD to start or develop a business.
- Multi-stage screening process to assess vulnerability and capacity to run a business: i) expression of interest filled by applicants and referrals, ii) in-person household profiling visit.
- **Research questions:**
 1. What is the direct impact of individual livelihoods assistance on economic wellbeing and social cohesion among beneficiaries?
 2. What is the indirect economic and social impact on other community members who are exposed to the programme through social (friends) and economic (competitors) networks?

The study addresses four shared policy priorities:

Economic recovery

‘Kick-starting’ the local economy by creating sustainable jobs, stimulating income and expenditure

Durable solutions

Promoting the (re)integration of IDPs and returnees by supporting access to livelihoods and an adequate standard of living

Community Impact

Social inclusion

Creating a more inclusive socio-economic environment for women, youth, IDPs and other marginalized groups

Community stabilization

Addressing grievances, competition over resources and lack of opportunities; promoting contact, trust, interdependence, and community engagement

Research Design

The research design is intended to **capture broader effects** of the livelihoods program on the community – beyond those experienced by beneficiaries themselves.

- Specifically, we will measure *indirect effects*, or *spillovers*, on individuals exposed to the program through interpersonal relationships.
 - Social network connections of applicants ("friends"),
 - Professional network connections of applicants (people with similar livelihood, or competitors).
- Known as "referral sampling"; results today (mostly) pool these groups.

Baseline findings describe the situation before grant distribution among people eligible for ILA and their community members



- Data collection in May - October 2024 in eighteen communities targeted by IOM for individual livelihoods assistance (ILA)
- Our sample focuses on three groups exposed to the programme (n = 6,159):
 - Eligible (screened) applicants (n = 2,132)
 - Members of their social and economic networks – friends and ‘competitors’ (n = 2,981)
 - Random sample of community members (n = 1,046)
- Findings indicative of situation in ILA-selected communities, but not their broader towns/cities/district/governorate.

Agenda for today

Present results of the baseline survey:

- Characterize economic and social conditions in study sites.
- Is social cohesion related to economic well-being?
- Takeaways + thoughts for future consideration

There is time for questions at end, but happy to take short, pressing clarification questions along the way (please unmute & ask -- can't monitor chat).

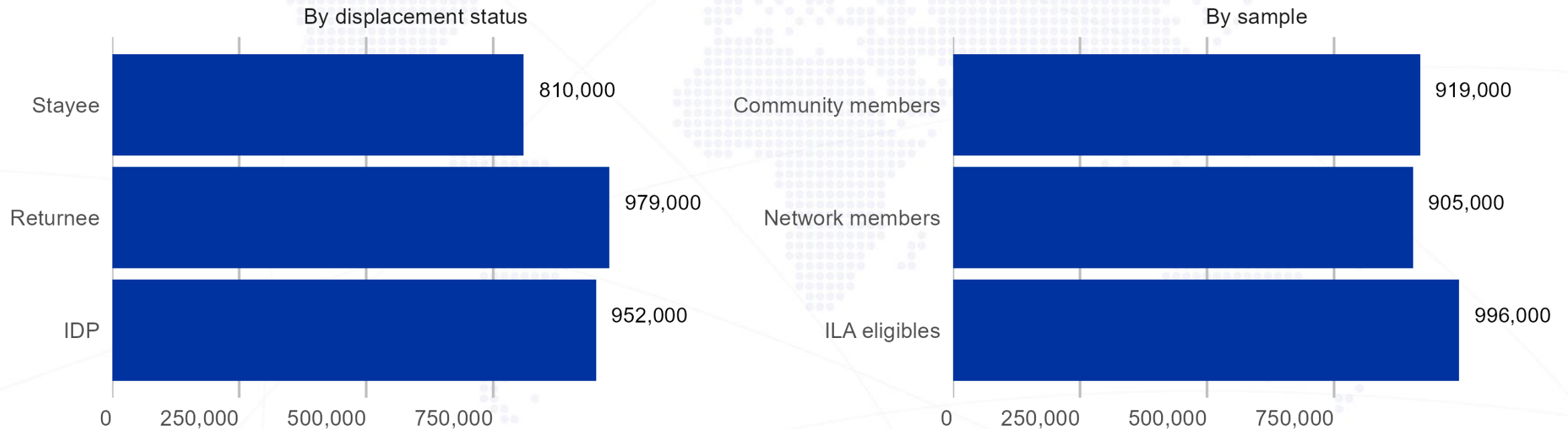


Economic outcomes Perceptions of security Housing, land and property issues

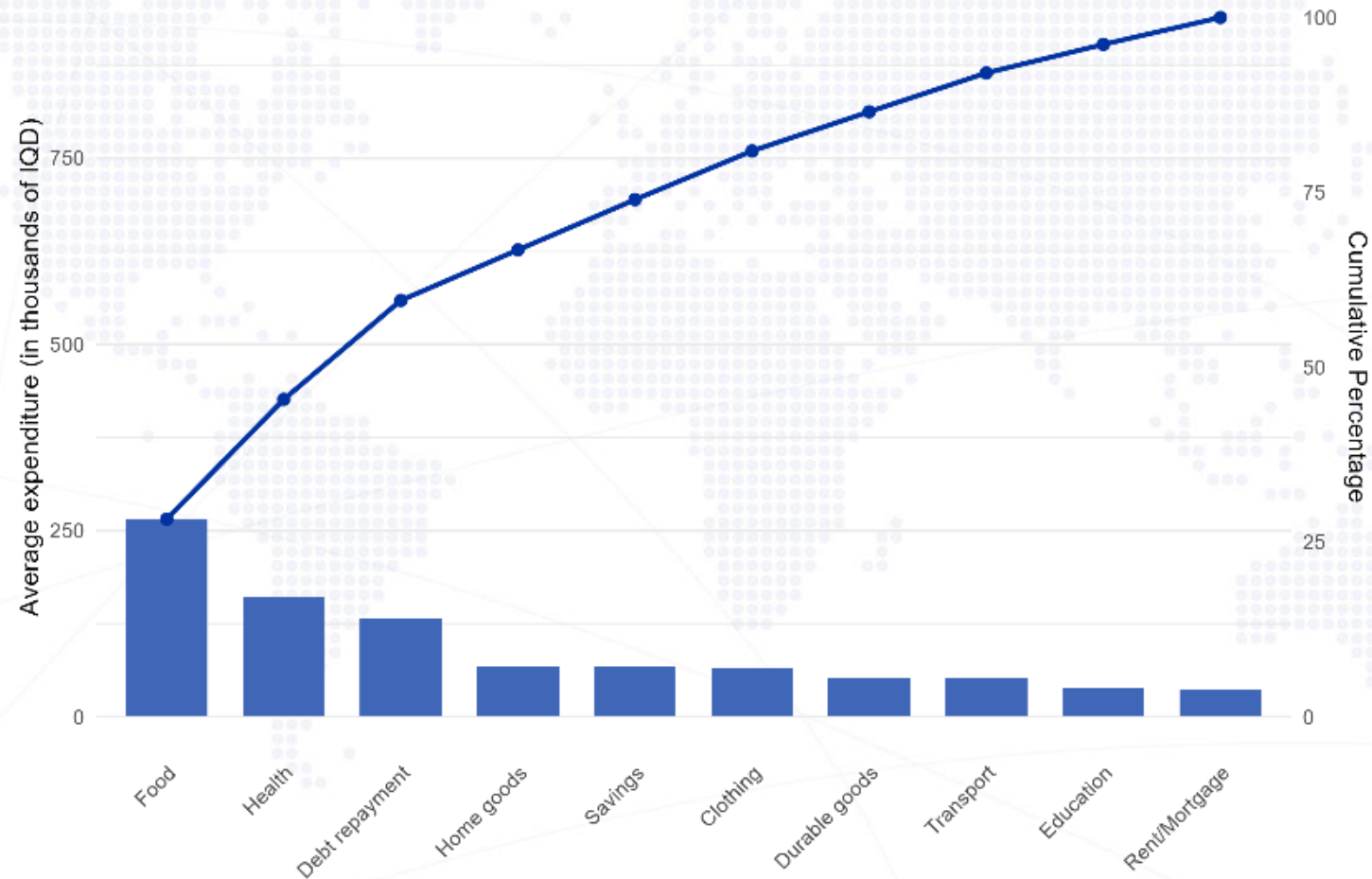
58.9% of respondents live below the national poverty line, compared with 17.5% of Iraqis (IHSES 2024)

