



Image: Andrew McConnell/Panos for DFID

Report

## Youth employment in the Levant: opportunities and challenges

Tuesday 16 – Thursday 18 October 2018 | WP1611

Held in Jordan

In partnership with:



In association with:



## Report

# Youth employment in the Levant: opportunities and challenges

Tuesday 16 – Thursday 18 October 2018 | WP1611

**In partnership with Mercy Corps, The Asfari Foundation and in association with the WANA Institute, Jordan, the Institute of Development Studies and the UK Department for International Development.**

### Introduction

'Youth employment in the Levant: opportunities and challenges' is part of the 'Wilton Park Youth Dialogues: powering the future' series which focuses on youth ambitions and opportunities concerning employment, education, security and peace. The series of events is being held from 2017- 2019 with a specific focus on Africa, the Middle East and Europe. The Dialogues aim to bring together young people, government and non-governmental organisations, civil society, academics, experts and educationalists, for honest, inclusive conversations about young people and their role in addressing local, regional and global challenges. They set out to provide a forum to discuss the effectiveness of existing policy approaches and promote exploration of what new approaches are needed.

This Wilton Park event was held in partnership with Mercy Corps, the Asfari Foundation, and in association with WANA, The West Asia North Africa Institute, (Jordan) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The event took place in Jordan from 16 to 18 October 2018 and centred on youth employment in the Levant, with a particular focus on Jordan. It aimed to hear from young people about credible solutions that might combat the crisis of youth employment and also to explore how governments need to respond in order to regard the youthful population of the region as an opportunity and not a threat.

The event gathered around 60 participants from governmental and non-governmental bodies, educationalists, young entrepreneurs, INGOs, economists, social workers and experts from 10 countries. The event covered the following:

- The dynamic nature of employment.
- Challenges and opportunities of preparing young people for the future.
- Sharing innovative solutions and best practices by hearing the success stories of young people.
- Discussion of barriers to success, what needs to change and next steps?

## Key points

This report summarises the debates at the conference and elaborates the key take-away points:

The world youth population, between the ages of 10-19, is 1.2 billion. The Levant region has the largest youth population in the world. It also has the highest youth unemployment rate. Youth unemployment is described as 'The Middle East's Ticking Time Bomb'; the latest Arab Youth Survey puts it at around 30% - more than double the global average. In the Levant, unemployment rates for young people can be even higher, with Jordan, for example, at 36% and female youth unemployment there rising to 41.8%.

With 60% of the population under thirty, the long-term stability, prosperity and peace of the Middle East have never depended so much on the region's young people. However, the lack of opportunities for young people is acute, with jobs failing to keep pace with the demographical boom across the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

"Young people in the Arab world have no sense of belonging"

- Youth unemployment and joblessness have led to waithood; delayed transitions to adulthood; lack of a sense of belonging to society; frustration; and in a minority of cases, radicalisation; and unrest.
- Barriers to employment often include; lack of sufficient jobs; legal issues (for refugees); social (discrimination against refugees) and a system based on connections rather than merit; and educational (not sufficient skills).
- The rapid advancement of technology in the 21st century is bringing political, cultural and economic challenges. This advancement will create - globally and regionally - many opportunities but it also risks leaving young people in the region ill equipped to compete globally, lacking the necessary skills.
- In order to remain competitive, young people must be prepared to learn, unlearn and relearn and there must be renewed focus on technical and soft skills and entrepreneurship. It is critical to focus on reforming education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, to improve the technical and basic skills of youth. Education reform and Vocational Education and Training must be a priority.
- In the Arab world more education does not lead to better prospects, with a mismatch between education and skills and the jobs available as well.
- Current educational systems in the Arab region are failing to produce engaged citizens who are prepared for the job market and ready to make an economic contribution. Youth need to be more engaged and involved in decision making on policies related to their future.
- There is a sense that the social contract which saw governments promise jobs and security in the region has been broken, with little indication of what might replace it.
- Many young people in the Arab world are finding their livelihood in the informal sector. It is crucial therefore to address the challenges and opportunities in the informal sector and recognise work (in particular that undertaken by women) in the informal economy.
- It is important to build trust between the government and the private sector. Creating an enabling environment for the private sector and the establishment of businesses is crucial.
- Donors and governments must recognise that there is a weak use of evidence

"We need to learn how to learn, unlearn and relearn"

"In this part of the world, accountability is lacking"

<sup>1</sup> According to the leading job website [www.Bayt.com](http://www.Bayt.com), there are more than eight million job seekers in the region and six million in Egypt alone. Undoubtedly, this creates tense competition for jobs; the average number of applications on Bayt.com is between 1000 and 2000 for one post.

“Listen to youth not only hear their voices”

“We are youth, and this is a demographic opportunity. The youth have to be acknowledged as partners, not as targets of focus groups. What they are asking for is equal access to everything. They don’t want an official with a checklist, they want to lead their opportunities and they want to have the liberty to do that”

in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and programs related to youth and employment.

