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# WFP's role in youth employment and inclusion programming

## Jordan Case Study

February 2022



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## Executive Summary

This case study is one of three commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) to understand how it can more effectively engage in youth employment and inclusion programming in different contexts. The increasingly urgent challenge of a large unemployed and conflict-afflicted youth cohort in many of WFP's partner countries has led the organisation to consider how it can improve its programming to become more youth inclusive, integrating youth into its existing programmes and strengthening collaborations with partners to develop opportunities that will help young men and women realise their aspirations and find decent work.

The Jordan case study offers an opportunity to consider youth employment issues in a mainly urban context, in a country hosting a significant refugee population and with a firm commitment to developing its digital infrastructure. The Kenya case study highlights the opportunities for youth employment created through private sector collaboration.

The WFP Jordan Country Strategic Plan (CSP) outlines key issues influencing youth employment. Ninety per cent of Jordan's 10 million people live in urban areas and over 74% are under the age of 30. The population includes over 700,000 registered refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi crises and an additional 90,000 from Yemen, Iraq, Sudan, Somalia and other countries. Statistics on unregistered refugees are unavailable, though estimates indicate there are over one million. Although 83% of refugees live in host

communities rather than in camps, they often face legal restrictions on entering formal employment, including self-employment. Refugees' ability to work depends on their original nationality: Palestinian refugees with Jordanian nationality face few barriers to work; under the terms of the Jordan Compact, Syrian refugees are able to work in manufacturing, construction, food or agriculture; and the remainder of the refugee population is unable to access work permits. Rates of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) are high at an average of 38%, though this is more of a problem among young women (49%) than young men (27%).

The CSP outlines a 'resilience building' strand which emphasises empowering young men and women, both Jordanians and refugees. Noteworthy youth programmes include a wide range of human capital development and technical training programmes in the food sector, school gardens, forestry, nutrition in refugee camps and hydroponic innovations for fodder and vegetable production. These are implemented with a range of partners, including government ministries, Royal Foundations, international NGOs and businesses, together with the Ministry of Agriculture, the National Alliance against Hunger and Malnutrition, World Vision, the Royal Health Awareness Society and Dar Abu Abdallah. Most programmes focus on both refugees and hosting communities and emphasise skills development, capacity development and creating a public asset base.

Strategic Outcome 3 in the CSP outlines WFP's focus on enterprise development via training and promoting access to finance and credit, and supporting smallholder agriculture (mainly women and smallholder farmers and herders) by promoting access to markets and improving productivity and resilience to climate shocks. However, smallholder farming or herding is not a desirable option for young Jordanians: they attach a stigma to agricultural production work, which is often done by non-Jordanians who are willing to take jobs for lower wages. Even when agriculture is seen as desirable, young people face barriers to entry from the perceived high cost of renting land, high production costs and marketing challenges.

Interviewees identified possible opportunities for WFP to further contribute to youth employment and engagement in food systems by supporting young people to build enterprises along agricultural value chains. These included addressing post-harvest losses from inappropriate handling, transport and storage, and value addition within the food sector such as processing primary products, marketing, transport and delivery. They highlighted the opportunities this would present for self-employment and home-based businesses, especially for women, who may be unable to leave the house because of social and religious norms which dictate their role in childcare and other domestic activities. Some expressed a concern for sustainability, and support for programmes that involved sustainable foods, irrigation or conservation of arable land. And they noted that, with appropriate digital skills and increasingly affordable data services, young people could take advantage of Jordan's accessible and relatively cheap internet. They identified potential opportunities in the growing number of social media platforms to start and grow small businesses in agricultural and food value chains, engaging around a diverse range of support activities for value addition, such as processing, marketing, farmer education and extension, network-building between aspiring farmers and labourers, information system investments and fintech initiatives.

Key partners in WFP's support for youth employment are two vocational training organisations: the National Alliance against Hunger and Malnutrition (NAJMAH) and Dar Abu Abdullah (DAA), which participate in WFP's asset creation programmes and partner with businesses for on-the-job training and skills development. Focus Group Discussions with programme participants noted the value of the skills that had been built and welcomed the cash transfers associated with the training. However, not all felt they would realise longer-term benefits. In some cases, the skills acquired had already been enough to find full-time employment, and in others they were enough to consider creating a small business, but some participants could not see a direct route to employment or entrepreneurship, and

were concerned that, at the end of the programme, they would need to fall back on informal work.

Taken together, the observations above suggest that activities higher up the agricultural value chain may be more attractive to young people in Jordan than primary production in rural areas. They might also offer additional routes to a range of entrepreneurship or employment opportunities. More detailed market assessments could help ensure that the skills provided to young people are those which offer the greatest chance of helping them find self-employment or employment with others. Involving young people in conducting value chain assessments (partnering with FAO and using its gender-sensitive assessment guidelines) could help build their business acumen while identifying market opportunities and support networks. These could be further developed through targeted vocational training and mentorship, particularly around the digital skills that are increasingly important for entrepreneurship and some forms of employment. This could be done with support from WFP's Innovation Accelerator, which with its partners in UNICEF and the Crown Prince Foundation supports start-ups to leverage their contacts within the innovation ecosystem, providing mentorship access and other forms of non-financial support.

Permeating all of this is the issue of gender. Despite young Jordanian women having a 99% literacy rate and 78% holding a first degree, conservative gender norms in both Jordanian and non-Jordanian communities abound. Most Jordanian men do not approve of married women returning home from work after 5pm, and many disapprove of their working in mixed-gender workplaces. This, combined with risks to women's physical safety on public transport and in the workplace, means that female labour force participation is among the lowest in the world. Livelihoods programming aims at achieving a 50/50 gender ratio, but this has proved challenging. Investments in life and soft skills training may help shift perceptions of women's productivity and contributions to family well-being, but many women are reluctant to work outside the home. Fostering young women's entrepreneurship through the digital labour market could help them overcome barriers to accessing decent work through home working, though there is a significant gender digital divide to overcome to achieve this. Any job market assessments, or interventions to support youth employment through digital technology, need to be designed with close attention to gender norms. And while it is unlikely that the formal sector will grow fast enough to absorb all young people looking for work, removing legal barriers that prevent refugees from entering the labour market will allow those who can acquire the necessary skills to contribute more effectively to Jordan's economic growth.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research and its aims

The World Food Programme (WFP) is increasingly aligning its work with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on SDG 2 to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. WFP looks to meet SDG 2 not only by providing emergency assistance, but also by building resilience for food and nutrition security – especially among smallholder farmers – in the face of challenges such as conflict, climate change and increasing economic disparities. It is widely acknowledged that food insecurity, violence and migration are interrelated phenomena which exacerbate humanitarian crises: evidence from *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* indicates that the decade-long decline in the prevalence of undernourishment has gone into reverse since 2014.<sup>1</sup>

The core of WFP's mandate is to ensure that everyone has access to food, that no one suffers from malnutrition, that smallholder productivity and community resilience is increased, and that food systems are sustainable. In 2016, WFP became a signatory of the 'Peace Promise', committing itself to work across the humanitarian–development–peace nexus to 'end ... human suffering by addressing the drivers of conflict and vulnerability and reducing subsequent humanitarian needs'. This prompted WFP to extend its focus on 'saving lives' to include an agenda for 'changing lives', with a consequent emphasis on supporting the development of resilient livelihoods.

However, WFP is facing a growing economically inactive youth cohort in many of its partner countries. Prolonged youth unemployment and underemployment directly prevents young people from being able to afford nutritious food. Its effects on young men and women's well-being can be long-lasting, affecting their earnings and employment opportunities (and therefore food security) as much as 20 years later.<sup>2</sup> It also indirectly reinforces drivers of food insecurity by leading to risky behaviour, increased criminality, lack of civic engagement, and lower trust in society and formal institutions.<sup>3</sup>

The UN Secretary-General has elevated the issue of youth to the highest level, with a UN Youth Strategy<sup>4</sup> and a Special Envoy on youth. WFP recognises the urgency of the youth employment challenge and the direct and indirect relationships to food insecurity. It is exploring options for making its programming more youth-inclusive, particularly in the rural contexts where it operates. It is debating how to further develop its youth programming and maximise its impact on addressing the youth employment challenge as captured under SDG 8.6.1<sup>5</sup> and linking it to WFP's core objectives under SDG 2. It is also considering how its resources can best assist young people, and whether this should be achieved by assisting human capital development, for example through food for training programmes, adding to existing social protection programmes, or other approaches entirely.