- Economic well-being is low by international standards and all groups face deprivation & vulnerability

Mean monthly household expenditure by displacement history and sample group

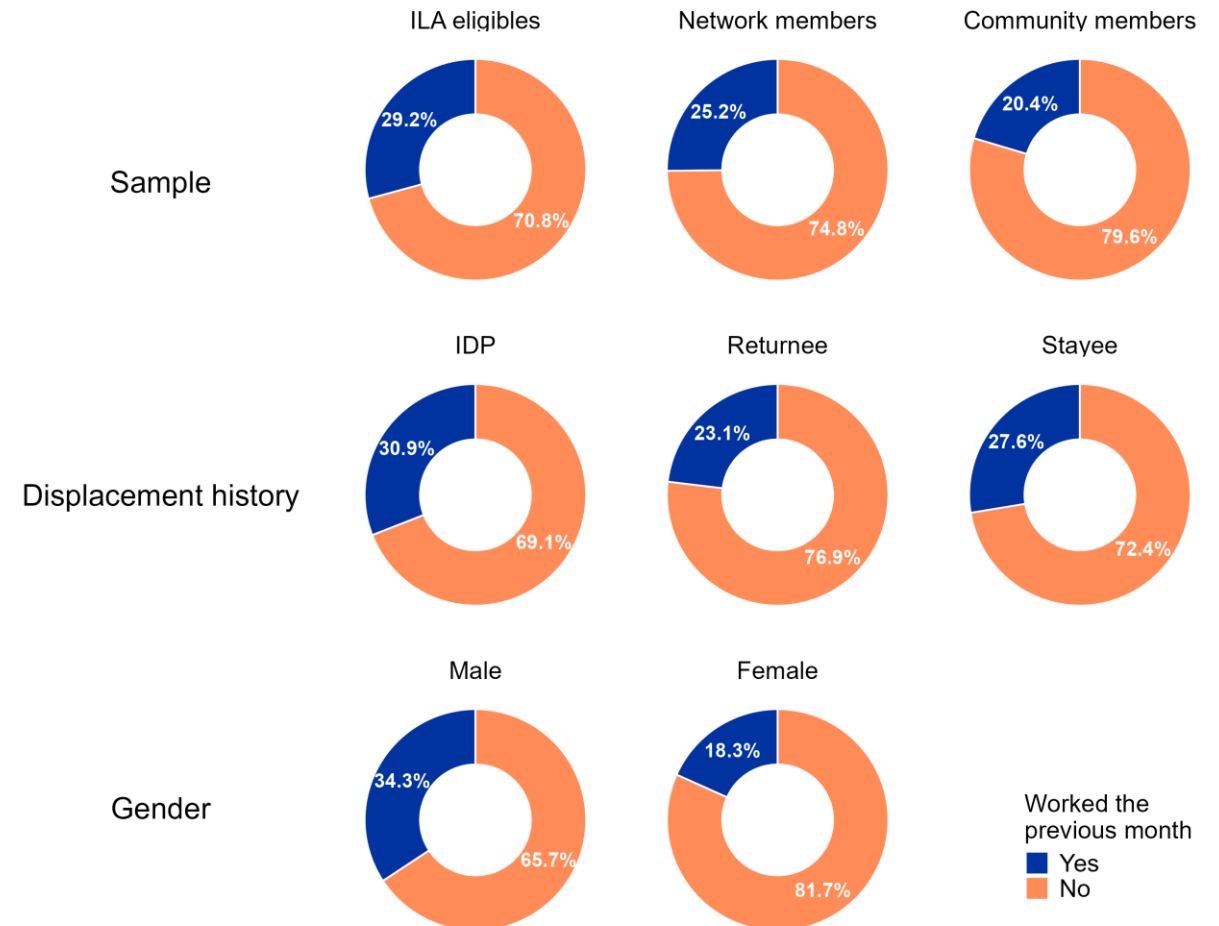


Food, health and debt repayments account for over half of average expenditure



Only 18.3% of female and 34.3% of male respondents worked in any capacity during the month before the survey

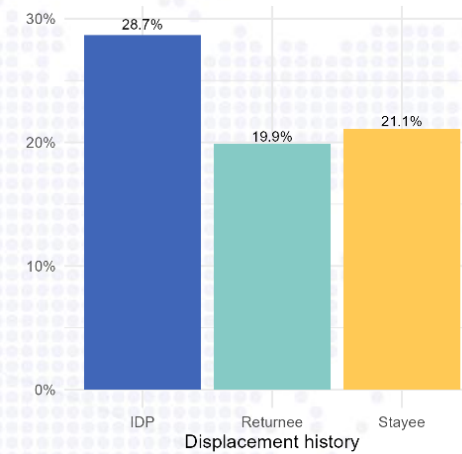
- Among those actively looking for work, the unemployment rate is 44.7% compared with 13.5% at national level
- Type of employment:
 - 58.8% daily / casual laborers
 - 22.8% business owners
 - 19.1% in regular employment
 - 4.1% work for family members
- Adult women are twice as likely as adult men to have received no formal education (24.6% vs 11.6%)



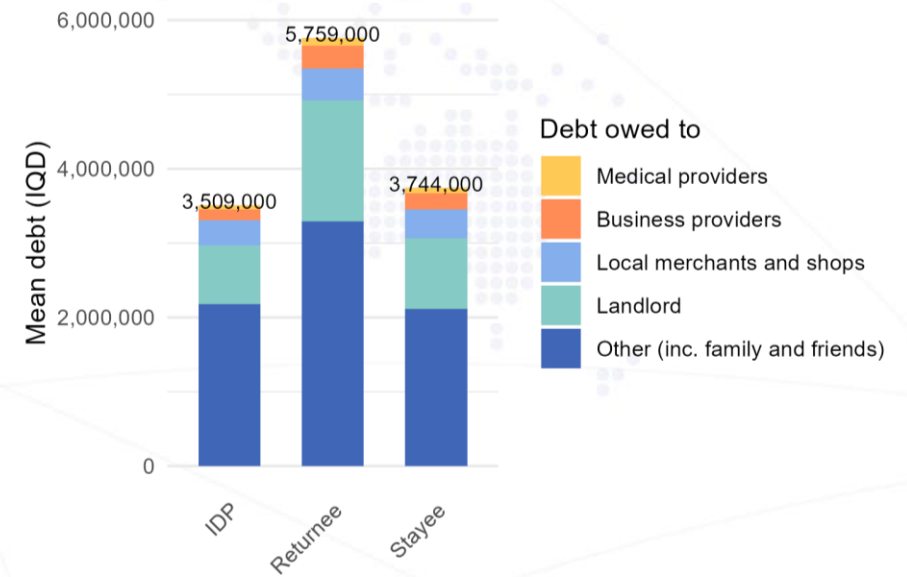
Savings and debt

- 69.5% of households report having no savings.
- 28.7% of IDP households are in debt, which is mostly owed to family and friends and to landlords.
- Indebted households owe on average 4.716 million IQD (3,600 USD), 5x the average household's monthly expenditure.

