



Generations For Peace and ARK: Research on fostering youth engagement and capacity building

Research Summary

The research was conducted from 3 to 9 January 2023, and the research summary was used for concept note that was submitted by ARK and Generations For Peace to the USAID's Youth GROW Notice of Funding Opportunity in January 2023.

“Acquiring a degree does not grant the right to employment.”¹

For decades, the social contract between Arab citizens and their states was based on the understanding that families educate their sons and daughters, and the government offers employment. For Arab families, they have done their side of the bargain, but [governments kept gradually failing in their commitment](#). This failure is destabilizing the relation between the state and citizens, and in Jordan has reached an extent to which [“going to college penalizes Jordanians because it reduces their likelihood of finding work commensurate with their skill level”](#).

In recognition of the need to [shift](#) this existing social contract through which the state structures offer employment and social security, the Jordanian government has pushed for broader role of the private sector in which the latter should shoulder this responsibility. Supporting this shift is integral not only to the country’s economic prosperity but also to its political stability. However, the regional political climate, fiscal challenges, rising energy prices, water shortages, and COVID-19 have all contributed to a decade of economic decline in Jordan.

To assist the national effort towards more robust youth employment, and to influence a shift away from employment as a right, ARK and Generations For Peace (GFP) are exploring how their work can contribute to vocational and technology-related training schemes in Jordan. Based on the findings of this research, the following aspects might be considered, as follows:

1. Integrating work placements/apprenticeships as part of formal training programs
2. Introducing cooperation towards international exchange experiences
3. Addressing needs for financial support or in-kind support to allow students to afford licensing exams
4. Working with government entities to address transportation concerns
5. Campaigning to address the stereotype of vocational training as the option for the poor, which in turn further [reinforces the stigma](#)
6. Introducing role models and success stories of vocationally trained Jordanians
7. Investing in school programs that integrate elements from Steiner/Waldorf school model, focusing on cultivating areas of excellence for students instead of mainstream education for all in traditional subjects.

“I was taking hairdressing courses since I was 14 at the Capital Youth Centre [مركز شباب العاصمة](#). I could not continue my school education for family reasons, but why should I? I can work as a hairdresser!” A male hairdresser (20 y/o; Amman)

The suggested focus on vocational training is different to other actors who have been investing in gig economy in Jordan. Youth consulted for this research expressed desire for both vocational and technology/digital skills. Mercy Corps’ [Masaruna](#) Program and Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship’s [National Youth, Technology & Jobs Project](#) have introduced programs aimed at training Jordanians and Syrian refugee youth. Therefore, one of the intervention areas might include introducing innovative vocational approaches in green economy and emerging technologies.

Across Jordan, there is an agreement among youth that there is no shortage in training opportunities. Instead, youth desire a coordinated and focused effort to offer trainings on skills

¹ A female university student and copyrihter (20 y/o; Jerash).

needed in the market, or skills that enable them to start their own ventures in non-traditional and informal employment options.

One key challenge in the necessary paradigm shift pertains to the scope of youth employment, where the thinking is geared towards employment within Jordan. However, design of new programs should be geared towards skills sought-after externally, as argued by one recent study.² The expansion in WFH and technology-dependent employment opens the job market beyond Jordan.

This summary note is based on group interviews conducted in the first week of January 2023 with 48 youth (24 F; 24 M) from all 12 Jordanian governorates. Participants ranged from 15-29 y/o (21 participants between 15-18 y/o), and included 10 vocationally trained youth, and at least 17 from poverty pockets/ remote areas, with 24 of participants who had no prior engagements with GFP or other NGOs.

Question 1:

Take a few minutes to identify a successful young person currently living in your community: someone who you consider to be a role model, be it, for example, as an individual with successful career or someone who have contributed to youth development in your community or governorate.

Why do you think this role model has succeeded? What personal, social, educational, and/or institutional factors have led to their success?

General note:

For research respondents, the role models share two criteria: a volunteerism experience and serving/ helping other youth. Jordanian youth identified role models who started their experiences as volunteers regardless of the sector: in almost 65% of all answers, role models started as volunteers. Volunteering granted role models practical experiences and wider access to communities they serve. Participants viewed helping other youth as a crucial trait for role models, whether as local government officials, business owners, or CSO actors. Several references the respondents made to human development coaches also fall under this category. Youth viewed these individuals as crucial assets helping them using online free inspirational videos to find one's skills and craft one's business or income opportunities.

Obtaining a degree does not stand out in youth's perceptions of role models. In fact, three specific examples of role models refer to school dropouts who later succeeded in business, sports, or coaching.