1 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2021) [The state of food security and nutrition in the world: transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all](#)

2 OECD (2015) [Setting objectives for achieving better youth employment outcomes](#)

3 E.g. Carcillo, S., Fernandez, R., Königs, S. Minea, A. (2015), "NEET Youth in the Aftermath of the Crisis: Challenges and Policies", OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 164.

4 UN (no date) [UN Youth Strategy](#)

5 Percentage of young people (aged 16-24 years) not in education, employment or training (NEET)

## 1.2 Defining youth

The idea of ‘youth’ is a social construct. Although the Kingdom of Jordan defines young people as those aged 25 or under,<sup>6</sup> not all young men and women make the transition to adulthood in the same way or at the same time, and different societies mark the transition to adulthood in different ways, including through marriage. Young men and women therefore do not form a homogeneous group: the opportunities and challenges they face in their search for dignified work will differ depending on their gender, age, marital status, whether or not they have children, urban or rural location, education level, poverty level, and refugee or displaced status. It will also be influenced by forms of social and economic exclusion, such as disability and membership of excluded or indigenous groups. In most societies, the end of youth is not achieved on a certain date but through the acquisition of culturally defined markers of adulthood, including parenthood, marriage and – importantly in this context – meaningful work and income. As this study seeks to inform the operational work of WFP across several countries, it uses the UN definition for youth (aged 15–24) to keep consistency across the different countries, though some literature referred to in this report will use the extended definition and considers different groups within the ‘youth’ category, such as 15–17-year-old adolescents, who are specifically targeted by certain programmes such as school feeding. In practice, youth employment programming should be sufficiently context-specific and culturally sensitive to take local definitions of youth into account, to best assist young men and women in their transitions into adulthood. It is also worth noting that the word ‘youth’ has often been used pejoratively, associated with discussions about radicalism or criminality. While phrases such as ‘youth employment’ and ‘youth labour force’ are widely accepted, the preferred terminology in this report is ‘young men and women’ or ‘young people’.

## 1.3 Research aims and methodology

This report is one of three case studies conducted to make operational recommendations to WFP on how it could help young people improve their food security through finding dignified and fulfilling work. The other case study covers WFP’s work in Kenya; an overview document outlines the global problem of youth unemployment and its relevance to WFP’s overall programming. The guiding question for the research was: how can WFP effectively engage in youth employment and inclusion programming in different contexts? What works in youth capacity-building for access to employment and youth empowerment? How are these lessons relevant for WFP’s work in the case study countries?

An initial literature review contributed to the development of a framework for determining which youth programmes are most likely to have the greatest impact in addressing youth employment and security challenges, with the aim of giving youth hope for the future. It identified three main causes of youth unemployment: a mismatch between job growth and population growth; a mismatch between education and the job market; and structural factors that exclude young people from labour markets. The case study countries were selected to highlight different types of challenge and opportunity faced by young people in their search for dignified and fulfilling work.

Jordan was selected to explore youth employment in a middle-income, urbanised country with a good digital infrastructure, but with a significant refugee population. Two sites for primary data collection were identified in collaboration with WFP’s Jordan Country Office in consideration of budget and time constraints. Amman was selected as the Jordanian capital, and Irbid as the place where most refugees live. This allowed us to explore the links between youth employment and forced displacement in the Jordan Valley, the most prominent rural agricultural area, and to capture the differences in the types of challenges that young people face in urban and rural settings, regions and economic sectors. The fierce competition for job opportunities for young people in urban areas is very different from the types of labour market exclusion that young men and especially women face in smaller towns and villages. Additionally,

6 National Committee for Human Resources Development (2015) [Education for Prosperity: Delivering Results. A National Strategy for Human Resource Development 2016-2025](#)

7 Boateng, E and Löwe, A (2018) [Aspirations matter: what young people in Ghana think about work](#)

8 UNFPA (2021) [Youth, peace and security: a programming handbook](#)

we aimed to capture the voices of young people who have been forcibly displaced, to understand the needs and challenges faced by young refugees.

Primary data was collected to triangulate the findings from the literature review and locate them within the lived realities of young Jordanian and refugee men and women. Because of restrictions on travel caused by the pandemic, the team used both remote and face-to-face key informant interviews (KIIs), group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). Overall, 20 KIIs were conducted, remotely with WFP staff from the Jordan Country Office (n=5), UN agencies, government officials and a combination of local and international NGOs and foundations (n=15). Additionally, eight face-to-face FGDs were conducted with young men and women aged 18–30 who participated in WFP programming (Vocational Skills Training and Food for Assets). Four FGDs were held with young women and four with young men. Eleven IDIs were held with FGD participants and 2 KIIs with local youth experts. While most FGD and IDI participants were Jordanian, three out of the 20 women who took part in FGDs were Syrian refugees, and seven of the 22 men were Syrian, Egyptian or Sudanese. Just under half of both male and female IDIs were with non-Jordanians (two out of five young women, and three out of seven young men).

Limitations to the study include the low representation

of young women, resulting in the absence of female IDIs, and one FGD consisted of only two young women. Restrictions linked to the Covid-19 pandemic also limited the size of FGDs to six people. There is also very little disaggregated information on education and employment among young refugees, which affects this report's ability to provide a nuanced analysis of youth employment for a large community of people with whom WFP works closely.

## 1.4 Structure

The case study is divided into three sections. The first section starts with an introduction to the country context, including an overview of youth unemployment, the structure of the labour market and specific challenges related to the economy, Covid-19, forced displacement and conflict. It also includes a brief section on WFP's existing activities in Jordan. The study then delves into the causes of youth unemployment in Jordan, namely the mismatch between job and population growth, the divergence between available skills and education and those needed by the job market, and labour market exclusion. The third and final section provides suggestions for youth-inclusive programming for WFP in relation to the causes of unemployment.



## 2. Country context

### 2.1 Introduction: youth unemployment in Jordan

Jordan has a highly urbanised and young population, characterised by high levels of youth unemployment: 90% of the population is urban and 74% are below 30 years of age.<sup>9</sup> In 2019, 742,700 young people were classified as not in employment, education or training (NEET), representing 38% of young people aged 15–24. NEET rates are higher for among young women (49.2%) than they are among men (26.9%).<sup>10</sup> Rates have likely increased as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, with ILO estimating that youth unemployment among those aged 20–24 years was as high as 42.2% in the second quarter of 2020.<sup>11</sup> Economic inactivity among young people in Jordan is not just widespread, but persistent. The average duration of unemployment for young people ranges from 33 to 69 months, depending on gender and level of education.<sup>12</sup> Lengthy school-to-work transitions affect young women in particular.

Although inactivity rates among young people in urban and rural areas are similar, there are differences in the quality of labour market opportunities available. The largest number of those living under the national poverty line are young people in urban areas, where competition for jobs is driven by rural-to-urban migration.<sup>13</sup> Job retention is an issue among young people due to poor working conditions, inflexible working hours, low pay, lack of transportation and lack of career growth opportunities.

### 2.2 Labour market characteristics

Jordan is a small and highly urbanised country. Employment is concentrated in the services sector, which employs more than 80% of workers. The public sector accounts for a significant proportion of this, employing 40% of those in services.<sup>14</sup> Demand for public sector jobs among Jordanian youth is high, as they tend to be permanent and enjoy a growing wage premium over private sector counterparts.<sup>15</sup> However, the government has envisioned private sector-led growth of economic opportunities in the services sector, reducing its role as a provider of jobs.

Outside the services sector, the vicinity of agricultural activities to urban markets provides opportunities for young people. Agricultural activities in Jordan extend from rural into peri-rural and urban areas, offering potential for value chain development around food production and processing. Jobs in the agri-food sector enjoy relatively high labour productivity<sup>17</sup> and represent one of the leading export sectors. However, job opportunities are rare, with just 2% of workers in Jordan employed in agriculture.<sup>18</sup> The sector also suffers from costly transportation links and environmental challenges, such as water shortages.

Manufacturing represents another high-productivity and export-oriented sector. Food products, apparel, chemicals and pharmaceuticals make up a larger share of manufacturing labour income, with higher employment shares and higher wages. Although the industrial sector represents a small proportion of jobs and labour income,<sup>19</sup> it has experienced some of the greatest increases in employment.

9 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) [Jobs Diagnostic Jordan](#). World Bank Group: Washington D.C.