- Women’s labour force participation has remained consistently and stubbornly low. It is key to target the structural, cultural and legal obstacles that prevent women from participating in the labour market.
- Current entrepreneurship programmes are not getting enough tangible results. Specialised sector specific entrepreneurship programmes could be a better answer. Entrepreneurship literacy for parents is essential to decrease or even remove cultural barriers about starting up a business. This is important in creating an entrepreneurship ecosystem that encourages youth to start businesses with parental support.
- Young people should be included in the entire cycle of projects (design, implementation and evaluation) with emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of youth interventions.
- There is a need for better labour market research to provide general information including data and statistics on sectors and employers. Researchers need to work with the private sector to develop such a platform and help identify jobs that are needed.
- All discussion on youth employment should tap into the latest research and thinking on what adolescent development means and in particular what that means for youth who have experienced trauma and who are, for example, refugees or migrants. A relatively new approach called Positive Youth Development (PYD) should be further explored recognising that adolescent youth are rapidly evolving socially, emotionally and physically and that multiple factors are influencing how they develop, thrive or struggle. Much like early childhood, the adolescent years are seen to be a critical period of brain and physical development that requires a different approach.

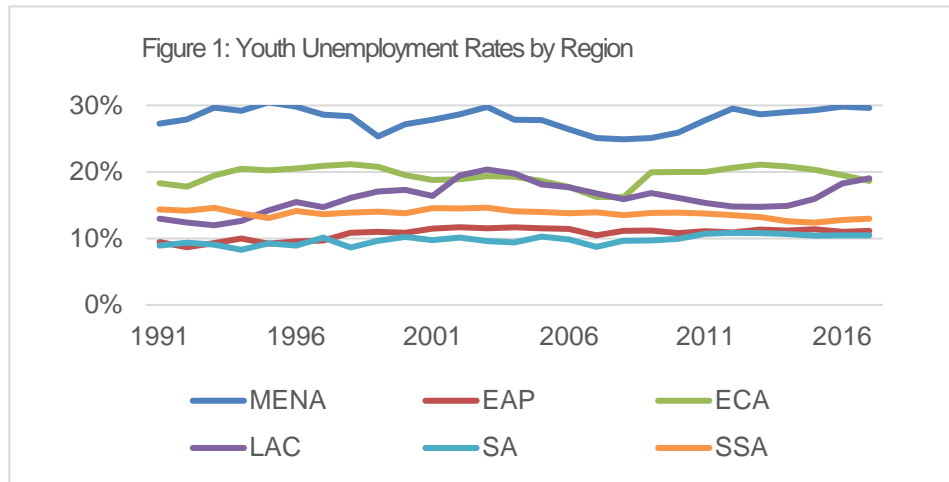
### Setting the context: Youth unemployment in the Levant

1. With over 1.8 billion youth between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world today, the Levant region has the **largest youth population** in history. Not only is there a large youth population in the Levant, but there is a **sizeable adolescent population** compared to other communities. This is larger than at any other point in the region’s history.<sup>2</sup>
2. With 60% of the population under thirty, the long-term stability, prosperity and peace of the Middle East have never depended so much on the region’s young people. However, **the lack of opportunities** for young people is acute, with jobs failing to keep pace with the demographical boom across the Middle East.<sup>3</sup>
3. **Youth unemployment** has been described as ‘The Middle East’s Ticking Time Bomb’ with the region having the **highest youth unemployment rate in the world** (see figure 1). Regionally close to 30%. Jordan (36%); Lebanon (26%); Palestine (43%); Syria (75%).

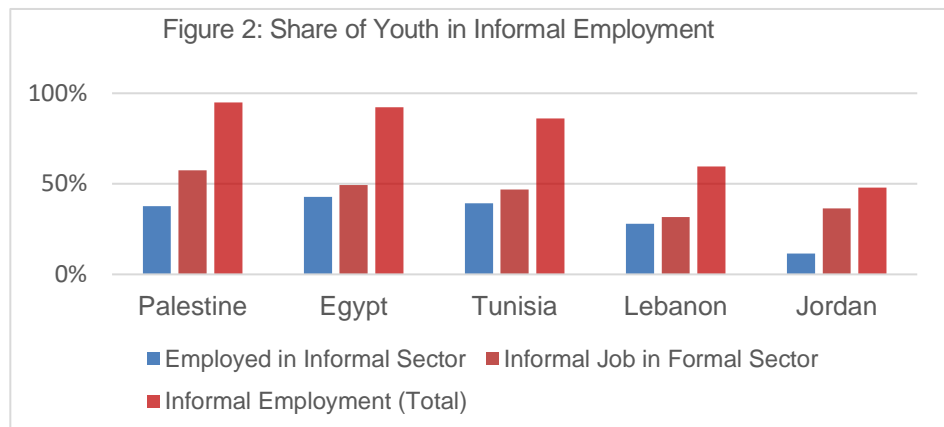
<sup>2</sup> See: David Beck and Paul Dyer, “Demographic Transitions across the Middle East and North Africa,” in Young Generation Awakening: Economics, Society, and Policy on the Eve of the Arab Spring, ed. Tarik Yousef and Edward Sayre (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> According to the leading job website www.Bayt.com, there are more than eight million job seekers in the region and six million in Egypt alone. Undoubtedly, this creates tense competition for jobs; the average number of applications on Bayt.com is between 1000 and 2000 for one post.

“I had the inspiration, the passion for starting something and helping people in particular in Gaza. I started because I had no option, I was thinking of immigrating after I finished my university. Now it’s different I have lots of options and I can help other people to find work too”



- Many young people are being **denied the opportunity** to contribute to their communities, in the region.
- The problem is not only unemployment but **underemployment** and a **lack of secure and decent work**.<sup>4</sup>
- The **informal economy**, where many young people find a livelihood, may not absorb all jobless youth and offers mainly insecure work. This is particularly challenging in agriculture, where work is highly unstable and low paid (See figure 2).