Only two prominent business figures were mentioned by participants: Talal Abu Ghazaleh and Zeyad Manaseer as self-made success stories.

Geographic variations:

- Ma'an stands out because all role models started as volunteers. Volunteerism is one major entry point to success.
- In Karak, 75% of role models are business owners in different sectors: water purifying, agriculture, and traditional coffee houses.
- In Jerash, successful role models mainly include public office holders like the governor and municipality officials.
- A participant from Mafraq defined success as the individual's ability to understand community needs and develop one's skills to meet these needs: an understanding defined by this woman's experience as a refugee in a refugee host community.

² O'Brien et. al. "What Will it Takes for Jordan to Grow?" Faculty Working Paper Series No. 411, Centre for International Development at Harvard University, March 2022.

Question 2:

Please think of available educational (academic and vocational) opportunities in your governorate. How can these be improved? You can think of improving existing opportunities; improving access to these opportunities; or you can identify (thematic) gaps and needs that, if/once fulfilled, can improve these opportunities.

General note on available opportunities:

Youth referred to three categories of opportunities: specialized centers within universities; national NGOs; and government entities that offer vocational training opportunities. National NGOs are praised in remote areas especially for offering training to women. Examples include Vocational Training Corporation; Princess Basma Centers; Jordan River Foundation; Aqaba Industrial City; and Queen Rania Centre at Yarmouk University.

Geographic variations:

- No major geographic variation in types of available opportunities except for the mention of Tafileh and Aqaba Technical Universities

General note on required improvement/ existing gaps:

Public and the NGO sector offer many training courses that attract youth. However, these opportunities do not always match the new technology-based skills needed for the changing market in Jordan. What contributes to this abundance of trained but unemployed youth is the general lack of transparency from employers and the business sector on required skills in the job market. Youth eager to get trained to enhance their employability are not sure which skills are needed.

English language education remains a priority for most youth, including those in remote areas. Interest in language skills in tourist areas like Jerash, Karak, Tafileh, and Aqaba is not being met at the required levels in governorates.

For those with interest in vocational training, four concerns stand out:

1. The shortage of affordable and safe public transportation, particularly for women. Vocational Training Corporation Centers are generally located far from city centers.
2. Inability to afford buying tools and materials needed for the licensing test امتحان المزاولة. In most cases, vocationally trained youth cannot afford the costs, and do not graduate as a result.
3. Employers require experience. The Vocational Training Corporation Centers do not offer training placements, and the graduates on their own have limited abilities in securing practical training that gives them the required experience.³
4. The skills offered at vocational training centers are traditional, for example, sewing and catering for women or carpentry for men, and the technology-related skills are not being introduced or offered. This is more noticeable in governorates located further away from Amman.

Those who have a skill that can be turned into a profession such as photography for example, cannot afford to buy the equipment, and have expressed concerns about the Ministry of Labor's new rules regarding registering with the Ministry (توثيق في الوزارة).

Shortage in trainings on digital or technology-related skills that enable youth to work independently and online in casual and informal employment was commented on by respondents: "There are no training opportunities on digital painting or NFTs although these are financially profitable skills."

³ One participant commented that Luminous College in Amman is one rare example of an educational entity that offers work placements in coordination with the business sector.

With regards to schools and education, several participants from different regions of Jordan addressed existing needs. Most notably a schoolteacher from a poverty pocket in Mafraq commented on inadequate IT infrastructure in schools or quality internet connectivity. Respondents' suggestions include introducing education through play programs in schools; offering training by NGO trainers/staff in schools on critical soft skills needed in the job market; offering ToTs for schoolteachers to build their capacity in communicating soft skills needed by students; etc. In Ma'an, participants complained about the traditional focus on rote learning/recitation methods in schools; for example, one of the ways that could address this would be to explore, through cooperation with governmental structures, the introduction of models such as Steiner/Waldorf schools.

Geographic variations:

- Vocationally trained women in Irbid, Tafleeh, and Mafraq particularly referred to the lack of public transport to vocational training centers that are located far from city centers. The cost and safety of available options limit their opportunities.
- Also voiced was a noticeable gap in training/education for the agricultural sector, with participants in Irbid and Karak commenting on shortage of trainings to equip youth in modern technologies in this sector. Respondents believe that more efforts are also needed to steer youth employment towards agriculture.
- In Jerash, respondents noted the lack of investment, systematically and professionally, in arts and crafts workshops as part of the historical heritage and income-generating opportunities. The respondents believe there is a need to first invest in professional trainings in crafts and then in establishing a main crafts market in the area.
- Participants in Karak voiced the need for courses in servicing/mechanics for hybrid cars. One female participant called for addressing gender roles in creative arts, with the example of courses in filmmaking for women which are still considered by families to be exclusively for males.
- A participant in Zarqa referred to recycling skills for agricultural purposes.
- In Madaba, younger youth commented on shortage of specialized professional sport academies.
- Participants in Ajloun, all 15-18 y/o, expressed interest in 3D printing and its uses for business ideas, and commented on shortage of vocational training options in the governorate.
- In Ajloun, participants referred to social perceptions as a barrier for innovation in career options, with, for example, medical degrees still being seen and promoted as a preferred career option. A female participant referred to families generally lacking understanding of the impact the volunteering might have on personal and career development.
- Ajloun participants, all 15-18 y/o, expressed frustration with traditional teaching methods and teachers' lack of understanding of modern technologies.
- Participants in Salt referred to various corruption concerns. They prefer the private sector as a partner for youth initiatives, to avoid nepotism and corruption which is present when the public sector is managing a youth support initiative or program. But they also referred to illegal practices whereby the salary mentioned in an employment contract in the private sector is not paid fully to the employees.

Evidence from other studies:

Research [findings](#) on human security pointed to the stigma of vocational training; the perception that vocational training is encouraged only among poorer segments of population.

O'Brien et. al. USAID study points to the need to focus on green growth, including agribusiness and renewable energy as future areas of economic growth for Jordan.⁴ With the existing youth interest and potential, efforts can focus on skill development to enable this growth.

⁴ O'Brien et. al. "What Will it Takes for Jordan to Grow?" Faculty Working Paper Series No. 411, Centre for International Development at Harvard University, March 2022.

FES Jordan have published a [study](#) on women and public transportation in Jordan, and although the study does not specifically address access to vocational training locations, it does highlight the key concerns.

Question 3:

Which institutions are working to enable youth success and leadership in economic, entrepreneurial, creative, and/or political spheres? Please think of institutions on the level of ministries and national government, local government and municipalities, NGOs, or private sector/entities.

General notes:

Youth centers which are run and managed by Ministry of Youth (MoY) are considered as important assets for youth. This deserves attention since around 25% of participants in this research had no prior engagement with CSOs or NGOs. MoY is therefore an actor with wider reach to youth, with the MoY centers having more prominence in governorates like Tafileh and Ma'an where NGOs have limited reach.

Princess Basma Centers and Jordan River Foundation seem to have better reach in remote areas within governorates, making them the go-to option, or perhaps the only available option, for youth.

Participants in city centers referred to specialized centers within universities that offer courses to the public.

Institutional enablers of youth are diverse, and include government actors (MoY and MoC), INGOs (GIZ, Action Aid, IRC, INJAZ), national NGOs (Jordan River Foundation, Princes Basma Centres), CSOs, All Jordan Youth Commission, and Crown Prince Foundation.

Across Jordan, all research participants agreed that there is no need for more institutions that offer training opportunities, or a quantitative increase in courses already offered. Instead, youth desire a coordinated and focused efforts through which the market-required skills-building trainings will be offered, or for trainings that will enable youth to start their own ventures.

Geographic variations:

- Worth mentioning (by respondents) were the Entrepreneurship and Creativity Centre at Mutah University جامعة مؤتة - مركز الريادة والابتكار, and the Consultation Studies and Training Centre at Tafileh Technical University.
- Enablers in Ma'an are mainly CSOs and MoY Youth Center. Unlike other governorates, participants did not mention the INGOs or university-based centers, which further confirms the isolation of Ma'an from national dynamics in Jordan.
- In Aqaba, a specific mention was made of Orange and I-Park business incubators.
- In Ma'an and Zarqa, participants expressed frustration with the government in relation to false promises regarding the employment plans for youth (Ma'an), and the local government's destruction of street stalls/goods بسطات of youth trying to make an income this way.

Question 4:

What form of youth self-organized or collective action will help advance youth economic participation? We are speaking here of youth action which should not be seen as confrontational with/towards the government or security actors. Instead, it should encourage institutional actors to support youth leadership and development.

General notes:

Three categories of suggestions were put forward by youth. The first category of needs relates to the availability of transparent information in different areas. Most youth commented on absent data from employers, whether public or private, on needed skills in the market. Youth acquire trainings they deem helpful, but this is not backed by evidence from the job market. For example, there seems to be a need knowledge sharing on main projects in each governorate and skills

needed for supporting services that build on the existing economic activities in a governorate.⁵ Information is also needed about sectors in governorates that attract migrant workers so that local youth can invest in needed skills to later replace migrant workers. Finally, there is the information shortage on unemployment by gender and education level per governorate. Again, transparent data will help clarify viable options for youth, and business/education options that are in demand.