Percentage of indebted households by displacement history



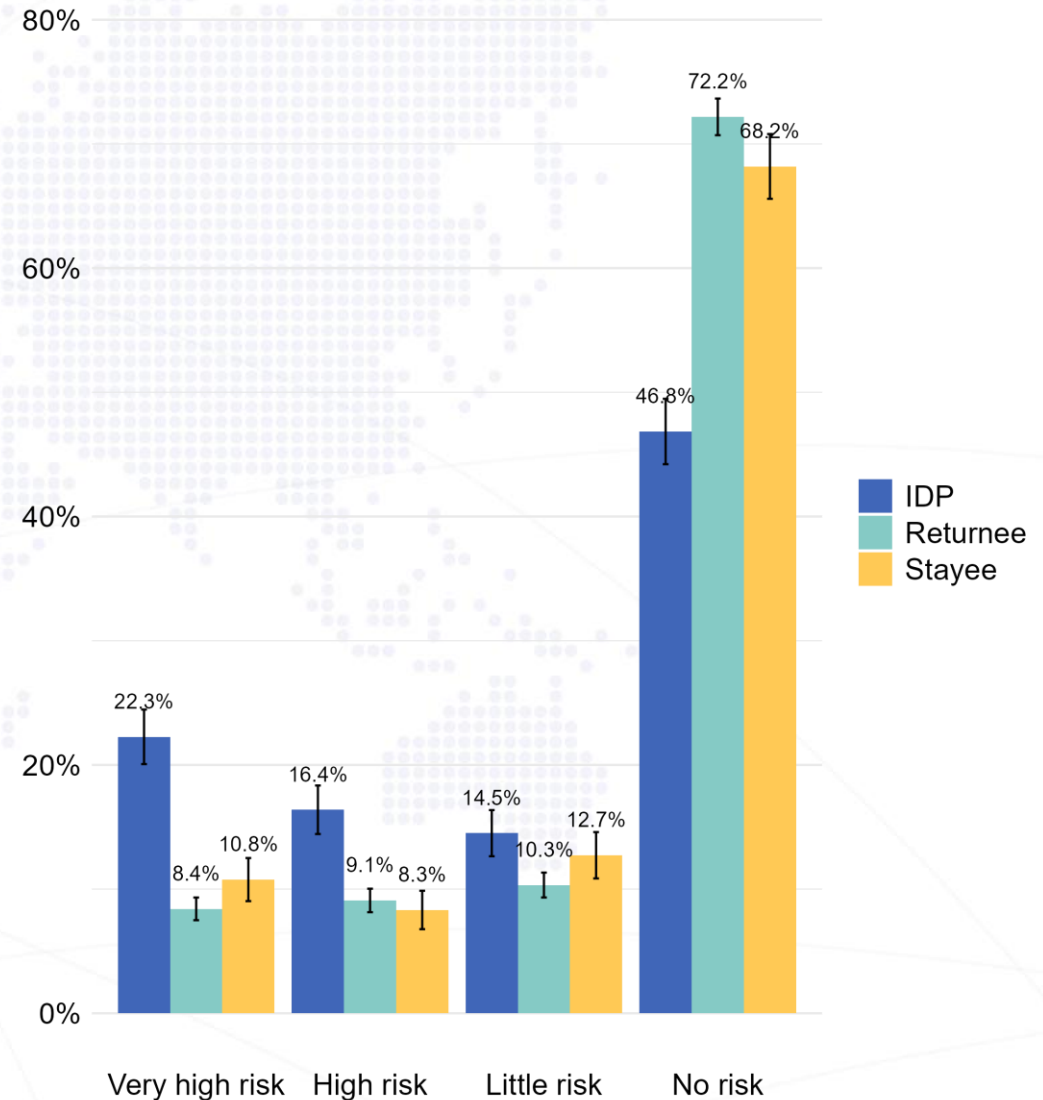
Mean debt among indebted households by displacement history and creditor



Shelter and housing remain a challenge, particularly for IDPs

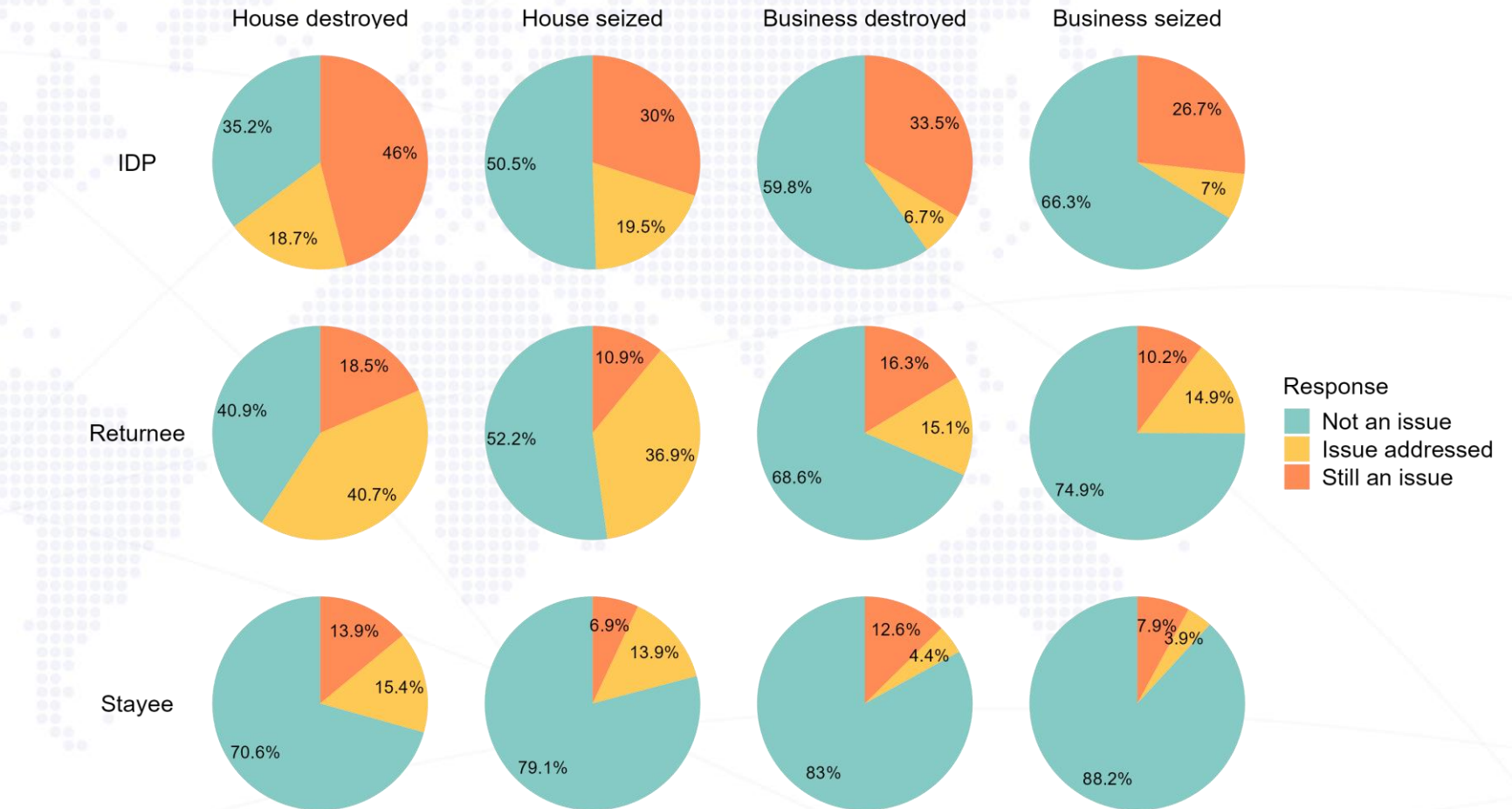
- 28.0% of all respondents and 45.3% of IDPs live in a residential building in poor condition.
- 34.3% of respondents and 53.2% of IDPs are at risk of eviction.

Households' risk of eviction by displacement history



54% of IDPs and 27% of returnees in the sample face unresolved housing, land, and property issues

- Substantial progress in HLP insecurity, particularly amongst returnees
- IDPs still face high HLP insecurity



Few report immediate security threats, but minorities remain disproportionately concerned about security

- Almost all respondents feel safe walking alone in their village or neighborhood (96.8%).
- 13.2% reported moderate to severe concern about mistreatment by armed groups. Much higher levels of concern, close to 30%, among religious minorities.
- 15.6% are concerned about property-related crime.
- Slightly higher perceptions of insecurity among women and returnees.

Insights

- Displacement-affected communities targeted for ILA in Iraq experience high levels of poverty and unemployment, by both national and international standards.
- While IDPs and returnees tend to be worse off in specific dimensions such as housing (for IDPs), debt and employment (for returnees), members of the host community living in the same villages / neighbourhoods also experience high levels of deprivation.
- Differences in economic wellbeing between eligible ILA applicants, members of their social networks, and other neighboring households are modest because of widespread vulnerability among the local population.
- At the time of the study, most respondents were no longer concerned about threats to their personal safety, but the data reveals widespread tenure and housing insecurity across the study communities.

A photograph of two women in a kitchen setting, both wearing hijabs and laughing heartily. The woman on the left is wearing a black hijab and a black long-sleeved shirt with a red stripe on the sleeve. The woman on the right is wearing a light-colored hijab and a brown coat. They are standing in front of a white tiled wall and a stainless steel sink. A window with metal bars is visible in the background.