- There is a **disconnect between education and skills and the jobs** that are available now or in preparation for the changing world of work through mechanisation and automation. In many Arab countries, **more education does not lead to better prospects**.<sup>5</sup> There is a sense that the **social contract** which saw governments promise jobs and security in the region **has been broken**, with little indication of what might replace it.
- Youth also remain **excluded from governance**, with the ruling bargains that once worked to keep the region stable, proving highly resilient against arguably failing social contracts.
- This situation has been linked to **youth’s participation in the violent extremist groups** operating in the region. Against this backdrop, tackling youth unemployment is often seen to be crucial to building peace and prosperity across the Arab world.

“We have to provide a safe environment to allow education to happen”

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund “Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa” (April 2015). Available at: <https://www.imf.org/~media/Websites/IMF/imported-flagship-issues/external/pubs/ft/reo/2015/afr/eng/pdf/sreo0415pdf.ashx>

<sup>5</sup> In Egypt, for example, 34% of university graduates were unemployed in 2014, compared with 2% of those with less than a primary education.

“The turning point of the Arab spring is that the youth were able to say we want, and we don’t want that”

This perception is maintained despite cautionary evidence from the UN Study Report on Youth and Peace, ‘The Missing Peace’, which notes that the vast majority of young people are peaceful and do not engage in violent extremism. That Report finds little link between high unemployment rates and the numbers of young people who turn to violence.<sup>6</sup>

10. Unemployment rates have fostered a deep **sense of disappointment** among youth, frustrated social mobility upward and exacerbated feelings of marginalisation. The issue is further exacerbated by the fact that young people are often excluded from decision-making processes that affect their lives at community and national levels. Indeed, many young Middle Eastern youth are trapped in ‘waithood’, as the lack of employment forces young people to delay critical rites of passage, such as marriage, compounding their dependency on their parents.

### Imagining the future: the dynamic nature of employment

11. The rapid advancement of technology in the 21st century where computing power is doubling every 18 months, is bringing political, cultural and economic challenges. The rate of this change is such that many countries are uncertain how to respond. According to studies, two third of today’s children will be engaged in professions that haven’t yet been established. In other words, 65% of children enrolling at primary schools today will be working in jobs we don’t know yet.<sup>7</sup> This implies that our current education systems are irrelevant. Such a situation poses challenges and questions related to how to prepare our children for future jobs. How is the work landscape changing for young people? Where will the new jobs be and what will they look like? How will technology and emerging innovation impact the job market in the future? How do mind-sets need to change to embrace the future of work and prepare young people for the next wave of mechanisation and automation? What does a decent job for young people look like now and in the future? What should young people expect from their governments and from their education to equip them for the realities of work in the 21st century?
12. Throughout history and with **developments in technology** dating back to the Stone Age, people assumed that jobs would disappear, but while **old traditional jobs did vanish, new industries rose, and new jobs were created**, and this is a constant in history. Advances in technology unleash the creative side in humans, and with better use of technology we can have higher productivity and as a result more profits, investments and jobs.
13. With the advent of technology, existing products become less expensive, and new products are created, **developing whole new sectors**, such as the IT industry over the past 30 years.
14. High-end jobs (such as architects and surgeons) as well as low-end jobs are in demand. The jobs that are in the middle which have created today’s middle class are the ones that risk being squeezed since many of the skills they require risk being replaced by robots and computers. In the Arab world today, there is a need for **strong policy-making** backed by strong institutions to deal with change.
15. In spite of the unemployment realities, **some trends play a role** and will have an **impact on the labour market** and the suitability of the current skills for **future employment opportunities**:

<sup>6</sup> Graeme Simpson (2018) The missing peace: independent progress study on youth and peace and security. Available at <https://www.youth4peace.info/system/files/2018-10/youth-web-english.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See: Yuval Noah Harari (2018) 21 lessons for the 21st century. And World Economic Forum, January 2016 “The Future of Jobs Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution”. Available at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_FOJ\\_Executive\\_Summary\\_Jobs.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_FOJ_Executive_Summary_Jobs.pdf)

“What I like about technology is that it opens doors that were closed before”