There also seems to be a shortage of information on the potential self-employment options youth can tap into. Traditional education has not encouraged creative thinking in general, and the creative thinking around one's own employability or profitable venture in particular. For example, carrying out campaigns that introduce innovative business ventures for the region and the Global South to widen younger youth's horizon about available options was considered as useful. The areas mentioned by respondents range from sport and arts to IT and very specific professions such as underwater welding, etc.

Second, youth in different governorates expressed the need for business incubators specialized in vocational businesses. For example, a vocational student (17 y/o; Tafileh) expressed the need for business incubators for projects related to solar energy and wind power given this emerging activity in Tafileh. The business incubator can be established in cooperation between the Vocational Training Center in the governorate and Tafileh Technical University. A similar idea was expressed for agricultural businesses and hybrid car mechanics.

The interest in business incubators and in youth initiatives stems from the interest in developing skills that allow youth to compete in the market but that also develop problem-solving skills and address creativity needs.

Third, as mentioned earlier, for most of the youth participants the volunteering experience is associated with success. Some participants suggested investing in coordinated volunteering experiences for youth in cooperation with local municipalities in which youth can help serve their local communities but under a supervised and coordinated effort by municipalities, therefore enabling collective volunteerism to better serve communities. Although the idea was not elaborated more by participants, it seems that exploring potential for initiatives that draw youth attention to local needs, enabling them in turn to design economic solutions to existing needs, could respond to expressed needs of youth.

Geographic variations:

- In Aqaba, respondents noted that there are vacant lands on the peripheries of governorate that are owned by Aqaba Private Economic Authority, and can be given to youth to start their projects in exchange for owning these lands in the future *انتفاع بقصد التملك لاحقاً*.
- A hospitality student in Aqaba noted that, "many businesses and companies can be encouraged to activate or introduce social responsibility programs to start tourism-related ventures".

Evidence from other studies:

The need for transparent information is echoed by USAID study on information asymmetries and coordination between the public and private sectors to enable the private sector to catalyze innovation.⁶ Transparent data on skills in demand and mapping of internal and external economic opportunities go hand in hand. The youth's demand for transparent information is perceived as a prerequisite before they invest time and resources in profitable skill development.

⁵ This is based on a need expressed by a female student (17 y/o; Tafileh)

⁶ O'Brien et. al. "What Will it Takes for Jordan to Grow?" Faculty Working Paper Series No. 411, Centre for International Development at Harvard University, March 2022, p. 3.

Question 5:

In your opinion, what type of effort would work better to help youth employment and creativity: collective group effort on national/governorate level or individual initiatives? What you think should be the goal of the effort in each case? Through which mechanism?

General notes:

Almost 80% of youth participants prefer collective efforts on the governorate level given the variation in economic activities and employment needs in each governorate. There is also a concern that a collective national effort will lead to improvements only in the capital. Collective efforts offer a better opportunity for coordination between different ministries and youth centers to advance the skills needed in the market, and to coordinate between youth centers and potential employers in information sharing, exposing youth to emerging economic activities, etc.

Participants acknowledged the need for individual efforts in:

1. The use of technology and improved capacity to search for employment and build their own profile, including digitally.
2. Electing MPs capable of representing youth concerns in parliament.
3. Recognizing the changing nature of employment today, with youth often needing to have more than one source of income, one of which can be, for example, freelance or informal employment options and/or businesses.

Geographic variations:

- Participants in Mafraq placed more emphasis on individual efforts than collective ones. This is related to excessive competition in individual's access to training and support from CSOs and INGOs active in Mafraq as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis.
- Participants in Salt prefer partnerships or coordination with the private sector, and place more emphasis on individual effort and excellence to achieve career success.
- Amman participants prefer collective effort in the informal approach to encourage exchange of ideas and creativity of individuals, whereas Zarqa participants prefer collective action for its policy impact in influencing government decisions.
- Tafleeh participants called on the government to engage youth in decision making and policy making that addresses youth employment. Notably, compared to all other participants, Tafleeh youth singled out the government as the responsible entity to address employment needs either by cooperation between the Ministries of Public Works, Labor and Tourism, or through organizing volunteering activities for youth by Ministries of Youth, Culture and Education.
- Despite abundance in potential economic opportunities for youth in Aqaba, lack of coordination between businesses and the government, and among CSOs, is depriving the city from capitalizing on its potential, and is depriving youth from possible support to start their business ideas.