10 ILOSTAT (2020) [Share of youth not in employment, education or training \(NEET\) by sex and rural / urban areas – ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2020 \(%\) - Annual](#). ILO: Geneva

11 International Labor Organization (ILO) (2021) [Promoting Decent Work in Jordan](#). ILO: Geneva

12 Amer, M. (2018, May) 'School-to-Work Transition in Jordan, 2010-2016'. In Economic Research Forum Working Papers (No. 1196)

13 Barucci, V. and Mryyan, N. (2014) [Labour market transitions of young women and men in Jordan](#). ILO: Geneva.

14 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

15 When comparing individuals with similar levels of education, age, and gender, a public sector job pays on average a 21 percent higher salary than one in the private sector

16 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

17 From 2000 to 2016, the size of the working age population almost doubled.

18 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

19 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

Over a quarter of the poor population – mainly women and young people – rely on agriculture for income. Young women in rural areas also tend to face higher burdens of unpaid family-related work.<sup>20</sup> Some young people appear to be deterred from working in agriculture due to perceptions that it involves difficult conditions, low pay and no clear path for skills development and upward mobility. While employment in agriculture is low, non-Jordanians are disproportionately represented because it is one of the few sectors in which they are permitted to work. In 2010, almost 80% of agriculture workers were Jordanian. By 2016 this had fallen to 29%.<sup>21</sup>

A World Bank study in 2018 estimated that close to 60% of workers in Jordan are informal, and are therefore not subject to national labour legislation, income taxation, social protection and employment benefits.<sup>22</sup> Informal work in Jordan has increased in the last decade,<sup>23</sup> mainly in wholesale and retail trade, transport and hotel and restaurant services. However, informal sector wages are approximately 15% lower than comparable jobs in the formal sector.<sup>24</sup> Because of this and work permit restrictions for refugees, informal employment is more common among non-Jordanians<sup>25</sup> and among men, particularly outside of agriculture.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 Crisis-affected populations

In a country of 10 million people, the influx of 1.3 million Syrian refugees has resulted in a major increase in the country's population. Refugees from Syria added to a number of refugees from other areas, including Iraq, Egypt, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, as well as long-term Palestinian refugees, many of whom have been granted Jordanian citizenship. Most refugees live in urban areas, or in camps close to the Syrian border. As of July 2021 there were 744,195 registered refugees: 660,000 Syrian, 67,183 Iraqi and the remainder Yemeni,

Sudanese, Somali and other nationalities.<sup>27</sup> There may be an additional 1–2 million unregistered refugees. There are few reliable statistics on employment among young refugees in Jordan – registered or unregistered. Twenty-nine percent of Syrian refugees are aged 18–35, and thus in the 'youth' category, but only 23% of Syrian refugees (45% of men and 4% of women) are in the labour force and thus seeking employment.<sup>28</sup> No figures are available for employment among young refugees from other countries. Refugees are a key part of Jordan's labour market. There is a slightly higher proportion of men among refugees, though only 18% of them have a postsecondary degree compared to 30% of Jordanians.<sup>29</sup> Many refugees do not have the right to work or to access work permits, although the Jordan Compact in 2016 saw an easing of legal restrictions for Syrian refugees which permitted them to work in certain sectors (Box 1).

### THE JORDAN COMPACT

In 2016, as part of an agreement with the EU, the Jordanian government committed to providing more school places to Syrian children, providing vocational training for Syrian refugees, improving the business environment for Syrian enterprises and issuing 200,000 permits to allow Syrians to work in specific sectors. Considerable efforts have been put into providing education for refugees, including double shifts in schools to improve enrolment, which is now close to 58%.<sup>30</sup> Work permits enable Syrian refugees to apply for waged employment in the manufacturing, infrastructure, food and agricultural sectors as long as they have the correct documentation and a sponsor (i.e. an employer). However, by the end of 2017 only 87,141 permits had been taken up (95% of them to men)<sup>31</sup> and evaluations of the Compact have revealed low uptake of permits among women, no significant difference between the income of permit holders and non-permit holders, lack of demand due to restrictions on flexibility, higher risk of exploitation by employers, and fear of losing cash assistance from UNHCR.<sup>32</sup>

20 ILO and IFAD (2018) [Jordan: Young women's employment and empowerment in the rural economy](#)

21 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

22 International Labor Organisation (ILO) (2018) [Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture](#)

23 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

24 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

25 17 percent of non-Jordanians more likely to be informally employed and 11 percent are more likely to not have a contract than Jordanian citizens.

26 International Labor Organisation (ILO) (2018) [Women and men in the informal economy: a statistical picture](#). Third Edition. ILO: Geneva.

27 UNHCR (2021) [Registered persons of concern: refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan](#)

28 Fallah, B., Krafft, C. and Wahba, J. (2019) [The impact of refugees on employment and wages in Jordan](#)

29 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

30 Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation (2020) [Jordan response plan for the Syrian crisis](#). Disaggregated figures for non-Syrian refugees are not available.

31 Fallah, B., Krafft, C., & Wahba, J. (2019) [The impact of refugees on employment and wages in Jordan](#)

32 Barbelet, V., Hagen-Zanker, J. and Mansour-Ille, D. (2018) [The Jordan compact: lessons learned and implications for future refugee compacts](#)

Other policies to address employment concerns for refugees include the National Employment Strategy (NES) (2011–2020), written just before the onset of the Syrian civil war and currently being reviewed by the ILO in partnership with SIDA.<sup>33</sup> Its key objectives are to improve the implementation of the NES and to develop a national framework on apprenticeship systems. Other programmes aimed at refugees include cash-for-work schemes and support to establish home-based businesses, many of which are female-run. Although these have potential to formalise microenterprises, most home-based businesses are still unable to obtain licences or access finance.<sup>34</sup> There have also been efforts to ease strains on the education system from the influx of refugees, including the Jordan Response Plan for the Syrian Crisis (2020–2022) and the Education Sector Strategy.<sup>35</sup> Development partners offer learning support services, the largest of which is the UNICEF Makani Centres programme. However, many of these target children and adolescents rather than young people.<sup>36</sup>

Interviewees suggested that competition between refugees and Jordanian workers can cause tension. In practice most refugees are lower-skilled than most Jordanians and therefore do not tend to compete with them. The main competition in the labour market is between refugees and economic immigrants, who are both restricted to working in the informal sector, especially in towns and cities.<sup>37</sup> Accessing education has been a challenge for young refugees, who face academic difficulties, school interruptions, lack of official certification and financial pressure to support their families by taking up employment.<sup>38</sup> For young female refugees, marriage presents another barrier to accessing education: female refugees suffer from lower levels of educational attainment and labour market participation.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.4 The impact of Covid-19

Covid-19 and the government response to the pandemic have compounded existing economic challenges, adding new job insecurities and barriers to accessing employment. Much of the evidence on the effects of Covid-19 on youth employment remains anecdotal, but there are indications of a rise in unemployment, a decline in profits and disrupted business activities.<sup>40</sup> Interviews suggest that there are also signs of impacts on well-being, with increased idleness and a declining sense of self-worth.

The government curfew to counter the spread of Covid-19 has had a detrimental effect, especially on the hospitality sector, as well as on daily or seasonal workers in agriculture and construction. As refugees in camps and in urban host communities are reliant on these kinds of jobs, they have been most at risk of unemployment. In a survey of 1,580 young people, 39% of respondents only had verbal agreements with their employers, and 92% reported being unemployed.<sup>41</sup> Only 4% of respondents indicated they were working during lockdown, and only 18% expected to resume work once lockdown measures are lifted.

The government curfew has disproportionately affected women, who have suffered from the closure of childcare facilities while simultaneously seeing an increase in their household work and responsibilities due to all members of the household being at home.<sup>42,43</sup> High rates of female employment in the health sector (51%) and in education (58%) added to these effects,<sup>44</sup> while school closures have led to an increase in child labour and child marriage among refugees.<sup>45</sup> Some interviewees suggested that e-learning has been weak in the context of Covid, compounded by limited internet access. On the other hand, some interviewees suggested Covid-19 may have improved the acceptability of home-based working, which could benefit women through greater flexibility in work.

33 ILO (no date) [Supporting a National Employment Strategy that works for Young Syrian Refugees in Jordan](#)

34 USAID (no date) [Home-Based Businesses](#)

35 Government of Jordan (no date) [Jordan Response Plan for the Syria Crisis 2020-2022](#)

36 Sieverding, M., Krafft, C., Berri, N., Keo, C., & Sharpless, M. (2018) 'Education interrupted: Enrolment, attainment, and dropout of Syrian refugees in Jordan'.