Social cohesion

We examine seven distinct dimensions of social cohesion

Competition

Grievances

Contact

Interdependence

Inclusive
attitudes

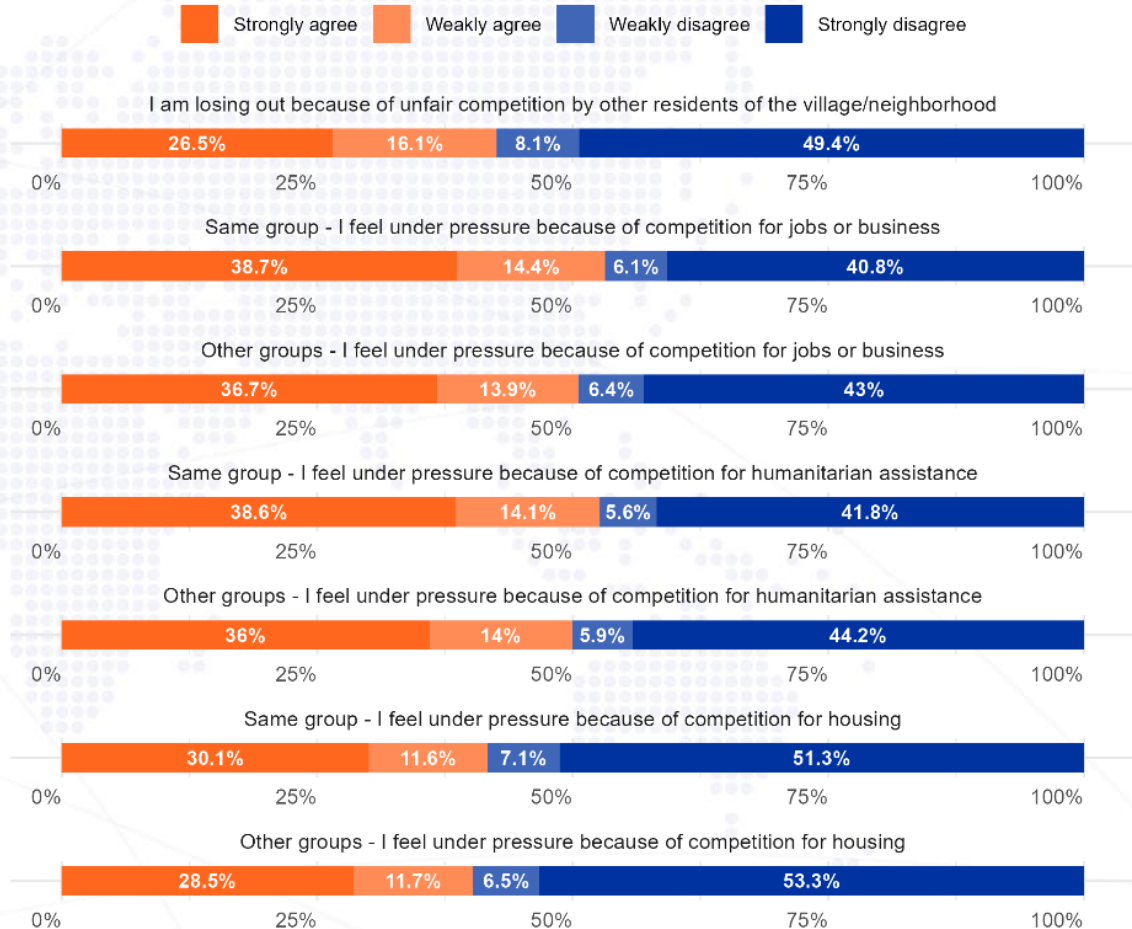
Trust

Community
engagement

Measures taken from validated survey modules, adapted, tested, and piloted for context

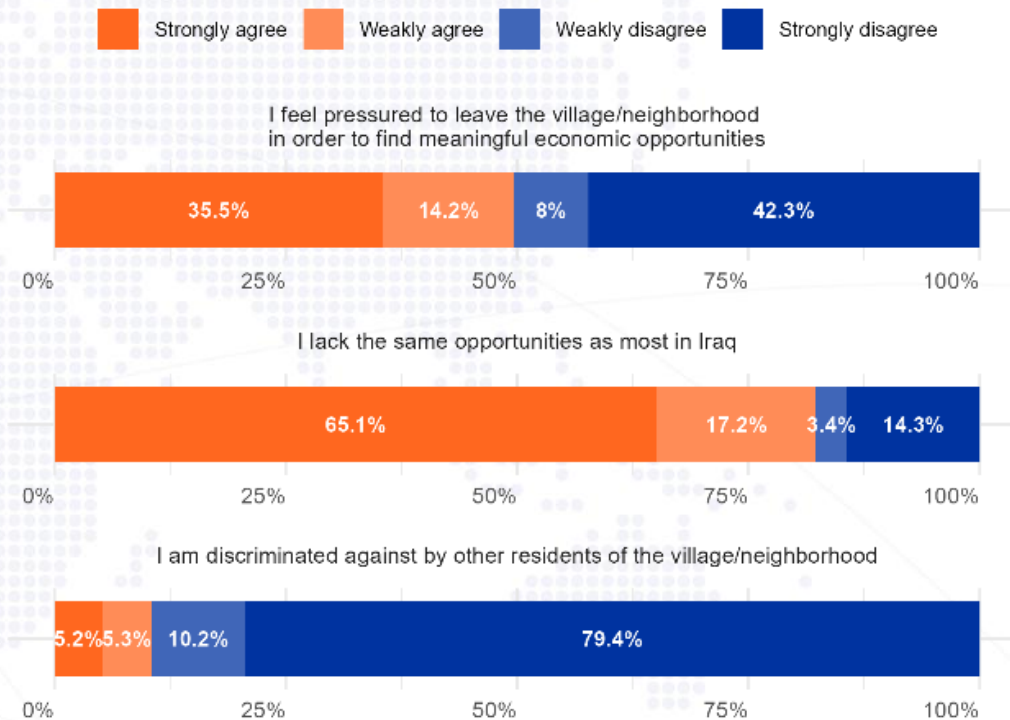
Over half of respondents feel under pressure because of competition for jobs, aid and housing

- 42.6% feel they are losing out because of unfair competition by other residents
- Similar feelings of competition among IDPs, returnees and stayers
- Little differences in perceived competition by people with the same vs other displacement group
- Men perceive higher levels of competition by 5-10 p.p.

