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Versus
Reality



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YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICES ON EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT:

KEY FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF YOUTH IN JORDAN

Policy Brief

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INTRODUCTION

With the prospect of returns to Syria appearing remote, significant numbers of Syrian refugees will likely remain in Jordan for the foreseeable future. As durable solutions are currently out of reach for most refugees, it becomes vital to support pathways towards solutions so that displaced people are able to take a voluntary and informed decision once solutions become available to them. Enabling Syrian refugee, vulnerable Jordanian, and refugee youth of other nationalities to live full and productive lives, through investments in and the building of linkages between education and livelihoods will not only allow them to fulfill their potential and achieve self-reliance – the latter being a prerequisite for enabling pathways towards solutions – but it also promises wider benefits to Jordan’s economy and society. There is a continuous need to identify the available options to support access to quality education and livelihoods services over the medium-term.

This **policy brief highlights youth’s voices of their experience and aspirations on education and livelihoods pathways in Jordan** and is part of a larger research project by the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP), Jordan River Foundation (JRF), and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) entitled “Aspirations Versus Reality” (AVR), which aims to assess youth’ pathways towards empowerment and self-reliance in Jordan. The overarching objective of this research is to explore displacement-affected young people’s aspirations for their current and future education and livelihoods options, and the reality of the choices they are faced with in Jordan today. The AVR research project aligns with the Global Compact on Refugees’ (GCR) Program of Action to meet the needs and support communities in education and livelihoods, with the focus on supporting the empowerment of refugee and host community youth.¹

Methodology Note

The project adopted a participatory and multi-stakeholder approach, involving key stakeholders including policymakers, practitioners and youth representatives across all stages of the research. The results in this brief are drawn from the findings of a mixed-method survey with a national level sample of Jordanian youth, Syrian refugee youth and refugee youth of other nationalities between the ages of 15 and 24 years. A Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling was used, where the main variables of gender, age and governorate reflect the original population of each group (for representative samples only). The data collection was implemented through phone calls with survey participants between the months of August and November of 2021.

Figure 1: Sample number of population groups targeted in the survey

Population group	Number	Type of sample
Jordanian youth	384	Representative
Out-of-camp Syrian Refugee youth	384	Representative
In-camp Syrian refugee youth	54	Indicative
Non-Syrian refugee youth	63	Indicative

1 United Nations (2018). Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Part II Global compact on refugees, UN Doc. A/73/12 (Part II), New York: United Nations.

KEY FINDINGS

Economic and financial factors are central considerations for young people pursuing education options

Youth respondents' primary motivation to pursue education² was linked to the perception of being able to access better income generation opportunities in the future. The top three benefits of pursuing education, as stated by youth across all nationalities, was to increase job work prospects (62%), to gain professional qualifications (46%), and to learn new skills and knowledge (30%). Non-Jordanian youth's respondents were more likely to value basic educational benefits, as one out of four non-Jordanians (24%) acknowledged the benefit of education as learning how to read and write. Qualitative responses showed that searching for income generation activities also acts as a motivation to continue pursuing education, as stated by a 19-year-old Jordanian woman:

"I would like to have a job along with my education to be able to support myself in pursuing my education because my financial situation needs support".

The lack of financial means creates a burden for pursuing education³ pathways for many youth regardless of their nationality, and acts as key reason for youth to withdraw from pursuing education pathways. Almost half of the survey respondents (45%) attribute the bad financial situation they have as a challenge for them pursuing these pathways. The need to earn an income also presented a financial challenge for pursuing education options for few Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth of other nationalities (16%), while this presented a bigger challenge for Syrian refugee youth, both out-of-camp and in-camp (20%). Moreover, **financial challenges were cited as a major factor for young people to leave school.** Financial difficulties were identified as the top reason for youth to leave school (56%). Household dynamics was also placed as another major reason, as 36% stated that the need to support the family financially leads youth to leave school, with out-of-camps Syrians were the most affected by this. Lack of motivation to continue studies was another commonly cited reason (31%).