37 Krafft, C., Sieverding, M., Salemi, C. and Keo, K (2018) [Syrian refugees in Jordan: demographics, livelihoods, education and health](#)

38 Sieverding, M., Krafft, C., Berri, N., Keo, C., & Sharpless, M. (2018) 'Education interrupted: Enrolment, attainment, and dropout of Syrian refugees in Jordan'.

39 Fallah, B., Krafft, C., & Wahba, J. (2019) [The impact of refugees on employment and wages in Jordan](#)

40 Kebede, T.A., Stave, S.E., Tiltnes, A.A., Kattaa, M., Prokop, M., Maaytah, R. and Handley, S. (2021) [Impact of COVID-19 on Enterprises in Jordan: One year into the pandemic](#)

41 Kebede, T.A., Stave, S.E., and Kattaa, M. (2020) [Facing Double Crises- Rapid assessment of covid-19 on vulnerable workers in Jordan](#)

42 Malachowska, A., Al Abbadi, T., Al Amaireh, W., Banioweda, K., Al Heiwidi, S. and Jones, N. (2020) [Listening to young people's voices under covid-19. Exploring the impacts of covid-19 on adolescents in Jordan's refugee camps and host communities.](#)

43 Kebede, T.A., Stave, S.E., and Kattaa, M. (2020) Ibid.

44 UN Women (2020) [COVID-19 and Women's Economic Empowerment: Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Jordan's Recovery](#). UN: New York.

45 World Food Programme (WFP) (2020) [Overview of Refugee Food Security in Jordan: COVID-19 Update](#). WFP: Rome.

## 2.5 Violence and drug use

Young interviewees for this study thought of Jordan as a relatively secure country but feared that social and economic pressures are contributing to violence, religious extremism, drug abuse, theft and other illicit activities or anti-social behaviour. Economic exclusion – including unemployment – plays a relatively minor role in explaining support for religious extremism and violent unrest.<sup>46</sup> Rather, interviewees observed, economic idleness was a driver of drug use and related violence linked to theft and petty crime, particularly among men. They reported that they lacked motivation, believing that there was nothing they could do to improve their situation, and that hopelessness and depression can in turn contribute to drug use and other illicit activities. This chimes with wider studies showing that high unemployment, financial pressures and other forms of economic exclusion contribute to feelings of social injustice and can be a major driver of illicit activity.<sup>47</sup> Several Jordanian organisations are trying to combat this by providing productive activities for young people, including the Resilient Youth, Socially and Economically Empowered (RYSE) consortium, which provides community-based programmes, civic engagement opportunities and skills training to improve employment opportunities and cohesion between Jordanians and refugees.

## 2.6 The Jordanian government's youth priorities

The government of Jordan has developed several strategy documents setting out a framework for youth engagement and employment. They include the Jordan Vision 2025, the National Employment Strategy (2011–2020) and the Employment, Technical and Vocational Education Training (E-TVET) Strategy (2014–2020). These focus on enhancing and supporting youth entrepreneurship, developing vocational education, creating links between educational institutions and the private sector, supporting migrant workers and promoting women's labour market participation.<sup>48</sup> The Civil Service Bureau has a platform for citizens to register for job opportunities, and the Ministry of Youth supports training and marketing of youth to the job market. The Ministry of Agriculture recently introduced programmes to address food insecurity and employment, including efforts to introduce youth to the agricultural sector. Both Ministries have utilised technological opportunities, for example by launching a digital platform for job searches in the agricultural sector, agricultural technologies to support hydroponic farms and local vegetable production, as well as home-based businesses for women and refugees.<sup>49</sup> Issues related to financial and institutional instability<sup>50</sup> have resulted in delays to the implementation of some of these strategies. Jordan's economy is one of the smallest in the Middle East, and is highly vulnerable to external shocks.<sup>51</sup> The financial crisis, the Arab Spring and the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts have all contributed to a decline in GDP per capita every year since 2010.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the number of jobs has not kept up with population growth, driven by migration and fertility rates: from 2000 to 2016, the size of the working age population almost doubled.<sup>53</sup>

46 See e.g. Hummer, L. (2015) [Youth & consequences: Unemployment, injustice and violence](#)

47 Sánchez, V. S. [How social injustice feeds extremism: the case of Jordanian extremist women](#)

48 OECD (2018) [Youth Well-being Policy Review of Jordan](#).

49 E.g. Slimane, M.A.A., Allen, F., Kattaa, M. and Daru, P. (2020) [New economic opportunities for Jordanians and Syrian refugees](#)

50 OECD (2018) Ibid.

51 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

52 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

53 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) Ibid.

## OPPORTUNITIES FROM DIGITISATION

Digital transformation is a high priority for the Jordanian government, as outlined in its national long-term vision and strategy REACH2025 and the Jordan Digital Transformation Strategy 2020.<sup>54</sup> Internet penetration stands at 67% of the population, with 56% active on social media. The gender balance of social media use varies considerably by platform, with more women than men using Snapchat and more men than women using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.<sup>55</sup> Most people in Jordan who are online use mobile devices to access the internet, though in 2016 there was a gender gap in mobile ownership of 38% in favour of men (it is unclear how many men and women share phone ownership within the household).<sup>56</sup> There remains room to further develop fixed broadband infrastructure and to scale up 3G and 4G penetration, but Jordan showed its commitment to digital transformation during the Covid-19 pandemic, where it formed an emergency committee with senior chief technology officers of its network operators aimed at strengthening network resilience and service continuity.<sup>57</sup> Jordan's Digital Transformation Strategy has a particular focus on youth, technology and jobs, committing to strengthening e-learning opportunities while creating 30,000 jobs for youth in five years, including for women and Syrian refugees.<sup>58</sup>

## 2.7. Overview of WFP's work in Jordan

WFP's work in Jordan spans a number of objectives, ranging from humanitarian assistance and the provision of social protection to longer-term strategies to build resilience and encourage sustainable livelihoods and opportunities. There is an emphasis on vulnerable populations, including young people, disabled people, refugees and women,<sup>59</sup> including programmes aimed at job creation and labour productivity. WFP also provides educational and awareness-raising programmes on nutrition, better food habits and social norms related to food security. As part of its recent country strategic plan (CSP), WFP has been working on livelihood and resilience activities since 2014, including vocational skills training, job matching and on-the-job training based on market assessments. The CSP's resilience-building strand emphasises a shift from non-conditional to conditional assistance for beneficiaries. Several of its programmes integrate skills development and vocational training, including a partnership with NAJMAH and DAA on skills development and technical training in the food sector.<sup>60</sup>

NAJMAH's cash for work and food for training programmes provide training and transferable skills development for young people. An evaluation revealed

important lessons, including the need to include youth in the market assessment phase, and raising the minimum wage to take into account the costs of rent and transport. WFP's partnership with DAA was around a pilot project that provides vocational training for young people in the food production and hospitality sectors, including the creation of market linkages.<sup>61</sup> DAA uses market assessments to ensure that their employment training is oriented towards business owners' needs.

Other partners in Jordan include ILO, GIZ, UN Women, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce and the Jordanian National Commission for Women, as well as government ministries. Programmes focussed on school gardens, forestry, nutrition and hydroponic innovations for fodder and vegetable production are being implemented with a range of partners, with an emphasis on skills development. School feeding programmes have taken two forms: complementary support to the National School Feeding programme and a home-grown school meals model, known as the Healthy Kitchen, in which women prepare fresh meals for schoolchildren in public schools. WFP has supported the latter to launch a Food Security Strategy for Jordan (MOA Nada).

54 Government of Jordan (2020) [Digital Transformation Strategy](#)

55 Datareportal.org (2021) [Digital 2020: Jordan](#)

56 Ameen, N., Willis, R. and Shah, M.H. (2018) [An examination of the gender gap in smartphone adoption and use in Arab countries: a cross-national study](#)

57 World Bank (2021) [Data practices in MENA: case study: opportunities and challenges in Jordan](#)

58 Government of Jordan (2020) [Digital Transformation Strategy](#)

59 WFP (2021) [Jordan Country Strategic Plan \(2020-2024\)](#)

60 WFP (2019) [WFP Jordan Country Brief: July 2019](#)

61 For example, DAA partners with McDonalds Jordan on a foundational skills training programme, including training to address cultural barriers (e.g. gender-related), individual mentoring plans, and securing jobs with McDonalds post training.