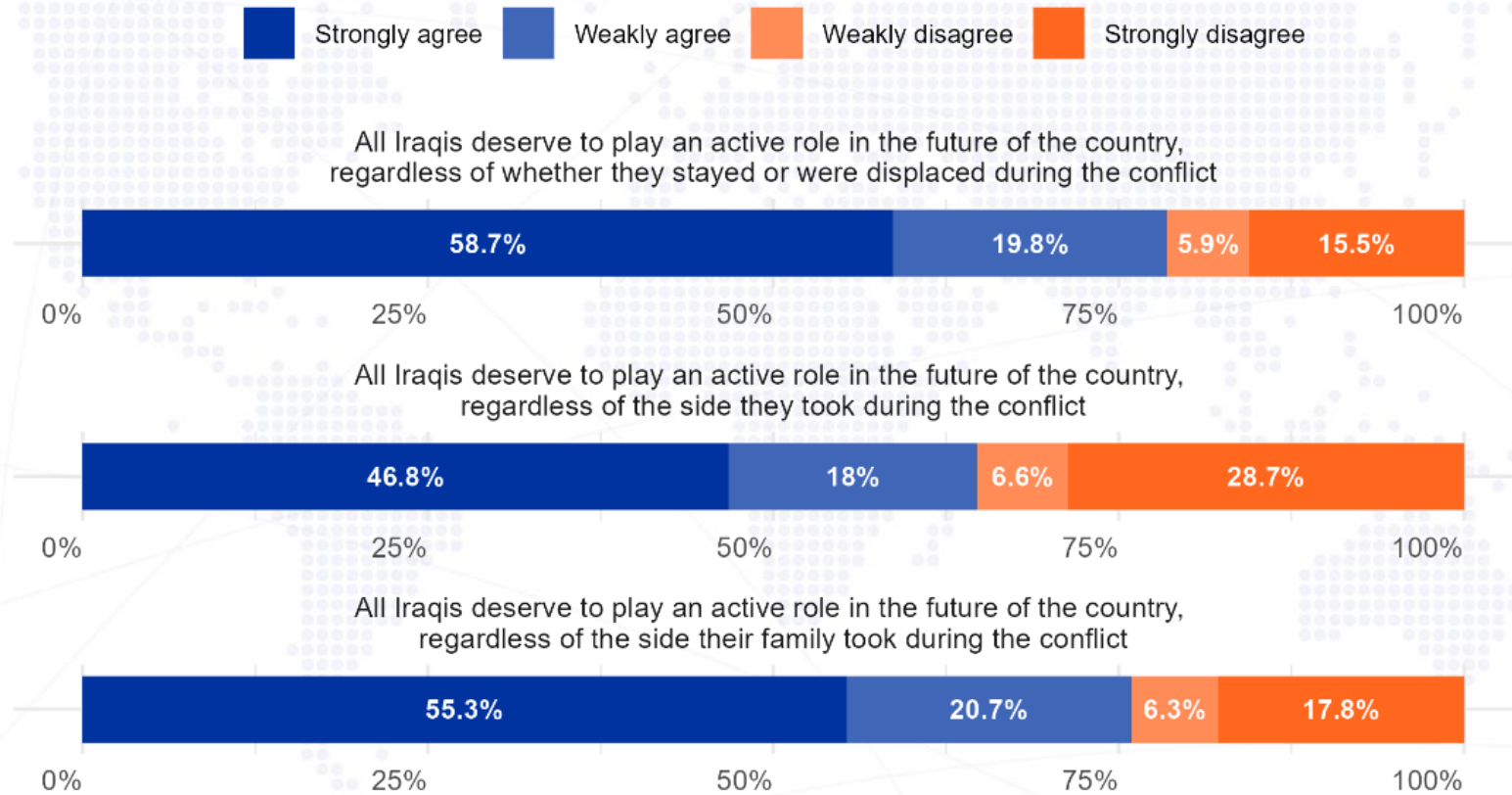


Grievances around economic exclusion and lack of opportunity are the most salient

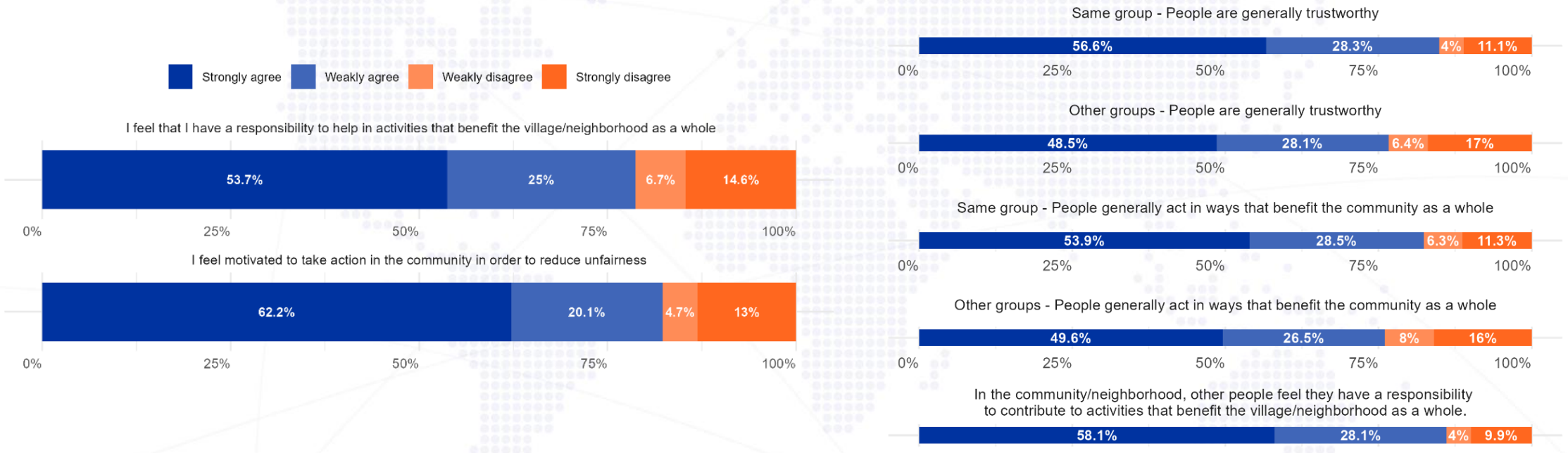
- High share feel pressure to consider economic migration and unequal opportunities; few report discrimination
- Men tend to report higher economic grievances and pressure to migrate due to lack of opportunities
- IDPs are most likely to report economic pressure to migrate, but report similar levels of discrimination as other groups



Most respondents expressed a desire for inclusion and reconciliation regardless of others' perceived affiliation



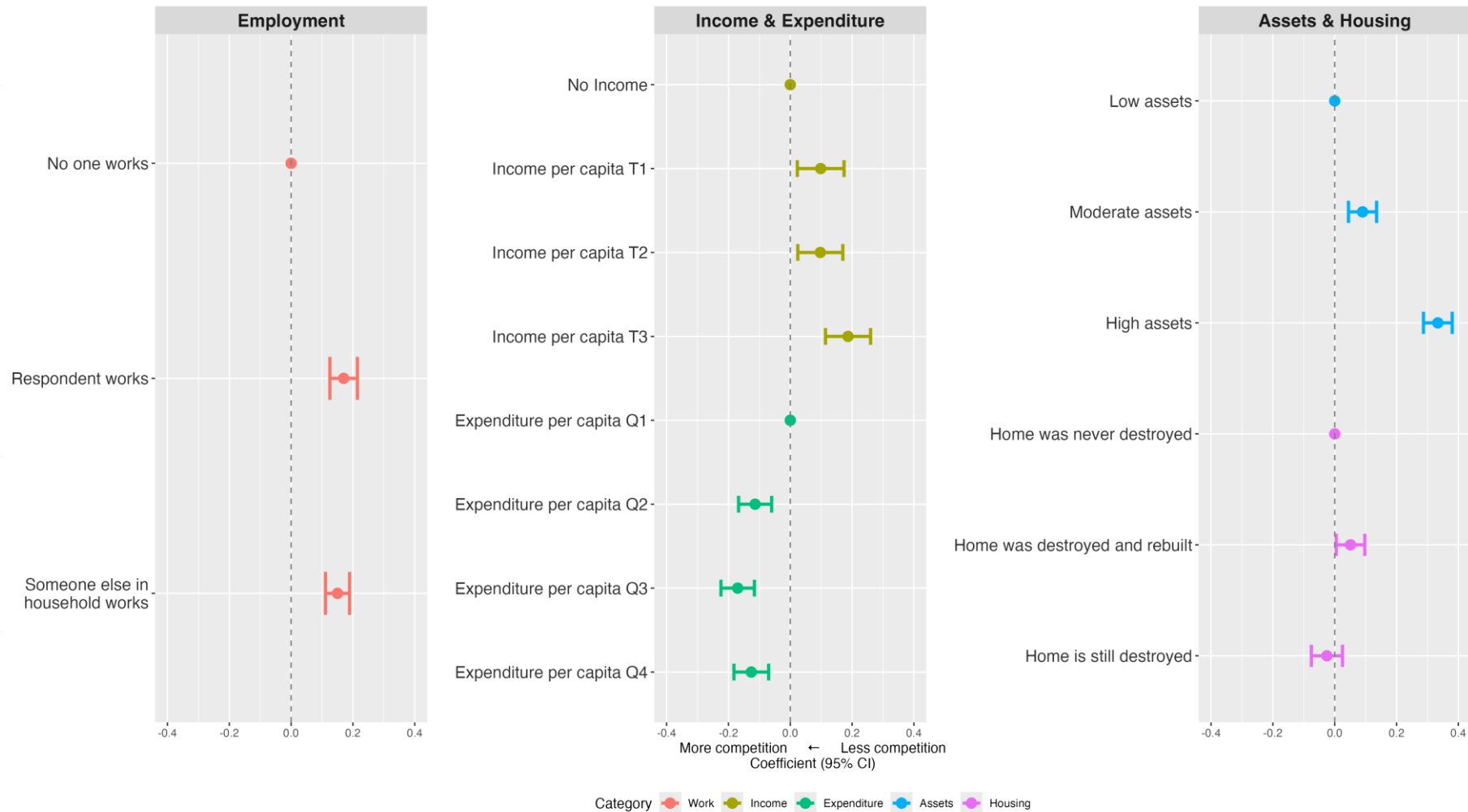
Levels of trust and community engagement are relatively high



Regression analysis: what correlates with social cohesion?