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted access to and quality of education across youth of different nationalities. The pandemic created restrictive measures for accessing education, especially for vulnerable groups in Jordan. One third of youth (31%) from different nationalities agreed that Covid-19 has negatively affected access to education. When asked about reasons of negative impact on access to education, youth mentioned a number of reasons, including lack of equipment, bad internet quality or unavailability of internet in their area.

² Education here refers to secondary, tertiary education and TVET as asked to youth for this question in the survey.

³ Education here refers to secondary, tertiary education and TVET as asked to youth for this question in the survey.

More than half of youth, (64%) believed that COVID-19 negatively impacted the quality of education where the highest percentage was among Jordanian youth (72%), compared to out-of-camp Syrians (59%). Youth mentioned the lack of supervision from teachers, weakness in communicating information and the inability of parents to help students in remote learning. A Jordanian male youth described these reasons for this by saying:

“Disinterest [by youth] in exams and cheating, in addition to lack of supervision. Students do not understand the education they get”.

Educational pathway selection is driven by family and personal preferences, with limited career guidance⁴.

A number of external factors influence youth's selection of educational pathways, including family members. Parents play a strong role in youth's decision making when choosing their education pathways. A total of 59% of respondents stated that they seek advice from their parents with regard to educational pathways and 62% of youth from all nationalities agreed that their parents can have a strong influence on education decisions. The most influential family members were identified as the mother (55%), followed by the father (31%).

Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth who were or are currently enrolled in a university, diploma or TVET⁵ program chose their field of study primarily based on their interest in that field (61%). While the *tawjihi* (higher secondary education) score was a more determining factor for Jordanian youth in selecting their majors (32%), it was less relevant for Syrian refugee youth (10%). Career objectives are a less relevant factor for youth when taking their decision, as only 17% of Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth responded selecting their major because it has good job prospects.

Despite the importance of career counseling in helping to identify future employment and education pathways for young people, very few respondents were aware of such services. While the percentage was higher for Jordanian and refugee youth of other nationalities (17% and 14% respectively), few Syrian refugee youth (3%) know about these career-counseling services. For youth who did know about career counseling services, 80% stated that it is easy to access them, which indicates that the issue with career counseling is less about availability and more related to better outreach and promotion of these services. Across all nationalities, over 70% of respondents who were not aware of career counseling services shared a desire to receive such services.

4 Career guidance here refers to the different services (such as career counseling) and sources that can provide guidance for young people when selecting their education pathways and future careers.

5 Due to the small in-camp Syrian and refugee youth of other nationalities samples, there were very limited number of youth who pursued these education pathways, so they were not included in the findings for reasons of selecting their majors.

Youth values education for entering the labor market, using both new and traditional job seeking methods.

Youth are increasingly using social media and new methods in order to look for jobs. A total of 75% of Jordanian youth and 72% of refugee youth of other nationalities respondents indicated that they use social media and the internet as a key source of information when looking for jobs, with lower proportions among out-of-camp Syrian (50%) and in-camp Syrian youth respondents (56%).

At the same time, traditional job seeking methods continue to play an important role, especially for Jordanian and out-of-camp Syrian youth in urban areas. This includes reaching out to friends and peers, which was higher for Jordanian and out-of-camp Syrian refugee youth, and lower for in-camp Syrian and refugee youth of other nationalities. This was also followed by seeking information from parents and other family members, (18% for all youth), which was the highest for in-camp Syrian refugees (31%), indicating the limited social reach beyond families. Though less prevalent, 7% of respondents stated that they have physically traveled to markets and other nearby locations to search for jobs. Only very few respondents mentioned using structured and organization-based methods, such as educational institutions and employment centers.

Youth perceptions toward factors that help in finding a job indicated clear linkages between education, skills and livelihoods. The majority of survey respondents across all nationalities (86%) considered education as useful to get a job. In addition, more than half of youth from all nationalities attributed finding a job to the education background in a specific sector or major (56%) and to having the necessary skills and practical experience (53%). Social factors were also linked to finding a job. While the right networks and connections were considered as a factor by only 10% of youth, 21% of Jordanians specifically said that *Wasta* (or nepotism) is an important factor, while non-Jordanians barely mentioned having this social factor.