16. **First, the advance of new technologies** has negative as well as positive impacts on employment and employability. **On the positive side**, it will create new jobs and huge opportunities enabled by these technologies. There is a strong demand, and the financial compensation of these jobs tend to be significantly higher than expected. **On the negative side**, it will turn the jobs that are based on basic pattern recognition obsolete, will render many skills non-useful for employment, and will lower wages. It is most likely that the overall impact advance of new technologies will be negative with only a small segment gaining benefit.
17. **Second, globalisation work mobility, and remote network telecommuting could further disadvantage young people in the Levant.** The globalised character of advanced communication technologies, as well as those technologies that digitize the delivery of work, entice lot of employers to access global talent outside the region - either due to cheaper rates or a higher calibre of skills - in areas like copywriting, translation, software development and design.
18. **In the context of the MENA region, globalisation work mobility, and remote network telecommuting, is a double-edged sword** as mobility requires work ethic skills that are often absent in the region including effective time management, effective communication, and excellent English language skills. **On the positive side**, the rise of freelance platforms will reward those who are prepared to learn such skills and can compete globally. However, **on the negative side** the majority of employers look for employees from different regions such as South Asia and Eastern Europe. **Young people in the region therefore need investment in the skills required by the changing patterns of work.**
19. **Third, the proliferation of the shared economy, gig economy, digital labour market and peer to peer economy. On the positive, this is empowering, enhancing independence and breaking away from traditional employment.** It will create job opportunities for people who are not able to connect to the commercial market; it will also require workers to develop relevant skills to fully leverage potential opportunities and earn a decent income. However, **on the negative side**, such platforms can be an easy way out, exploitative, offering no career development and no long-term investment in skills.
20. The development brought about by technology will create - globally and regionally - many **opportunities for those who are:** (1) Ready to contribute to and support new technologies. (2) Equipped with communication and organisation skills to reap the benefits of global access. (3) Provided with the business acumen to leverage the new digital and peer to peer economies and, (4) Prepared with proficient social skills to excel in a world of hyper-connectivity and social influence.
21. There is a **risk** that the same technologies and trends may **widen the skill gap** and place pressure on “average” and “low average” skilled workers. This can **be disabling** and increase the gap between what is required and what young people can offer, in particular when an employee is unable to undertake lifelong learning.
22. Jordan is a country **rich in human talent**; therefore, the only way forward is a **knowledge-based economy**. The focus has been on building the entrepreneurial ecosystem via efforts such as Oasis500. Availing funding, mentorship and direct support to entrepreneurs while advocating for the right laws and regulations to support this movement has put Jordan on the entrepreneurial map.
23. Jordan has among the most prolific youth programming in the region. Examples of this include Injaz Al-Arab; Youth: Work Jordan; Workforce Development. Further, Jordan is a regional hub for many organisations such as The International Youth Foundation (IYF); ILO sub-regional office; USAID; and Oasis500<sup>8</sup>. Many conferences have been held of the issue of youth employment such as the 2012 Global Partnership for Youth

<sup>8</sup> <http://oasis500.com/>

Employment<sup>9</sup> and the 2015 Conference on Arab Youth Employment.<sup>10</sup>

24. To remain competitive, it is essential to **learn, unlearn and relearn**.
25. Increased opportunities for young people will come the creation of **an ecosystem and working environment**.
26. There are **three main elements** needed to boost youth employment; **(1) technical skills, (2) soft skills and (3) entrepreneurship skills with an enabling business environment**.
27. **On technical skills**, universities are not adequately preparing students for the job market. Often, they are too theoretical, and curricula are too slow to change and, bureaucratic. This must be addressed.
28. **Soft skills** include communication skills, work ethic values, a sense of professionalism, time management, organisation, teamwork, confidence, interpersonal skills, problem-solving, creativity, empathy, self-learning, positivity, leadership and collaboration. A LinkedIn study shows that 57% of employers said that soft skills are more important than hard skills and they would prefer to hire someone with strong soft skills and train them in hard skills, rather than the other way around.<sup>11</sup>
29. **Entrepreneurship** doesn't have to be related to tech, start-ups or venture capitals, and it can be relevant to more vulnerable youth. Micro-enterprises, for example, can be home-based or community-based.
30. **Barriers to employment** often include; lack of sufficient jobs; Legal issues (for refugees); Social (discrimination against refugees) and a system based on connections rather than merit; Educational (not sufficient skills).
31. **Low-income students** often suffer from the lack of technical and soft skills and a lack of network/connection to employers. **Solutions** to this could include **dynamic boot camps** that offer more **practical instructions** and curricula that are tailored to meet the employers' needs. The appeal of a boot camp is that it teaches students **how to learn** so that they can acquire other skills in the future.
32. It is crucial to address the **informal sector** too; it is part of the economy.
33. There is a need to tackle the **culture of trust** and mistrust between employees and employers.
34. There is a need to think together to be **more inclusive**. **Technologies can open doors**, in particular for people with disabilities. For instance, someone with a hearing disability can become an IOS or a website developer. There is a need to work with companies to become inclusive.

<sup>9</sup> Organised by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), and sponsored by the World Bank's Global Partnership for Youth Employment. In partnership with the MasterCard Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Luminus Education, the Jordan Federation of Tourism Associations, and the Greater Amman Municipality. Conference report available at: <https://www.iyfnat.org/sites/default/files/event/resources/Conference%20report.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> The "Arab Youth Employment: Promoting Innovative Solutions to Longstanding Challenges" conference was organized by regional social initiative Silatech and hosted by the International Youth Foundation (IYF). Funded by the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, Oasis 500, Tamweelcom, Mowgli, Save the Children, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, Ahead of the Curve, and the RAND Corporation.

<sup>11</sup> <https://business.linkedin.com/talent-solutions/blog/trends-and-research/2018/the-most-in-demand-hard-and-soft-skills-of-2018>



“We don’t have incentives to stay in our countries”

“Employment is a form of empowerment: it’s not only about getting paid, it’s about self-esteem and having a stake in society and encouraging a sense of belonging”

35. It is important to bring technology to **youth and agriculture**<sup>12</sup> and areas such as the service industry need to be seen as an opportunity for employment for young people.
36. Young people often lack incentives **and motivation** (i.e. parks, good transportation, entertainment facilities, etc.) to stay in their countries. This is essential in order to stem the brain drain from the Levant.
37. It is essential to focus on how **the tech field looks like for women** and in particular **young females** and **marginalised youth** in war or post-war countries.