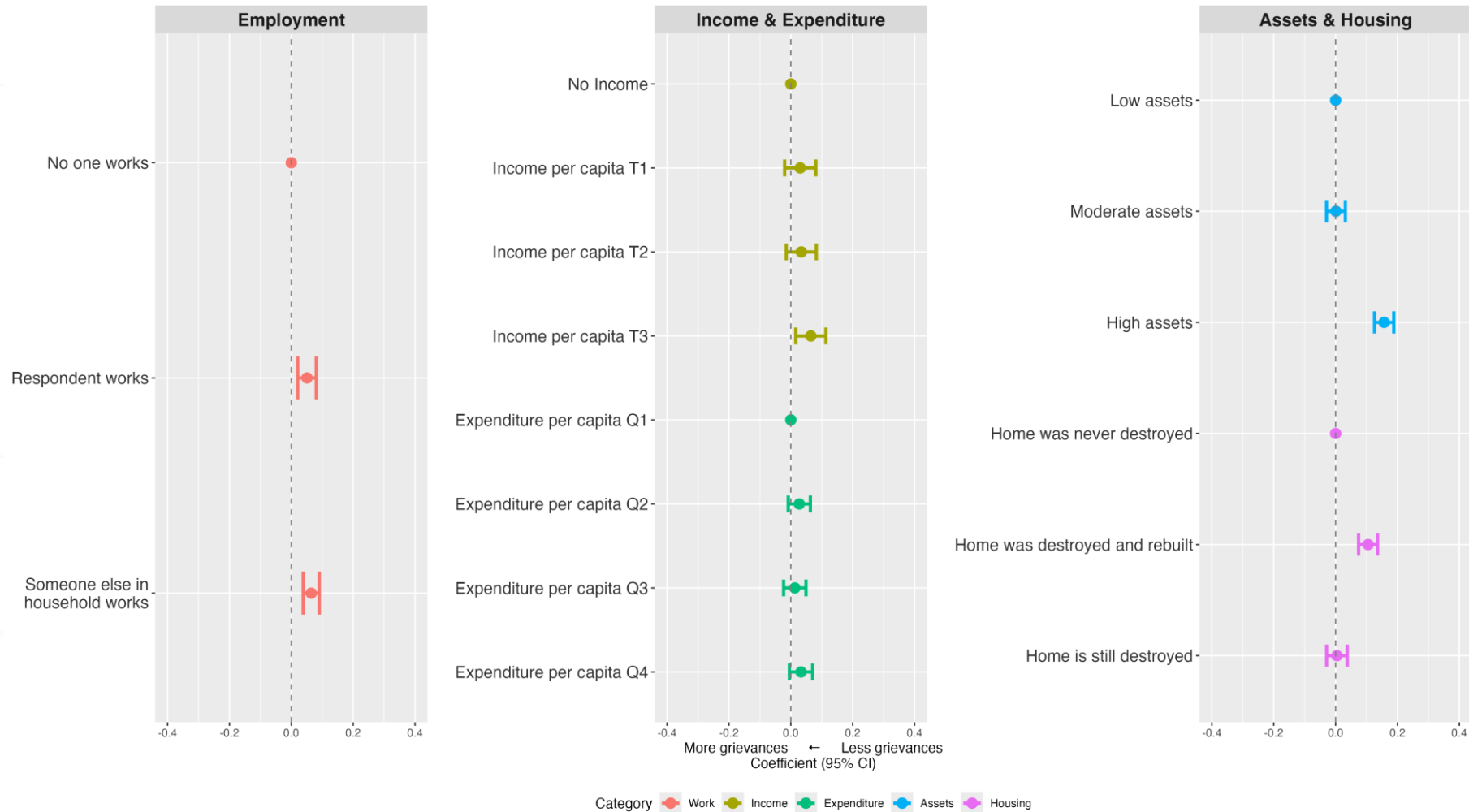
- We run statistical models to estimate the correlation between different measures of economic wellbeing and each dimension of social cohesion
- The models 'control' for demographic factors including age, gender, displacement history, education level, and household size.
- Not a causal relationship -- which is the focus of the next stage of the study

Employment, income and wealth are associated with lower perceptions of competition...

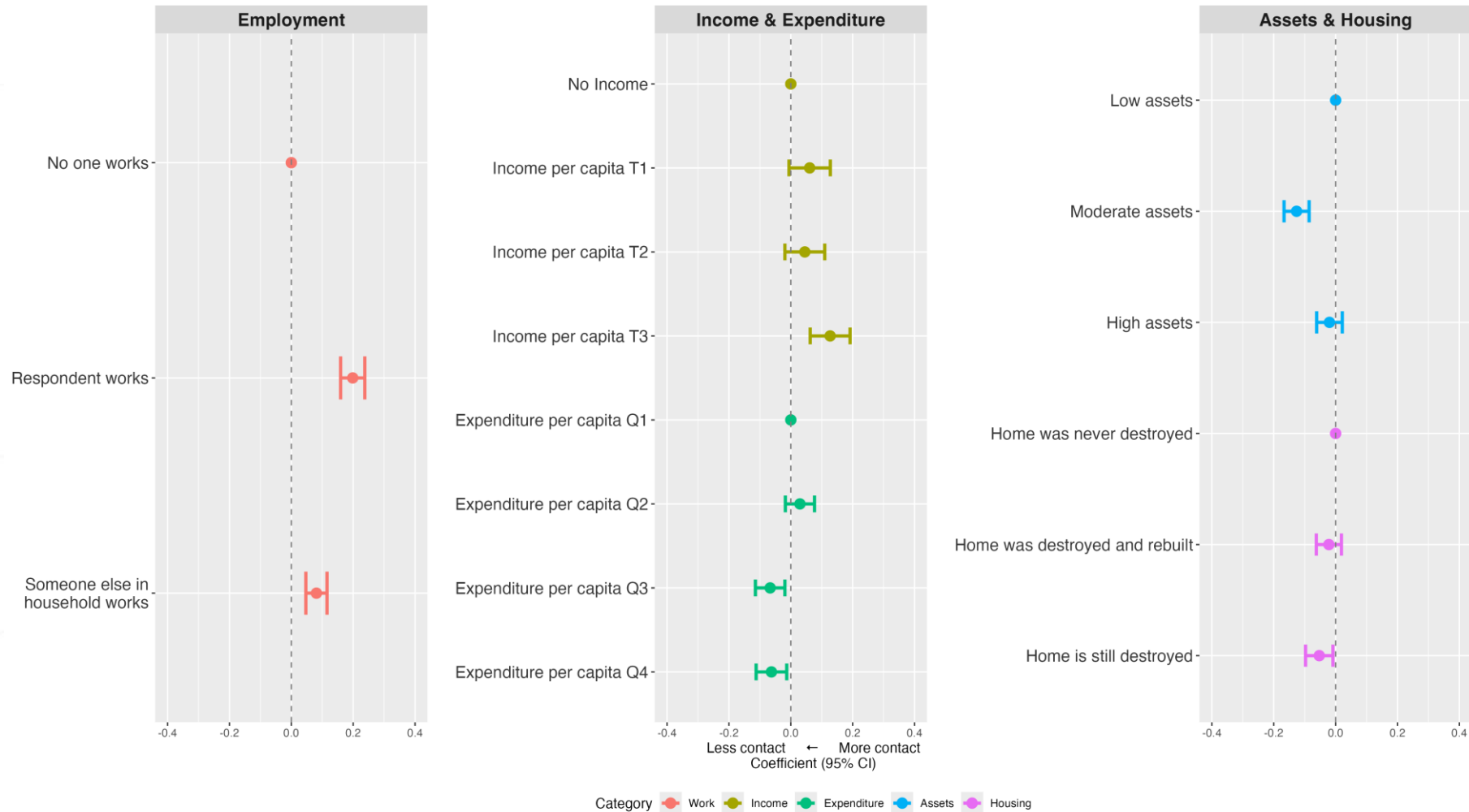


(Note: In all graphs, positive "effect" is an improvement in social cohesion)