Some interviewees suggested that there is scope for WFP to take a more proactive approach to addressing young people's needs. WFP's targeting is done on the basis of food insecurity indicators: while this will pick up young men and women whose unemployed status makes them vulnerable to food insecurity, WFP does not at present specifically target the 18–25 age range. Interviewees suggested paying more explicit attention to involving young people throughout the lifespan of a project and providing them with scope to have their views reflected in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmes. The Jordan Country Office has engaged young male and female refugees in an initiative on Incentive Based Volunteering. This represents an opportunity to investigate how young people have been engaged and with what effect, in order to expand opportunities for young people's engagement.

Interviewees identified key areas of aspiration for WFP programming aimed at young people. These are related to opportunities in the wider agricultural value chain as well as other sectors. They include greater investment in technical skills and hands-on training to help address post-harvest losses linked to inappropriate transportation and storage, increased access to finance, as well as the processing, marketing and distribution of imported food using home-based businesses and digitisation. Fintech initiatives, network-building, information system investments and irrigation also offer significant opportunities for promoting youth employment and training. WFP programmes can and have already started including measures to promote women's participation, including efforts to break down some of the barriers leading to their exclusion, such as access to childcare, an allocated hour for breastfeeding and the creation of workplaces close to female participants' homes.

WFP's Innovation Unit builds partnerships with organisations working on innovation, entrepreneurship and/or food security. It supports start-ups to leverage their contacts within the innovation ecosystem, lending them support, endorsement and credibility and providing access to mentorship and financial and technical support. The Innovation Unit also contributes to technological innovation, including the roll-out and use of blockchain technology in two refugee camps to facilitate secure cash transactions.

Despite these active partnerships, interviewees identified greater scope for WFP to coordinate with government ministries and the private sector on programmes aimed at young people. For example, there is an opportunity to expand on a recently signed MOU between UNFPA and

WFP on gender-based violence to address some of the cultural and mental barriers to women's labour market participation.<sup>62</sup> Although WFP's livelihoods programming in Jordan is aimed at achieving a 50/50 gender ratio in programmes, there have been challenges in realising this. Continuing to invest in life skills and soft skills training will be important to help shift perceptions of how women's productivity as economic actors can improve their contributions to family well-being.

Another area for improvement raised by multiple interviewees was around the difficulties faced in accessing information about WFP programmes. Some also lamented poor employment conditions, delays in receiving salaries and difficulties with transportation to the placement location. However, young participants of WFP programmes also highlighted various benefits, including increased self-confidence, (life) skills development, renewed motivation, networking opportunities and access to income. Some also indicated that the programmes helped to halt illicit businesses, at least temporarily, by addressing unemployment and boredom. The appeal of the benefits was tempered by some young people's uncertainty about what happens after the programme, including access to tools or future employment.



62 UNFPA (2020) [Y-PEER Jordan](#)

# 3. Causes of youth unemployment in Jordan

This section turns to factors contributing to youth unemployment, and related challenges. It is organised into three parts that unpack the causes of youth unemployment, and what WFP can do to address them: a mismatch between job and population growth; a mismatch between education and jobs; and barriers contributing to youth exclusion, including specific challenges facing young women.

## 3.1 Cause 1: Mismatch between job and population growth

Jordan has seen a rapid growth in its youth population, which has created a high demand for jobs. Between 2010 and 2016 the youth population grew from 1.9 million to 2.3 million. This growth was compounded by the influx of refugees. Contrasting this, job creation has been slow, meaning the number of young people entering the labour market cannot be absorbed. Where Jordan has seen job growth accompany its economic growth in the last decade, this has been mainly in the manufacturing and construction sectors. While these sectors have the potential to employ many young people, they are typically dominated by foreign workers with lower levels of education. Jobs in these sectors are often informal, offer low pay and poor job security and are not considered viable options by more educated Jordanians.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps as a result, social norms around acceptable and decent work mean that far more young people aspire to work in the public sector than there are jobs. The public sector's capacity to absorb young people has always been inadequate, but has decreased in recent years due to a policy shift towards a focus on private sector growth. As a result, the percentage of secondary and tertiary graduates who are able to secure public sector jobs has decreased from 60% in 1985 to 35% in 2010.<sup>64</sup> Entrepreneurship offers another potentially appealing opportunity, with UNICEF estimating 50% of youth in Jordan want to be entrepreneurs.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.1.1 Addressing the mismatch between job growth and population growth: WFP's role

One approach to tackling this cause of youth unemployment is to engage with young people around their aspirations, and the realities of the global economy and the labour market in Jordan. WFP's partner projects to support employment already engage in market assessments prior to developing training programmes. Multiple focus groups indicated that some young people feel that employment and training programmes are not aligned to their aspirations, and that their interests are not necessarily aligned with individual work placements and programme design. There is scope for more conversations with young people about their interests – and about market needs – to build understanding about opportunities and interests. Youth voices from WFP programmes suggested that a potential area where there is interest, and where more training could be focused, is around the use of social media or technology in agriculture and/or marketing. This suggests involving young people, not just employers, in structured job market assessments, and linking these assessments to similar assessments around vocational skills training to ensure training and youth support is focused on likely future job needs.

Another opportunity for WFP and partners that emerged across the interviews was to focus attention on capitalising on youth innovation and to support entrepreneurship. The WFP Innovation Unit provides some support for start-ups already. Some young people from WFP programmes expressed an aspiration to continue on from the programme, to own their own business, or to look for new projects and marketing opportunities. Access to finance, registration and markets were indicated as challenges to youth entrepreneurship. Addressing existing challenges will require programmes that consider financial constraints at the start-up stage, including the risks of loan defaults.

63 Brown, R.A., Constant, L., Glick, P., and Grant, A.K. (2014) [Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment](#)

64 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) [Jobs Diagnostic Jordan](#)

65 UNICEF (2020) [Geographic Multidimensional Vulnerability Analysis](#)

The start-up ecosystem also appears to be underdeveloped. The creation of hubs or incubators for young people to network, support one another and access technical expertise could help to mitigate this.

In light of this, there is scope for WFP to consider partnering more around programmes that build on young people's desire to take the initiative and learn, building from its partnership with, for example, DAA. The partnerships formed by its Innovation Unit could also be a point of entry for greater support for youth innovation, linking up more to training programmes and providing additional scope for networking and an enabling environment for innovation. These sorts of partnerships could form a basis for creating new and innovative forms of employment, beyond existing private and public sector waged labour.

Young people not only expressed an interest in entrepreneurship, but also a desire for continued support after programmes end. This aligns with some interviewees' identification of a lack of sufficient follow-up support after education and training. WFP could work with its existing partners, and other groups interested in more comprehensive support for youth entrepreneurship and employment, by extending support for young people along this pathway. This could include programmes aimed at assisting in the transition from university to work, and could be accompanied by further investment in skills development, including softer skills such as resilience, creativity and problem-solving which support entrepreneurship.

Another opportunity to mitigate the gap between job supply and demand would be to develop employment programmes that respond to shifts in government priorities around Covid-19 and the green economy. The government's focus has shifted to needs, such as agriculture, health and virtual learning. These could become potential sectors for greater focus. WFP can also investigate opportunities and impacts of home-based businesses as part of the RYSE consortium. Finally, Jordan's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement provide attractive opportunities for youth employment and skills development under the country's plans to transition to a low-carbon economy. They include encouraging the use of renewable energy (especially solar), the implementation of green building codes and the introduction of zero emissions vehicles.<sup>66</sup>

## 3.2 Cause 2: Mismatch between education and the job market

Education rates for Jordanian citizens are relatively high. Close to 98% of both male and female children are enrolled in primary school, though this figure falls to 69.3% and 80.7% after year 10, when education becomes non-compulsory.<sup>67</sup> However, there are concerns over the quality of education young people receive, particularly at secondary level and higher. Many public schools, particularly in rural areas, are poorly equipped, contributing to a lack of preparedness for work and post-secondary education among graduates.<sup>68</sup> There are also cost concerns around higher education:<sup>69</sup> access to tertiary education has expanded beyond high-income families, but young people from low-income or poor families still make up the minority of secondary school graduates and a small fraction of tertiary education graduates.<sup>70</sup> In rural areas, 81% of students do not pass the Tawjihi (secondary school leaving) exams, with young men often being pulled out of school to seek employment and contribute to family income.<sup>71</sup> During the pandemic the Ministry of Education launched two websites in response to school closures, one for teachers and one for students, supported by lectures broadcast over television to those without internet access.<sup>72</sup> This commitment to e-learning is highlighted in the Education Strategic Plan as a way of improving educational outcomes, building on Jordan's relatively high levels of internet access. However, emerging evidence suggests that uptake of the platforms was low because families with children in school needed to share single devices with limited data packages, making access to the websites difficult.<sup>73</sup>