Youth needs are shaping their priorities, with high interests in emerging gig economy

In their search for job opportunities, most youth prioritize salary over decent work conditions. Over 70% of youth respondents stated prioritizing the offered salary, while only 11% of them look at decent work conditions and employers that maintain employees' rights. One-quarter of respondents (23%) does look at job security, with Jordanian youth being the most likely to consider job security (27%), while Syrian refugee youth are the least likely (19%). One-fifth of youth respondents across all nationalities (21%) considered job location (a location close to home) as something they look after.

“I want to find a job near my house with a good salary so I and my mother can live from it” – unemployed Syrian refugee male from Mafraq

More than half of the youth respondents (57%) prefer having a formal, contract-based, salaried working arrangement, indicating that an official agreement that links the employee to the employer in the long term is an important consideration when selecting a job. Jordanian and refugee youth of other nationalities showed a higher preference for this option (69% and 68% respectively), in comparison to out-of-camp Syrians and in-camp Syrian refugee youth (44% and 59% respectively). While the informal sector is widespread across Jordan, very few survey respondents indicated a desire to work in the informal sector (4%).

Jordanian youth, Syrian refugee youth and refugee youth of other nationalities face significant different barriers for entering the labor market. The lack of work experience was mentioned by Jordanian youth at 33% in comparison to non-Jordanian youth, at 17%. This shows that non-Jordanian youth's tendency to be active earlier in the labor market means that they are exposed to more work experience in comparison to Jordanians. However, 39% all youth stated that lack and limited job opportunities creates challenges to them to enter the labor market. At the policy level, only 28% of refugee youth of other nationalities considered restrictive policies that prohibit non-Jordanians to work in specific sectors as challenge to them, while it was less stated by Syrian refugees, both out-of-camp and in-camp (5% and 14% respectively).

More than half of youth respondents showed an interest in being involved in the gig economy and in freelance-based jobs (63%), to varying degrees. The reasons for youth respondents' interest in the gig economy were linked to the associated independence and flexibility, including flexible wages (55%), self-employment and greater decision-making (48%), and flexible working hours and schedules (39%). While more young people were interested in participating in the gig economy as a supplement to their main source of income (41%), very few mentioned their interest to engage in gig economy as their main source of income (13%). Jordanian respondents were more interested to supplement their income through the gig economy (54%), while more out-of-camp Syrian refugee youth were leaning to engage in it as their main source of income (20%). Respondents who were uninterested in this form of work raised concerns related to low or unstable income streams (40%), lack of job security (19%) and negative perceptions by peers or family members toward these types of jobs (12%).

The majority of youth respondents across all nationalities considered training and skills-building as important to obtaining job opportunities (89%). The top two reasons mentioned by respondents were to improve youth employability in their desired job (66%) and diversify their skills to become more employable (68%). However, only 20% of youth were aware of skills-building activities provided by government institutions, and only 29% knew how to find services that are provided by NGOs. Only one-third of youth respondents (32%) believed that educational institutions currently provide enough opportunities to develop practical skills.

For youth who are engaged or finished TVET⁶, university degrees and diplomas, 72% of them considered the major they are attaining as highly in-demand in the labor market, while 28% said that demand for their majors is low. These responses are linked to broader youth aspirations in relation to the labor market. Youth have shown some awareness of the mismatch between education and labor market in their narrative responses. For example, some youth indicated that majors selected by youth do not match with labor market needs, and lead to over-saturation. Another few young people acknowledged the mismatch between education outcomes and labor market requirements, stating that the current education curriculums do not provide youth with the needed skills and qualifications that allow them to enter the labor market. This mismatch was also reflected when 22% of youth stated that they aspire to work within their major or specialty that they have studied in. These mismatches created another layer of barriers that stand in front of youth ability to meet their preferences and interests when engaging in the labor market.