### **How are young people currently being prepared for this new world of work? Challenges and opportunities**

38. **Education systems** and **political participation** stand out as **key significant challenges** for the future of work in the Levant region.<sup>13</sup>
39. **Arab educational systems do not**—and indeed are not designed to—**foster democratic and engaged citizenship**. Most of them **centre narrowly on the acquisition of defined and approved bodies of knowledge**. School systems are designed to use specific academic material, and as a result, teachers are encouraged to impart lower-level cognitive skills (recall and comprehension) at the expense of higher-level ones (application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and critical thinking). The systems, therefore, produce graduates with credentials but not with the range of skills necessary to deal with the political, economic, and social challenges faced by Arab societies—or even to meet the needs of the workplace, which is the purported goal of many recent reform efforts. Crucially, Arab educational systems neglect all other aspects of growth related to engaged learning, individual empowerment, and especially **social participation and active citizenship** (including values connected to democracy and human rights).
40. Focussing on **education and political participation is essential**. Arab educational systems must serve the needs of pluralistic societies and foster the development of active, responsible citizens who are empowered to deal with complexity and advance constructive change. Before any reform to the education systems in the Arab world, there is a need for a **real political will to change** the current education system into a more participatory education system. The role of schooling should not be the production of docile people who won’t question or challenge the authorities.
41. A **holistic approach to reform** should not just involve making a set of specific changes in existing school curricula to meet the needs of today’s labour market. Instead, the focus must be on an effort **to move society at all levels** - political leadership, public officials, teachers, students, and parents and communities - to develop a **new vision for education**. Such a vision needs to be based less on what material should be taught in schools and more on how to foster a learning process that integrates what takes place in the classroom, outside of the classroom, in the workplace, in leisure, and long after graduation.
42. Failing to move from a narrow focus on schooling to a broader and **society-wide process of learning** will result in generations of unproductive citizens.
43. Even when just considering the all-too-narrow goal of educating or instilling knowledge of specific material for participation in today’s workforce, it is clear that today’s education systems in the Levant, for the most part, perform inadequately. For all the extensive school infrastructure built in Arab countries, overall student **learning**

<sup>12</sup> IFAD (2014) Youth and agriculture: Key challenges and concrete solutions. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3947e.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See: Nathan J. Brown and Marwan Muasher, editors (2018) Engaging Society to Reform Arab Education: From Schooling to Learning. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/11/engaging-society-to-reform-arab-education-from-schooling-to-learning-pub-77454>

is disappointing, both by national and international standards. In short, educational systems in the Arab world are about the quantity and not the quality of learning.

“Every child has to learn how to code, if we don’t do that, we deskill them for the future”

44. **Youth unemployment and the resulting alienation remain significant problems throughout the region.**
45. **Teachers** receive little of the support and continuing training that they need. Most of the teachers don’t know how to teach; necessary changes in teaching and learning requires a **redefinition of teachers’ roles** and changes in teacher knowledge, skills, and vocational vision. Teachers must be required to have strong subject-matter knowledge and a repertoire of new teaching methods—many of which require the design of complex learning environments and delegation of authority by the teacher to the students—such as monitoring and controlling their behaviour in small groups without the presence of the teacher. Radical changes need to be made in pre-service teacher education programs. Innovative teacher education programmes require investment and capacity building in schools of education in Arab universities.
46. There are **no easy solutions** with such profound challenges. Recommendations for reform must, therefore, **combine general guidelines and proposals with suggestions for specific initiatives** that might vary in their details even within the same region.
47. There is a **gap between what people learn** at school and what they encounter in their **everyday life**. There is little interaction or engagement between the school and the community. This leads to a mismatch between the values system at school and the value system outside. **There needs to be a move from the concept of knowledge to the idea of participation.**
48. There is also a need to **redefine the role of the Ministry of Education in countries in the Levant**. Currently, it follows a top-down approach, believing that it has the authority to decide on education without consulting or including the community. There is a need for a transformational shift and move from a mentality of being a service provider towards being vision/standards setters while maintaining the role as regulator. Instead of merely imposing curricula, writing textbooks, and testing students, Ministries can lead societal dialogues about what kind of graduates schools should produce.
49. There is a concerning prevalent trend whereby some people believe that **critical thinking is about questioning religion**. A consequence of this in Jordan, for example, is that theatre, music and art, and humanities have almost disappeared from Jordan schools.
50. Youth should be a **demographic asset**, perceived as partners who can create new opportunities. There are **no magic solutions**, but if youth believe that the government is concerned about their future and there is commitment to build an environment for creativity, then the future will look brighter.
51. There is a need to have a **deeper understanding of what unemployment** looks like and how it affects young people’s lives. Unemployment is not about the absence or lack of income; it is also about the personal struggle of young people to get out of the house to network and meet other people who might help. Some young people are keen to stay in the job market at all costs and hence many recent graduates and young professionals are prepared to work in ‘underqualified’ jobs (such as an architect working as part-time receptionist for less than \$6 per hour). This acknowledges how difficult it is for graduates to return to the job market following a period of unemployment.
52. It is vital therefore for young people to **‘learn in the workplace’**, so that they stay in the job market and builds skills that traditional education does not offer. Key skills are interpersonal skills, soft skills, teamwork, and multi-tasking.