Education levels for refugees are considerably lower than for Jordanians. In 2018 only 36.7% of Syrian refugees were enrolled in primary education, falling to 13.5% in secondary education – though significant efforts have been put into strengthening refugee education in the past three years, which has raised secondary school enrolment among refugees to 58.7%.<sup>74</sup>

66 Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (2016) [Intended Nationally Determined Contribution](#)

67 Khalayleh, A. and Taddese, A. (2020) [EdTech in Jordan: a rapid scan](#)

68 Karmel, E.J., al Batran, A., and Hussainy, M. (no date) [Reforming education in rural Jordan Enhancing the capacity of schools to create options. Not Dependency](#)

69 Brown, R.A., Constant, L., Glick, P., and Grant, A.K. (2014) [Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment.](#)

70 Barucci, V. and Mryyan, N. (2014) Ibid.

71 ILO and IFAD (2018) [Jordan: Young women's employment and empowerment in the rural economy.](#)

72 Ministry of Education (2018) [Education Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)

73 Khalayleh, A. and Taddese, A. (2020) [EdTech in Jordan: a rapid scan](#)

74 Ministry of Planning and International Co-operation (2020) [Jordan response plan for the Syrian crisis.](#) Disaggregated figures for non-Syrian refugees are not available.

The education provided to young men and women typically lacks market relevance, there is very little provision of on-the-job training, and the qualifications young people gain do not align with the needs of the job market. Jordan's Department of Statistics estimates that, while 50.8% of unemployed people in the first quarter of 2020 have secondary school certificates or higher, approximately the same percentage of those who are employed do not have secondary school qualifications.<sup>75</sup> This contradictory pattern emerges because of the quality of education, especially in rural areas, and the limited market relevance of existing education and training. Inadequate development of graduates' technical and soft skills has contributed to youth unemployment, including the need for more life-long learning opportunities and skills training aimed at the private sector, such as in presentation, interviewing and CV writing. Many higher education institutions complain about the lack of guidance on developing more applied curricula that are more aligned with labour market demands. Some interviewees also noted that higher education does not prepare them for working with new (digital) technologies, or for understanding new approaches to work, such as online marketing.

The issues surrounding the market relevance of education and training are partly on the supply side. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is usually provided in informal settings and delivered in combination with employment services. However, young people indicated that the training provided in vocational schools and training centres is not sufficiently tailored to provide the practical skills needed, and that mentorship and network access are lacking. The private sector is only involved in 36% of programmes, and few employers provide on-the-job training. In addition, only 30% of programmes combine classroom-based and workplace training, which has been shown to ease the transition into work. Interventions should also look at developing a common accreditation and certification system that allows young people to market their skills to employers more easily. In a survey of 2,000 firms in Amman, 60% of those hiring said they struggled to distinguish between good and bad job candidates.<sup>76</sup>

In addition to supply-side constraints, young people in Jordan tend to shy away from vocational and technical education due to social expectations.

## VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND OTHER INITIATIVES

To bridge the mismatch of skills in the labour market, the Vocational and Technical Skills Development Commission was created in 2019 as an affiliate entity with the Ministry of Labour. The commission merges the Employment Technical and Vocational Education and Training Fund (E-TVET Fund) with the Accreditation and Quality Control Centre. The aim is to improve vocational training and skills development by reorganising and supervising vocational training programmes.<sup>77</sup> The government has also attempted to address the skills gap by directing young people to vocational work, for instance through the revitalisation of mandatory military service programmes as a pathway to vocational training. Other youth employment interventions have aimed to improve employability, create an enabling environment for youth businesses and entrepreneurship, and enhance women's participation. Skills training and employment services make up two-thirds of Jordan's Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), including job matching and employment training. Job placements and internships have been targeted at areas with large youth populations, including Amman, Irbid and Zarqa.

Significant stigma and perceptions of a culture of shame surround Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) and forms of vocational or agricultural work. Young women in particular consider a degree in the social sciences, humanities, the arts, medicine or law more desirable.<sup>78</sup> Some interviewees suggested that women choose to study subjects that will elevate their marriage profile, rather than improve their chances on the job market. The stigmatisation of vocational work is partly driven by high shares of youth unemployment and migrant and unskilled labour in vocational sectors, despite the fact that employers in those sectors need young people with vocational skills. Interviewees suggested that increasing the minimum wage to cover high living and transportation costs could encourage more young people to take up vocational training and work.

75 International Labor Organization (ILO) (2021) Promoting [Decent Work in Jordan](#)

76 Groh, M., McKenzie, D., Shammout, N., and Vishwanath, T. (2015) [Testing the importance of search frictions and matching through a randomized experiment in Jordan](#)

77 ILO (2020) [ILO and Jordan's TVSDC collaborate to re-engineer core services for better quality](#)

78 Brown, R.A., Constant, L., Glick, P., and Grant, A.K. (2014) [Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment](#)

## 3.2.1 Addressing the skills mismatch: WFP's role

The skills that young people are provided with through school and vocational training are poorly aligned with the needs of employers in Jordan. This results from both misguided youth preferences and limitations in the actual composition and structure of training. WFP can help address this mismatch by shifting its programmes towards areas where employment needs and youth interests coincide, such as in innovative agricultural technology and value-added activities. Involving young men and women in conducting value chain and job market assessments will help them understand the specific challenges they face in finding meaningful work, and the options for overcoming them. These could be based around FAO's gender-sensitive value chain assessment guidelines, which will help identify opportunities for youth in different value chains.<sup>79</sup>

Interviewees indicated an interest in programmes that provide training in more modern methods of agricultural production. WFP is well-versed in the use of vertical gardening and hydroponics for producing vegetables and animal fodder; interviewees were interested in undertaking training that looks along these value chains to help them understand the wider potential for employment in new forms of agribusiness. Some expressed a concern for sustainability, and support for programmes that involved sustainable foods or that supported conservation of water and arable land. They also highlighted programmes supporting food processing and other value addition activities. While shifting public perceptions of vocational work may be a more challenging longer-term aspiration, WFP can use these insights to examine opportunities for investing in areas of education and training that are of particular interest to young people, such as urban agricultural and environmental sustainability. Young refugees also indicated interest in the intersection of technology and employment around IT skills, solar panels and engineering, and mobile phone technology. Sector-specific programming could also include a more expansive view of the skills and capabilities necessary to maximise success in entrepreneurship: not only technical skills training, but also soft skills and sector-specific mentorship or support for networking and community engagement. Expanding work on rooftop, urban agriculture might also ease constraints for women with care responsibilities,

as agricultural activities can be brought closer to home. WFP is already supporting this sort of innovative agriculture, which indicates a promising premise for expanding support in these areas – though as outlined above, rigorous job market assessments will need to be conducted to understand where the real possibilities lie for sustainable employment.

Other opportunities for partnership include:

- IFAD, which provides microfinance to support small-scale agricultural technology projects and hydroponic farming.
- USAID, which supports a hub-based financing model as well as training for young entrepreneurs.
- UNICEF, which works with refugees on projects that include skills training around solar engineering and community engagement.
- UN Women and the Ministry of Labour, which provide vocational training for women. The Jordanian National Commission for Women is another organisation working in this area.
- IRADA, INJAZ and Johud, which support skills training and provide interest-free loans.
- Government ministries, such as the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Digital Entrepreneurship. Together with the World Bank and ILO, WFP could support government to improve national curricula to better meet market needs.

The World Bank highlights that Jordan's high unemployment is not only a supply-side issue: Jordan does not suffer from a lack of appropriately educated workers. Instead, the main problem is one of demand: the investment and regulatory environment limits the ability of the private sector to create sufficient good-quality jobs, and legal impediments to work make it hard for women, young people and refugees to find suitable employment outside the informal sector.<sup>80</sup> While job market assessments will be important to ensure that WFP's support is aligned with likely job opportunities, these demand-side restrictions are more appropriately addressed by others such as the World Bank and ILO. WFP can engage with them as part of job market assessments, to understand which sectors are likely to offer fruitful employment opportunities for young people. However, a potentially more significant role for WFP would be raising the voices of young refugees in debates about their search for work, using that to help reduce their legal obstacles to employment.