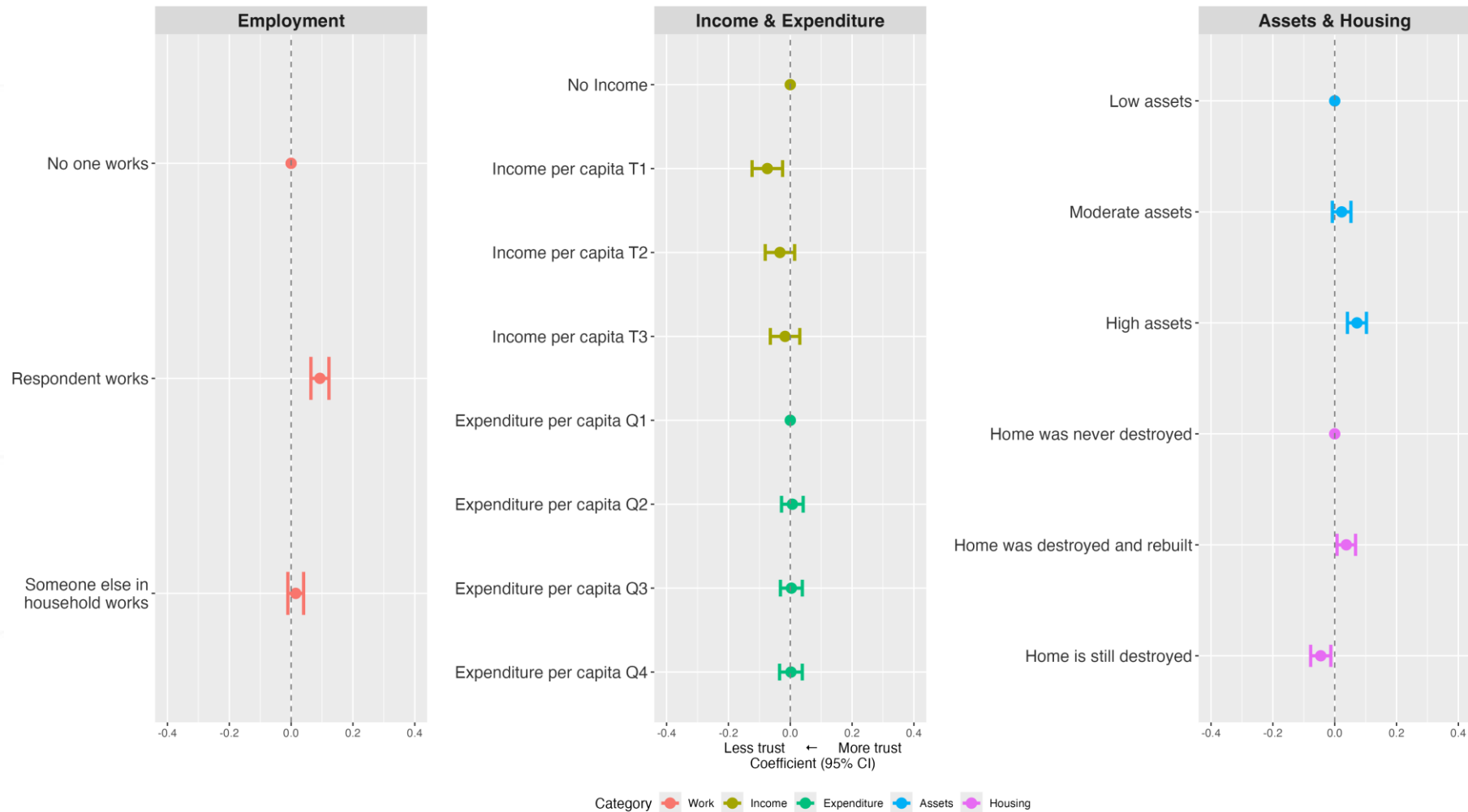
... and lower grievances



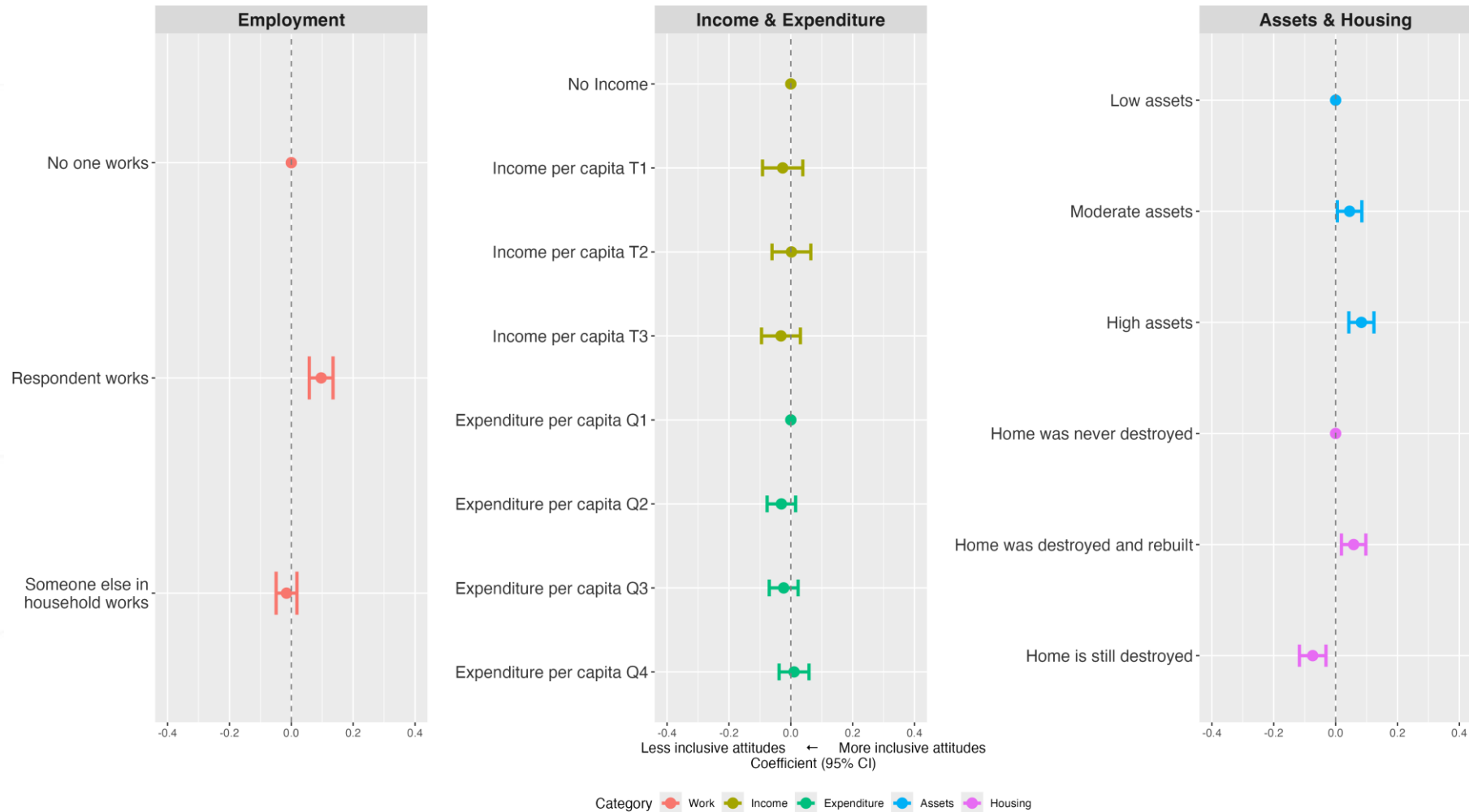
Employment and income are positively associated with social contact