“We need to dig deeper to understand how unemployment affects people’s lives”

“I don’t want to hear only about the problems, I want to hear what you can do about things”

53. The current trend for innovating and digitising education provides an opportunity; especially with the momentum created by the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, globalisation and technological advances.<sup>14</sup> There are some promising concepts such as **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** which promotes a holistic educational process, including a focus on critical thinking, envisioning/futures thinking, systems thinking, creativity, dialogue and partnerships; as well as the concept of **Global Citizenship Education (GCED)** which focuses on inter-cultural dialogue and promoting tolerance.<sup>15</sup>
54. There is a need for a **shift towards practical, practice-based & participatory learning approaches**.
55. Building knowledge and skills are not enough; there is a need for proper orientation to guide young people towards **promising sectors in the economy**.
56. **Youth need to be more engaged and involved in decision making on policies related to their future**, as well as engaged in the national dialogue on labour matters. Also, it is crucial to advocate for policies and programmes that address issues of youth unemployment. For instance, UNESCO has developed a methodology for regional skills forecasting studies in Arab countries as well as an advocacy guide for youth on unemployment and entrepreneurship.
57. All discussion on youth employment should tap into the latest research and thinking on **what adolescent development means** and in particular what that means for youth who have experienced trauma and who are, for example, refugees or migrants. It was suggested that a relatively new approach called **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** be explored. PYD is both a philosophy and a targeted/intentional approach to adolescent development where youth are seen as assets and not problems to be solved. This approach recognises that adolescent youth are rapidly evolving socially, emotionally and physically and that multiple factors are influencing how they develop, thrive or struggle. Under PYD, adolescence is seen as a transitional period of life with long term impact: youth is seen as a period of vulnerability with the brain still in development, as well as a period of opportunity. Much like early childhood, the adolescent years are seen to be a critical period of brain and physical development that requires a different approach- with an emphasis on building skills, assets and competencies, fostering healthy relationships, strengthening environments and working to transform systems.

### **Barriers to success: what needs to change?**

58. To overcome unemployment challenges in the Levant, the following recommendations were made:
- It is critical to **focus on reforming education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET, in order** to improve the technical and basic skills of youth.
  - The Government in Jordan employs 42% of the workforce in the country. Such labour market distortions caused by public sector employment need to be reduced.

<sup>14</sup> A full version of the Sustainable Development Goals are available at: [http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/brochure/SDGs\\_Booklet\\_Web\\_En.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/brochure/SDGs_Booklet_Web_En.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> For more details on Education for Sustainable Development please see: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Publications; Education for Sustainable Development Goals: learning objectives (2017) available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247444> and Education for sustainable development: sourcebook (2012) , available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216383>. And for further details on Global Citizen Education please see Global citizenship education: preparing learners for the challenges of the 21st century (2014) available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000227729>

“The main issue we are facing is the how. How to take a successful programme to another level and integrate it and expand”

- A more dynamic and competitive private sector to create jobs needs to be promoted, providing resources for entrepreneurship and start-ups.
- Early employment experiences and opportunities for youth are necessary.
- Labour market information systems need to be improved.

59. **Donors and governments must recognise that little evidence is used in designing, implementing and evaluating policies and programmes:**

- Many youth employment programmes don't work and include many participants who are not educated enough for the material covered in the intervention.
- Few programmes and policies include robust monitoring and evaluation tools with feedback loops that inform course corrections.
- Donors and international organisations create incentives to keep programme implementation on track even in the face of evidence that they are not working.
- There is a need to develop a community of practice with a culture of transparency and shared learning that allows problematic programmes to close and divert resources to successful models.
- Researchers need to be more effective in communicating relevant evidence to policymakers and practitioners. Research findings should not just stay in the academic realm.

60. **Politics and the political economy:**

- Public sector employment in Jordan sits at 42 per cent in 2018. This is too high for a country with few natural resources.
- The private sector must employ more young people. However, Jordan, for example, ranks 104th out of 190 countries as a place to do business and 105 out of 190 as a place to start a business and 159 out of 190 as a place for getting credit.<sup>16</sup> This needs to be addressed.
- The government needs to enable the private sector to provide employment and generate income.

“It is not about the technical solution, it's not about a change in the law, it's about changing the mind-set of the public and the private sectors to work together to tackle the issue of youth employment”

### Breaking the impasse

61. The participants joined five different groups to reflect on and discuss various themes and assess ideas to promote change. The following summarises the discussion and reflection points.

62. On **engaging and enabling the private sector** the participants highlighted the following points:

- The Government of Jordan (GoJ) has introduced different schemes to **subsidise the private sector to create jobs**. While, some of these schemes have been successful the successful, future investment should only be with those schemes which have the potential to grow.
- The private sector's ability to create jobs could be enhanced by greater stability in the legal framework and by simplifying laws that relate to business establishment.
- The participants considered **INTAJ** (The Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan)<sup>17</sup> as a **success story** of an association focusing on the future of the IT sector by marketing it and engaging with other

<sup>16</sup> See: Doing Business 2019. A World Bank Group flagship report. Available at: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/country/j/jordan/JOR.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <http://intaj.net/>

stakeholders who are interested in IT. Stakeholders could replicate this model in other emerging areas such as pharmaceutical.