79 FAO (2018) [Developing gender-sensitive value chains: a practitioner's guide](#)  
80 Winkler, H. and Gonzalez, A. (2019) [Jobs Diagnostic Jordan](#)

## 3.3 Cause 3: Exclusion

Forms of exclusion within the labour market in Jordan are multidimensional, affecting young refugees, young people from low-income backgrounds, and young women.

As noted above, many young refugees are excluded from job markets because of their status, with limited legal or practical access to employment opportunities and a lack of choice as to the conditions in which they work. Some interviewees noted that extended to children born to non-Jordanian fathers, as children retain their father's nationality.

High upfront financial costs are often cited as a barrier to youth participation in the labour market. In the agricultural sector, for example, interviewees identified farming as having high associated costs, tied to agricultural tools, preparation of land and production. Lack of access to finance is commonly cited by micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises as a major business and employment constraint.<sup>81</sup> In Jordan, this also means ensuring that access to finance is provided interest-free and therefore sharia-compliant. This was considered important for interviewees, and in general it was noted that Islamic banking provision in Jordan needs to be expanded. And there are few cooperatives or youth associations to provide community-based lending, especially in rural areas. Financial literacy is relatively low, with many young people facing fears around their ability to pay off loans and the penalties they would incur as a result: one focus group mentioned a fear of being imprisoned. Others indicated that insufficient base salaries or lack of access to a financial guarantor limited their access to financial services.

Third, distance and transportation costs can be a barrier to labour market participation. Challenges include not just the high cost of public transport, but disorganised and unreliable services, and limited hours of service.<sup>82</sup> Employers also consider public transport costs too high for their workers and have expressed willingness to subsidise them (through providing transport or carpooling) if their costs can be matched by the government. High transport costs and long commutes can also lead to low retention: low salaries that do not cover living costs were cited by 66% of young people as a reason for leaving work or rejecting employment opportunities.<sup>83</sup>

Youth focus groups and interviewees consistently mentioned transportation as a challenge, especially from rural or peri-urban areas to Amman, where most job opportunities exist. They highlighted that women face additional safety concerns on public transport. Related to the issue of safe, reliable and affordable transportation are high rental costs in Amman, and lack of internet in more remote, rural areas.<sup>84</sup> This has led to political pressure to raise the minimum wage to better align with the rising cost of living, especially as there is downward pressure on wages due to the large refugee population.

Finally, there are clear gendered dimensions to exclusion around labour market participation in Jordan. Although educational attainment for women has increased, this has not had much impact on labour market participation and wages. A university degree appears to be important but not sufficient for women's employment, with most women (employed and unemployed) being university graduates.<sup>85</sup> Labour market participation is also lower for married women compared to single women, and women typically get married at a young age.<sup>86</sup> In addition to lower levels of labour market participation, employment opportunities are stratified according to gender: women tend to work in education and health services. Women also engage in post-harvest activities such as yoghurt-, cheese- or ghee-making. Although some interviewees identified an interest in developing IT skills among young women, there was less interest in IT-related employment opportunities.

81 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (2015) [Research Study on Strengthening Small and Medium Enterprises in Jordan](#)

82 IYF Global (2014) [Transport Services & Their Impact on Youth Employment & Development in Jordan](#).

83 IYF Global (2014) [Transport Services & Their Impact on Youth Employment & Development in Jordan](#).

84 WUSC (2019) [Women Transporting into Employment: Challenges and Opportunities in the Jordanian Transportation Sector](#).

85 Barucci, V. and Mryyan, N. (2014) Ibid.

86 World Bank (2018) [Understanding How Gender Norms in MNA Impact Female Employment Outcomes](#).

## HARD AND SOFT CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN'S LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

Barriers to women's labour market participation can be separated into 'hard' and 'soft' constraints. Soft constraints include social, cultural and religious norms<sup>87</sup> which discriminate against women. Interviewees identified multiple factors as playing a role, including societal pressures and aspirations of women around education and employment, and a limited view by women of their career choices, educational outcomes and skills. Culturally, there is a view that women are limited in where they should work and the type of work they can do, among both Jordanian and refugee communities. Women's employment is mainly considered appropriate in the public sector, particularly in education, and men's employment is prioritised over women's, as men are generally considered the main breadwinner.<sup>88</sup>

Discriminatory gender roles also prevent women from accessing secondary education and the workforce due to their household and caring responsibilities. Vocational skills training and strengthening young women's soft skills do not necessarily help them find employment.<sup>89</sup> And, regardless of skill levels, discrimination at the workplace includes a general preference for male employees, with most Jordanian men disapproving of married women working in mixed-gender workplaces and returning from work after 5pm.<sup>90</sup> Young women struggle to access and participate in male-dominated networks.<sup>91</sup>

The public sector is generally considered favourable for women because it provides more flexible working conditions. This allows women to take care of domestic duties, which private employers consider a burden. Labour laws typically require employers to bear the costs of childcare, including maternity leave, which discourages them from hiring women.<sup>92</sup> A lack of childcare facilities at the workplace, inflexible working hours, concerns about physical safety and lack of transport provision represent significant barriers for women entering work in the private sector.<sup>93</sup> The government's shift towards private sector-driven growth has therefore been detrimental to women's employment prospects (ibid.).

Some NGOs have pushed for home-based businesses as a way to expand economic opportunities for women. Fostering young women's entrepreneurship through the digital labour market could help young women overcome some of the physical barriers to accessing work, such as safe transportation, dress and childcare responsibilities.<sup>94</sup> For example, the World Bank's Youth, Technology and Jobs project provides professional skills to 30,000 young people and supports access to the market for young entrepreneurs, including access to freelance platforms.<sup>95</sup> However, to have a wider impact on job creation, programmes that support this sort of entrepreneurship need to be accompanied by complementary interventions that ensure that these enterprises do not operate in isolation, but as part of wider national and international value chains.

Furthermore, while young people have high computer literacy, there is a significant gender digital divide, driven by gender norms, wherein men do not feel comfortable with women using technology.<sup>96,97</sup> Fostering youth employment in Jordan through digital technologies will need to account for gender norms during the design phase of interventions.

87 World Bank (2018) Ibid.

88 Brown, R.A., Constant, L., Glick, P., and Grant, A.K. (2014) [Youth in Jordan: Transitions from Education to Employment](#).

89 Groh, M., Krishnan, N., McKenzie, D., and Vishwanath, T. (2016) 'The impact of soft skills training on female youth employment: evidence from a randomized experiment in Jordan'. IZA Journal of Labor & Development, 5(9).

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### 3.3.1 Addressing exclusion from job markets: WFP's role

Addressing youth exclusion from the labour force in a meaningful way requires attention to the sustainability and long-term effects of WFP programmes. This involves the design of programmes that can become a foundation for sustainable career pathways in the longer term.

Recent labour market challenges, including those linked to Covid-19, indicate the importance of programmes that support the agility, adaptability and resilience of youth entrepreneurs. There are trade-offs around the impact of different programmes: grants to train young people may help them enter employment, but may also compromise retention rates. There is also an opportunity to invest in programmes that help build the evidence base around achieving longer-term labour market participation. Studies by organisations like RYSE mentioned above may be a good starting point.

Youth focus groups consistently raised issues around salaries, transport and housing costs and the length of commuting as barriers to work. This suggests an opportunity to work with partners to design programmes that begin by assessing the terms of decent work and livelihood costs for young people, specifically women with childcare responsibilities and young families. Designing programmes to help mitigate these costs could help sustain youth participation by contributing to a sense that work is valued and beneficial in achieving a good basic standard of living. Access to interest-free lending, also mentioned as a barrier, could be addressed by partnering with organisations already offering interest-free loans and by setting up youth savings and loan associations, as has been done in other countries. This could be combined with group-based training and sensitisation efforts, such as around women's participation in the labour force.

However, issues such as the lack of infrastructure, insufficient wages or legal barriers to employment can only be addressed at policy level. Policy dialogue between the Jordanian government, WFP, UN Agencies and International Finance Institutions (IFIs) could be strengthened to facilitate the reforms and investments needed to overcome young people's labour market exclusion. ILO is active in supporting and encouraging better working conditions, while IFIs and private investors could help address some of the country's infrastructure challenges. Technical assistance may also be needed to support government ministries in the design of tax subsidies and other incentives for companies to offer extra-statutory benefits that help retain skilled employees, such as healthcare insurance or childcare.