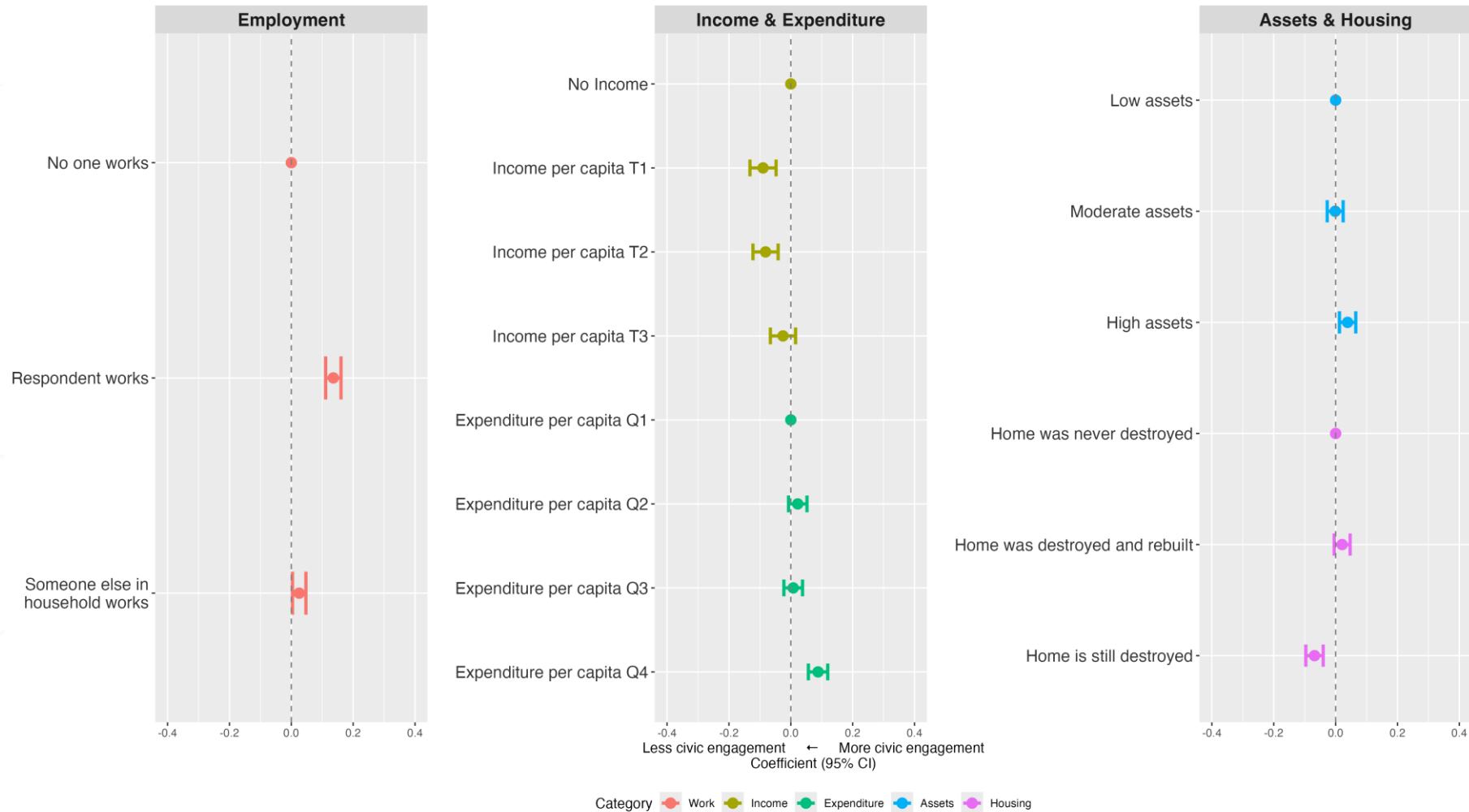
Employment and wealth are associated with higher levels of trust...



...more inclusive attitudes towards other social groups...



... and higher levels of civic engagement



Insights

- Looking at a range of indicators of social cohesion, the most prevalent challenges are perceptions of resource competition and grievances about a lack of economic opportunities.
- Although still important, low levels of interpersonal trust and absence of community engagement are relatively less widespread issues.
- Better economic conditions, in particular access to employment and higher levels of wealth, are robustly correlated with improved social cohesion outcomes.

Recommendations

Baseline data point to complementary programming that could enhance the effectiveness of grants

- i) Interventions aimed at addressing **housing and property rights insecurity**.
- ii) Supporting households with **high debt** balances through financial literacy or digital financial inclusion efforts.
- iii) Addressing limited resilience to shocks by **supporting saving** practices through financial inclusion efforts, commitment-based saving, and community-based savings and loans groups.
- iv) Strengthening opportunities for **female entrepreneurs**.
- v) Monitoring and encouraging **school attendance** of children among recipient households, as well as supporting **job placements or technical/vocational education** programs for youth above the minimum working age and young adults.

Livelihoods programming may affect material grievances and competition over aid and jobs

What enhances the perception of broadly shared benefits to recovery programming?

- i) Need-based targeting at both the geographic and individual level to **mitigate real and perceived inequalities** that may be linked to feelings of competition or material grievances.
- ii) Combining individual-level assistance with **public goods provision** benefiting the entire community.
- iii) Informing a balance of individual and community-level aid through **consultation** with affected communities.
- iv) Incorporating **community-engagement mechanisms** to monitor and respond to possible tensions.



Questions

Please answer our prediction survey – your answers will contribute to the research study!

Please answer our prediction survey! We use this to measure existing expectations about the effects we investigate across sectors.

To access:

QR code →

or link: tinyurl.com/iraqgrantefx



Next steps? Study timeline going forward

- May – July 2025: Midline survey collection
- Q3/Q4 2025: Data analysis and draft study results
- Q1 2026+: Study findings dissemination

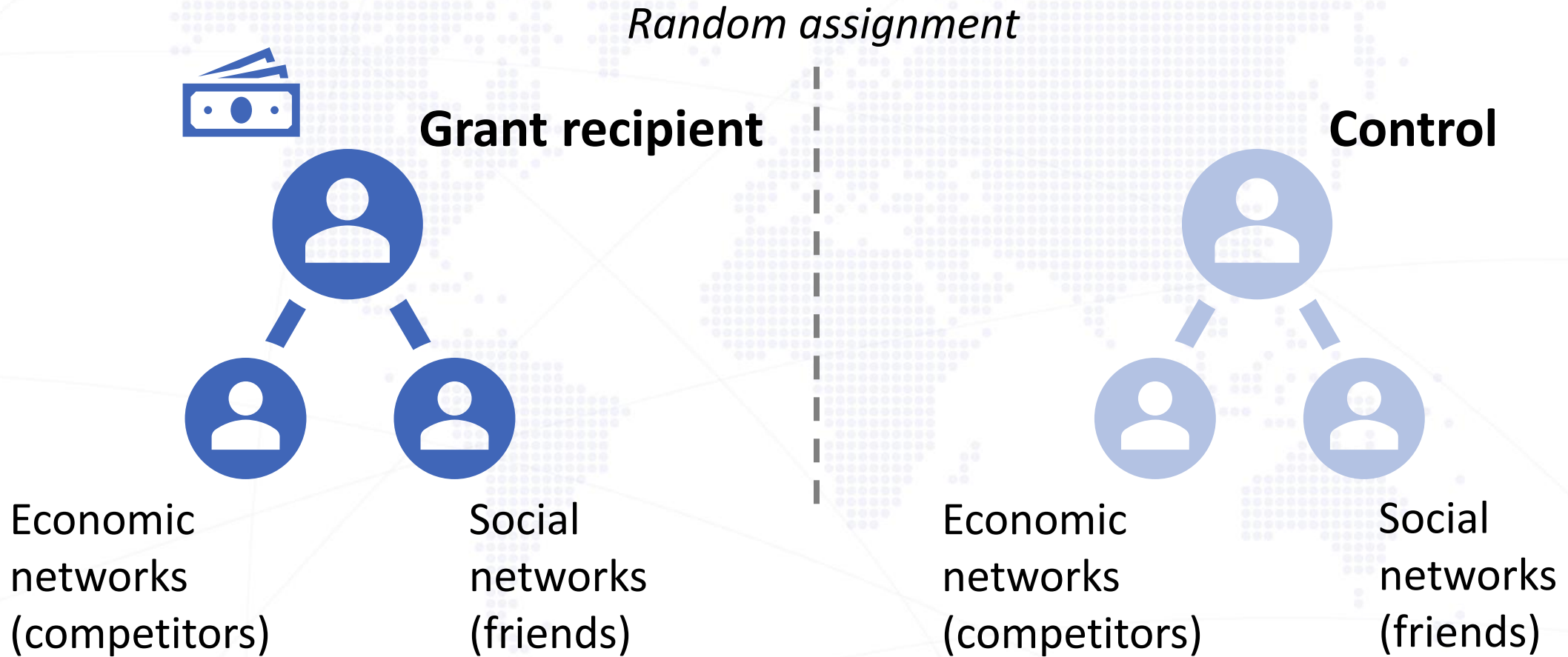
The image features a dark blue background with a subtle, light blue grid of thin lines. Overlaid on this is a world map created from numerous small, white, semi-transparent dots. The dots are arranged to form the outlines of the continents, with a higher density of dots in the landmasses. The text "Thank you!" is centered in a white, sans-serif font, positioned over the central part of the map.

Thank you!

Annex

The background of the slide features a world map created from a dense collection of small, light blue dots. The map is centered and covers most of the frame. Overlaid on this map are several thin, light gray lines that curve across the image, creating a sense of movement or a network. The word "Annex" is written in a dark blue, sans-serif font on the left side of the slide.

The next stage involves a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to evaluate the direct and indirect impact of business grants



Ethics: because the programme is oversubscribed, many rejected applicants are similar to beneficiaries

- 74% of rejected applicants, or 1,399 individuals, report lower expenditure than the highest spending 20% of approved applicants.
- 33% of rejected applicants, or 818 individuals, have a higher composite score than the lowest scoring 10% of approved applicants.