- The **private sector** needs to enhance their engagement with the **educational institutions** in the countries in the Levant- both academic and the technical. Such involvement is essential to ensure that the outcomes from these institutions respond to market needs. For instance, the private sector in co-operation with academic institutions should organise regular training for the university students during their study (such as summer courses). This is one way of ensuring graduates have practical experience when leaving university.
- **Donors' engagement with national stakeholders** could be **more innovative** to overcome the challenges the country is facing through introducing new technologies in some sectors. For example, given the water scarcity in Jordan, the Dutch have been working in the agriculture sector by introducing different techniques to the farmers to utilise their lands more efficiently with less need for water. More innovative solutions are required.
- Small-to-Medium Enterprise (SME) is considered the backbone of the economy. It was recommended that, the Government of Jordan and other governments in the Levant, should encourage investors in this segment by creating an enabling environment to help the further establishment of businesses.
- Although there are considerable efforts to support the **tourism sector** in Jordan, it is still underutilised. When tourists visit any country, they are looking for a full package, and this is something that should be considered to promote this sector.
- To better enhance the economy, it is crucial to attract **new investments**. The GoJ and different institutions need to strategise in which sectors new investors might be interested in, capitalising on the country's strengths and available resources.
- Finally, it is important to have a clear definition and agreement among stakeholders on **what is the informal sector** as it is sometimes confused with entrepreneurs.

63. On **women's economic empowerment** the participants discussed the following:

- The **link between education and work** in the Levant is **not happening**. This is despite impressive gains in education including the number of women enrolled in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) subjects. This is higher in some MENA countries than in Europe and the U.S. **Women's labour force participation however has remained consistently and stubbornly low**. The reasons why women are not making the transition to work include **cultural attitudes** that value women as carers and men as providers; **infrastructure deficits**, such as the lack of public transport and childcare facilities and **legal shortcomings** which can restrict women's participation in work or perpetuate gender stereotypes.
- The low economic participation of women in the MENA region has an **economic dimension. If there was female labour force participation on a par with men by 2025, 2.7 trillion USD would be added to this region's GDP**.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> International Labour Organisation (2017) World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for women 2017. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms\\_557245.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_557245.pdf)

- The economic participation of women also has a **human dimension** with so many women denied the opportunity to explore and fulfil their potential and ambition.
- When discussing women's economic participation, it is important to **understand the context** and the actual situation of women's work. There is a **lack of evidence** and mapping of women's distribution in labour market; this can be done by further investigating why women work and why they don't; what sectors and what backgrounds they have; and what are the differences between women's experiences and needs and whether, for example, these are different dependent on whether they live in rural or urban areas or on age.
- It is key to target the **structural, cultural and legal obstacles** that prevent women from participating in the labour market.
- It is important to recognise women's work in the **informal economy often through** home-based work as well as their contribution in the form of **unpaid labour** (care).
- **Social security laws** must recognise and include part-time workers, home-based workers and make it attractive and cost efficient for them to join social security schemes
- To overcome women's low contribution to the economy, there is a need to consider legal **issues that may be an obstacle**, including a review of the legal measures that are supposed to facilitate women's entry to work. These might, for example, include child care and transportation. The law should be changed to reflect the way women want to work, for example, making registering home-based businesses easier and extending labour laws and legal protection to the informal economy.
- It is key to focus on the **physical work place** and to lobby employers to demonstrate how promoting women's employment is an investment that they will profit from with productivity increased as a result. The **quality of the workplace also matters**. It must be clean, comfortable, and safe and safeguard against workplace sexual harassment whether at work or travelling between home and work. Gender equality in Human Resources (in education courses and in workplace practices) must be mainstreamed. Flexible working hours and an overall flexible work schedule should be routinely offered.
- Promote and learn from **good examples and practices** such as women's agricultural cooperatives (Palestine) and the village business incubator (Syria).
- The **cultural dimension** is also important point to consider. This can include a **review of schools' curricula** in an attempt to **eradicate gender stereotypes** and an effort to raise awareness of important historical, religious and current role models such as The Prophet's Mohammed's wife.
- **Gender stereotypes** in the media should be removed. For example, a new entertainment series with strong female characters, could be created
- It is important to work with **political and religious leaders, media and public outreach strategies** to change mind-sets, and to have value analyses of women's work outside the home and to work on **organising women** in the workplace and strengthen their leadership.
- Data from Jordan shows that women rates in entrepreneurship are higher than men. Women establish one out of three start-ups; these start-ups are employing more women than men, and they recruit women at all levels.

64. On **how to build bridges between educations and work** the participants highlighted the following points:

- It is essential to know who education is for. Is it about what children or parents or the government want? Who are the real customers and accordingly, where should the main focus be?
- It is essential to shift the focus from entrepreneurship skills to change the mindset of students. The focus at the universities level should be less on content and more skills driven.
- Growing and developing the private sector is necessary to create more employment opportunities
- It is important to review school dropout regulations and explore how children can go back to school/study.
- There is a need for a National Qualification Framework.
- There should be exploration of how to scale employee benefits from the formal economy to the informal economy
- Introduce extracurricular activities at the school level along with career counselling
- Education system reform must include updating the curricula to focus on 21st century skills and investment in teachers and their ongoing professional development.
- Revisit and revise Higher Education Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to fit employment needs.
- Redefine vocational education to modern vocational using technology and create awareness about the benefits of vocational education in society and families.

65. On **Promoting Entrepreneurship through education and skills training**, the participants discussed the following:

- In spite of the importance of social skills in entrepreneurship, students **lack basic levels of social skills**.
- Since current educational curricula are based on memorising and don't encourage creative and critical thinking, many students do not develop skills of innovation and creativity. This must be tackled at the primary school level.
- It is critical to include into basic education curricula subjects related to financial literacy, analytical and critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and how to learn skills.
- To help students to learn and know more about their future careers and what kind of skills they might need, it is essential to expose them to the business world giving them experiences through a well-tailored programme and not just random internship opportunities.
- Current entrepreneurship programmes are not getting enough tangible results. Specialised sector specific entrepreneurship programmes could be a better answer.
- Entrepreneurship literacy for parents is essential to decrease or even remove cultural barriers about starting up a business. This is important in creating an **entrepreneurship ecosystem** that encourages youth to start their businesses with parental support.