High aspirations, faced by a difficult reality

Displacement appears to play a significant role in the long-term aspirations of youth in Jordan, with refugee youth less likely to have high ambitions or aspirations compared to their Jordanian counterparts. Displacement-related vulnerabilities seem to present a significant barrier for youth to pursue more ambitious plans related to education and employment. The most frequent response to educational aspirations for out-of-camp Syrian refugees was “no aspiration” (37%). Gender also played a role, as few females stated that because they got married, education fell down from their list of priorities.

“[My] aspirations are stopped due to tight situation, if there were money and income then I would think to continue my education”.

Syrian man in Zarqa with primary education

“I am not thinking to continue my education because I have responsibilities at my house with my husband and children”.

24 year-old married Syrian woman with lower secondary education

Moreover, Jordanian and refugee youth of other nationalities were more likely to aspire for a university degree (bachelor) in a specific major, compared to Syrian refugee youth. Jordanians were more likely to aspire to postgraduate education (Masters or PhD) (25%), which was barely mentioned by refugee youth. This finding seems to reflect the financial difficulties that refugees face when they want to pursue higher education pathways, especially with the limited scholarship opportunities available for refugee youth.

Taken together, survey results demonstrate that young people in Jordan, regardless of nationality or residency status, are not very satisfied with where they have reached in their education. Around half of Jordanian youth, (54%) agreed to the statement “my own aspiration of education was met and achieved”,

6 TVET refers to Technical and Vocational Education and Training

while only 27% of out-of-camp Syrian refugee youth agreed to the statement. In-camp Syrian and refugee youth of other nationalities were slightly higher in agreeing at 42% and 47% respectively. The difference between Jordanian and Syrian refugee youth reflect shows the limitations that refugees face to continue further education and their limited aspirations as described above.

Youth of all nationalities in Jordan have high aspirations when it comes to attaining higher education and sustainable livelihoods, but in practice struggle to make their aspirations become reality. Some youth indicated that they have higher aspirations that are not met and matched with what the labor market offers. Other respondents negatively described youth's aspirations as a barrier to adapt to the labor market, indicating unrealistic expectations which prevents them to potentially adapt and be more flexible in terms of taking certain jobs or working in different sectors.

“Youth's aspirations are bigger than the current labor market. Youth think that once they graduate they will start working, but they got surprised that there are no available jobs, either in their majors or other fields”. A 23 years old *Jordanian woman with bachelor degree from Amman*

“Youth aspire imaginary things, such as having a good salary and convenient employment, but these things do not exist in real life”. A 29 years old unemployed *Syrian refugee male from Balqa governorate*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief aimed to draw a picture of youth's perceptions toward education and livelihoods pathways, and to indicate the challenges that prevent the bridging between education and entrance into the labor market. The target age group investigated in this study are either near or in their early stages to enter a challenging, limited and highly competitive labor market, where displacement add another layer of vulnerability that face refugee youth specifically. Better supporting all young people in Jordan, by empowering and enabling them to achieve self-reliance, will create a positive medium- and long-term impact for both host communities and the refugee population, and Jordan as a hosting country.

Recommendations

To the Government of Jordan:

- **The Jordanian Ministry of Education in collaboration with implementing agencies should expand, scale-up, and promote the existing career-counselling services for young people**, with a specific focus on the younger ages that did not enter secondary education yet. Youth from all nationalities

face limited guidance in choosing their education pathways. Career counseling expanding and promoting across age groups and governorates, through coordination with different service providers across ministries and implementers, can support youth in choosing their future education pathways and careers. In addition, involve parents in career counseling to enable them to better support youth in selecting education pathways.