These are all partnerships that WFP could seek to adopt a more holistic approach to tackling youth unemployment: its close relationships with young, food insecure people, particularly young refugees, means it is well placed to raise their voices in policy debates.

Addressing exclusion requires attention to barriers facing specific groups, with both women and refugees confronting particular challenges and barriers within the labour force. As notes above, women face both hard and soft barriers to participation, and require a mix of support: to help address immediate barriers such as childcare provision, longer-term efforts around gender sensitisation, and support to help them assess the opportunities provided by home-based or remote (digital) working in the form of flexible and freelance work. While young Jordanian women are generally well educated, they tend to stigmatise vocational skills training. Investing in specialised skills useful for home-based working, such as digital literacy, could remove some of the barriers to women's economic and social empowerment. While refugee women tend to be less well educated and have less access to mobile phones, this should not exclude them from digital skills training, as WFP's successful EMPACT programme has shown. Finally, safety on transport and within the workplace remains a significant barrier to women's participation in the labour force. Work on gender norms with both young men and young women could be expanded to the employers WFP works with, to improve young women's access to dignified and fulfilling work.



## 4. Conclusions

WFP's prominent role in Jordan, including many programmes that already target human capital development among young people, mean that it can play a significant role in addressing the youth employment challenge in the country. Programming can be adapted in three ways: to address the multidimensional challenges facing young people seeking education, training and employment; making young people a more inclusive part of WFP's processes; and expanding programme support to create a more enabling environment.

There are several ways WFP programming can better support the challenges young people face in accessing education, training and employment. They include a more holistic and longer-term approach to supporting entrepreneurship, supporting the development of soft skills and confidence among young people, and strengthening home-based business support and vocational training:

**I) WFP can provide more holistic and longer-term support for entrepreneurship**, and thereby support job creation. Successful microenterprises and businesses require a mix of support at the start-up phase, including mentorship and confidence-building, specialised business training, financial access, advisory services and equipment support. Although some entrepreneurship programmes in Jordan provide such comprehensive packages, a large number tend to lack specific and important components for young people to be able to launch their businesses. A good example for WFP to work from is the SMEs Promotion Programme in Jordan, which provides young people with support for technical skills development, entrepreneurship training, business development services and microfinancing. The programme also provides learning and networking opportunities, including the sharing of alumni experiences. One of the main ways in which WFP can support successful entrepreneurship in Jordan is by building networks for young people – building student networks after they complete vocational training, so they can continue to support one another through alumni networking, mentoring, market access and job search support services.

**II)** Linked to this, WFP can play a stronger role in developing the **soft skills and confidence** of young people. Ongoing experiences of unemployment and lack of opportunities have underpinned a general sense of hopelessness, boredom and frustration among young people, raised in multiple focus group discussions and

the wider literature. With this, there has emerged a need in Jordan for mentorship and soft skills training, to help build up youth confidence after periods of idleness. WFP programming could encourage youth innovation, engage their creativity, and provide hope for more sustained career pathways.

**III) WFP can strengthen home-based business support**, which provides an opportunity to bring work opportunities to two key groups: women, especially with caring responsibilities, and refugees. For refugees, the informal sector remains a prominent aspect of Jordan's economy. Alongside this, the conditions and pay for refugees in work remain challenging. Home-based businesses can be supported as a way to help formalise and regulate the informal sector. The Covid-19 crisis may provide an opportunity for greater acceptance of home working. WFP can expand its efforts as part of the Innovation Unit and food-for-training initiatives to enhance access to technology, including e-commerce and e-marketing training. However, home-based businesses continue to face constraints, especially around network infrastructure access outside of Amman, which WFP needs to partner with other institutions to overcome (see below).

**IV)** Finally, **WFP can help strengthen vocational training, especially by reducing the stigma around jobs and training demanded by the market**. There is a mismatch in youth interests and skills training, and areas of opportunity for productive employment in Jordan. Vocational training uptake and provision remains mismatched with employer needs, despite being a key area for NGO and INGO attention. WFP can canvass market needs by commissioning detailed market assessments, and together with partners help to provide more specific training. Key partners for achieving this are the NAJMAH and DAA, which participate in WFP's asset creation programmes and partner with businesses for on-the-job training and skills development.

Crucially, WFP can also address the negative perceptions linked to TVET and vocational work among young people. This includes communicating with young people to convince them of the value of certain jobs, as well as expanding support for training and skills that are useful for future employment, as well as being of interest to young people. There is scope to explore areas of IT-related training of interest to youth, including building on work by the Ministry of Digital Innovation & Entrepreneurship and the Crown Prince Foundation's

One Million Jordanian Coders initiative. Teaching young people how to adopt sustainable agricultural practices and increase resilience to the effects of climate change are also promising areas.

Second, young people could be involved early on in programme design to increase buy-in and interest. **Active youth participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of WFP programmes** could help align them with young people's interests and priorities. The Country Office Incentive Based Volunteering Initiative, which engages refugees in its programming, offers a good example of this.

Third, WFP can support a more enabling environment for young people's education, training and employment in Jordan. This can be done by partnering with government ministries and international organisations working on relevant policies and projects. For example, WFP can support **networking of relevant stakeholders** to encourage further development of a policy framework for youth employment and engagement opportunities, especially in the agri-food sector. This could leverage WFP's specific knowledge of agri-food value chain development, and help to build a community of supportive stakeholders to encourage the creation of high-productivity jobs in the sector. Along with local and regional governments, WFP could work with the Ministry of Agriculture to build facilities to store, market and distribute food and food products. Similar efforts could be launched for other promising sectors, such as eco- or adventure-tourism around the country's heritage sites.

WFP can also support a more enabling environment for young people's employment by addressing challenges related to **digital infrastructure and vocational training**. Along with efforts to align its own education and training, WFP can coordinate with private- and state-led vocational training institutions to help provide a more robust and fit-for-purpose training environment. This would involve improving specific curricula and courses. Supporting the development of digital infrastructure, especially in parts of the country with poor transportation links, will not only involve lobbying government ministries, but also bringing international or private financial institutions to the table.

Finally, WFP needs to ensure that any programmes it supports provide **sufficient and stable incomes** that meet the rising cost of living for young people. All youth focus groups indicated that salaries were insufficient to support living costs, including transportation and rent. Programmes need to recognise this by, for example, including subsidies for basic expenses related to work. However, this is a tricky area that may lead to other challenges. For example, evidence on wage subsidies in Jordan have not been found to result in long-term employment, especially for women: while wage subsidies can increase hires, evidence suggests that this is only for the period during which the subsidy is provided.<sup>98</sup> In areas outside Amman where wages are lower and employment options even fewer, wage subsidies can have a more significant and longer-lasting effect.<sup>99</sup> This indicates an opportunity to support youth employment by researching decent work conditions and livelihood requirements, and considering how support for workers within (e.g. job security, social protection) and outside of work (e.g. transport subsidies) might improve living conditions and a sense of value.

WFP has many opportunities to address the problem of youth unemployment in Jordan's highly urbanised context, and to boost employment among the high numbers of young refugees. Given the links between youth unemployment and food insecurity, its voice has weight in debates about employment rights for refugees, the types of human capital young Jordanians and refugees need to find decent and fulfilling work and the types of support young women need to become economically active within conservative religious and social norms. Taking a more purposive approach to assessing future job markets within agri-food value chains, extending work on gender norms to workplaces and linking with other partners to provide broad support for entrepreneurship would help young people find their voice and express their needs within these debates.

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# Acronyms

<b>ALMP</b>	Active Labour Market Programme
<b>CSP</b>	Country Strategic Plan
<b>DAA</b>	Dar Abu Abdullah
<b>EMPACT</b>	
<b>E-TVET</b>	Employment, Technical and Vocational Training
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GIZ</b>	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>IDI</b>	In-depth interview
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>IFI</b>	International Financial Institution
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IRADA</b>	The Enhanced Productivity Centers Program
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>MOU</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NAJMAH</b>	National Alliance Against Hunger and Nutrition
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution
<b>NEET</b>	Not in employment, education or training
<b>NES</b>	National Employment Strategy
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organisation
<b>RYSE</b>	Resilient Youth Socially and Economically Empowered
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nation's Children Fund
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VTC</b>	Vocational Training Centres
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

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EMERGENCIES AND TRANSITIONS UNIT (PRO-P)**

**World Food Programme**

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,  
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

**[wfp.org](https://www.wfp.org)**