- **The Jordanian Ministry of Labor, together with implementing agencies, private sector and education institutes should ensure that labor market needs are well tracked and used to inform youth's education and employment choices.** Including labor market awareness content in education curriculums and career counseling services, investing in raising awareness activities and engaging private sector in the process would support increasing youth' knowledge in these topics.
- **The Government of Jordan, in collaboration with international donors, should work on easing the requirements to establish businesses for youth,** and expand grants and mentoring opportunities to better promote entrepreneurial initiatives for youth. The experience of Kurdistan Region of Iraq's (KRI) Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs' loan scheme for youth can provide some learning in this effort.⁷
- **The Ministry of Youth should involve youth in the policymaking process,** and enable forums and venues to hear youth' voices in their education and livelihoods challenges and aspiration to better meet youth' preferences.
- **The Department of Statistics should invest in regularly assessing labor market trends and youth attitudes** to inform the policies and programs directions with evidence-based recommendations.
- **The Government of Jordan, in collaboration with implementing agencies and educational institutes, should consistently measure labor market trends and promote majors that have high employability potential for youth,** through relying on recent market assessment and available evidence-based research.
- **The Government of Jordan should support the private sector to create job opportunities.** Incentivizing the private sector and addressing their need within the current economic environment would better motivate private sector actor in supporting youth employability in Jordan. In addition, prioritizing policies that promote job creation, support demand and investment, and reduce regulatory and bureaucratic barriers and costs for Jordanian and non-Jordanian entrepreneurs would enable job creation for young people in Jordan.

⁷ See Durable Solutions Platform and IMPACT Initiatives. 2021. "My hope is to stay here" – Shared Livelihoods Services as a Pathway towards Integration in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Research report. <https://www.dsp-syria.org/my-hope-remain-here>

Donor agencies should:

- **Invest in adaptive interventions and programs that enable youth to become more resilient and adapt to the unprecedented changes in the Jordanian labor market.** COVID-19 pandemic created another layer of economic challenges for youth. Therefore, there is a need to equip with needed skills to tailor their efforts when entering the labor market to enable them in meeting labor market emerging needs and to create alternative and innovative ways in engaging with labor market in Jordan.
- **Increase flexible multi-year planning and funding modalities** to allow implementing actors to develop predictable planning and responses to the emerging needs and challenges of both refugee and host community youth in Jordan.
- **Help foster inclusive economic growth for host communities and refugees,** in support of host countries, to contribute resources and expertise to promote economic opportunities, decent work, job creation and entrepreneurship programs for host community member and refugee youth, in line with GCR's areas in need of support.

Inter-sector and coordination bodies should:

- **Prioritize the assessment of linkages between education and livelihoods pathways and options for youth of all nationalities in Jordan.** Entities such as the 3RP working groups, JIF and other platforms should actively explore the interconnections between education and livelihoods operations and needs in order to support more holistic programming and self-reliance more broadly.
- **Set a broader learning agenda on self-reliance and pathways to solutions, based on adequate mechanisms for data collection and data analysis.** The role of reliable and quality data is essential for designing new programs, adapting interventions, or developing new policies. Coordination bodies should take the lead in bringing together key actors to set a joint vision for how to support youth's self-reliance and pathways to solutions.

Operational agencies, such as United Nations and NGOs, should:

- **Educational institutes should ensure the current education majors and available trainings respond to the changing job markets and emerging sectors and meeting labor market demands.** Ensuring adequate mechanisms for data collection and data analysis of relevant data on labor market will contribute to the broader learning agenda, which is essential for designing new programs, adapting interventions and developing new policies.
- **Address shared challenges between vulnerable host communities and displaced youth, while remaining aware of refugees' distinct vulnerabilities due to their legal status.** The findings from the survey point towards many shared challenges and lived experiences between vulnerable host communities

and refugees, but also to a number of distinct vulnerabilities resulting from refugees' vulnerable position. Programs should be designed in a way that takes into account the shared aspects and the displacement-related differences. For example, Syrian refugees face distinct challenges in their ability to access guidance on selecting their education pathways and future careers, in addition to policies that restrict their access to specific sectors in the Jordanian labor market.

- **Invest in equipping students with supplemental training, technical skills building and internship opportunities**, through providing the needed activities that can increase youth employability beyond relying only on their education attainment, in order to bridge the experience gap in a way that facilitates their entrance to the labor market in their early career.
- **Implementing agencies with the support of the Government of Jordan should utilize cash assistance to households** to better enable young people in pursuing education pathways and in a way that protect them from residing to engage early in income generation activities to cover their financial needs of their families. This should be in line with GCR's areas of support that state the need to provide more direct financial support to minimize the time refugee boys and girls spend out of education.