- Creating a scalable entrepreneurship programmes for refugees could have significant impact as young people in refugee camps often have no cultural barriers or pre-defined notions with regards to entrepreneurship.
- It needs to be remembered that humans are creative and that it is natural to innovate and change.

### Next steps and what needs to change

The participants discussed in smaller groups the next steps and what needs to change to deal with the challenges of youth and employment in the Levant region. The following table summarises the recommendations. While each stakeholder has specific recommendations related to their role and areas of speciality, it is essential for all to cooperate and work with each other.

Who	What
Local Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To implement and enforce labour laws and regulations and to work with labour unions to review and develop specific articles of labour laws and to establish frameworks to regulate internship programmes.</li> <li>• To promote decentralisation efforts in particular concerning youth entrepreneurship regulations. To allow a legal environment for start-ups and give more power to local youth entrepreneurs with initiatives to minimise red tape and to respond to the fluid and fast-paced youth initiatives landscape. This would allow donors and international organisations to work with partners directly.</li> <li>• To create national curricula for entrepreneurship, coding and soft skills.</li> <li>• To allow a better enabling environment for youth to help them to start-up businesses and incentivise them financially (tax breaks) and provide social services.</li> <li>• To develop TVET cross-border certifications or a regional certification system to allow youth to work in different countries.</li> <li>• To allow access to capital and investment and shift from consumers to producers and provide entry and exit strategies to the market through economic reform.</li> <li>• To strive to better use technologies platforms for speedier processes such as service delivery.</li> <li>• To learn from other models such as in Tunisia where the newly passed Start-up Act was a participatory effort and involved multiple stakeholders.<sup>19</sup></li> <li>• To support the creation of an ecosystem of social entrepreneurship by encouraging a culture of more volunteerism and experience in the workplace, as well as to develop regulations that will help youth to get work experience and learn how to operate in the workplace.</li> </ul>

<sup>19</sup> The Start Up Law was passed on 2nd of April 2018 by the Tunisian parliament, the law is part of the government's broader strategy "Digital Tunisia 2020" to boost socioeconomic development and expand technological infrastructure. More details on the strategy is available in at: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Tunisia\\_-\\_Support\\_Project\\_for\\_the\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_%E2%80%9CDigital\\_Tunisia\\_2020%E2%80%9D\\_National\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Tunisia_-_Support_Project_for_the_Implementation_of_the_%E2%80%9CDigital_Tunisia_2020%E2%80%9D_National_Strategic_Plan.pdf). The full text of the Start Up Law is available in Arabic at: <http://thd.tn/startup-act-version-adoptee.pdf>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop youth internships in Parliament. This would give young people the opportunity to better understand policy-making and the processes of passing laws and regulations.</li> <li>• To perceive refugees as an asset and positive contributors to society. This might be done, for instance, through developing more flexible regulations to allow refugees to be entrepreneurs and allowing business registration and work permits for non-Jordanians.</li> <li>• To build trust between the government and the private sector by engaging with them and changing the vested government interests in the status quo and incentivise the private sector to act (creating a 'win-win' approach).</li> <li>• To allow access to information on rights and law.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Donors and International community</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To focus on quality rather than quantity in programmes to ensure that programmes have a sustainable impact.</li> <li>• To build a practice of honest conversation between donors and the targeted communities on what is working, what is not and how to develop exit strategies.</li> <li>• To have in place better frameworks of result, evaluation and measurement.</li> <li>• To focus on workforce development programmes and develop new ways of measuring employability.</li> <li>• To support enterprises to enable them to recruit more people.</li> <li>• To encourage the use of positive language rather than words loaded with negative meanings or stigma, such as beneficiaries and refugees. Recommended phrases instead include women on the move and start-up from Syria.</li> <li>• To focus on the subjective barriers that limit women and youth participation in the labour market.</li> <li>• To integrate education and skills practice into humanitarian responses.</li> <li>• To work together through frameworks that enable programmes to target individuals, inclusively (leave no one behind – search out the hard to reach stories).</li> <li>• To build partnerships with youth, develop youth specific programmes and include youth in the entire cycle of projects (design, implementation and evaluation).</li> <li>• To have a better understanding of the actual role of governments in promoting labour and employment</li> <li>• To organise coding boot camps for refugees and local youth and initiate proactive regional programming for refugees (this may require an initial policy paper to sketch out future options).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Civil Society Organisations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push back by developing evidence.</li> <li>• Develop informal education programmes that allow refugee children and youth a chance to catch up in their formal education studies.</li> <li>• Identify new jobs in undeveloped sectors such as in the waste management sector. This is a huge issue and potentially a significant source of good jobs. This would involve composting and recycling, creating many good jobs, stimulating the economy, and helping make countries more sustainable.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Researchers and scholars</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a need for better labour market research to provide general information including data and statistics on sectors and employers. Researchers need to work with the private sector to develop such a platform and help identify jobs that are needed.</li> <li>• Focus on understanding the implications of labour issues in fragile contexts, such as Gaza, including a better understanding of the legal and regulatory framework, and provide recommendations for how to operate in such challenging settings.</li> <li>• To better understand the ecosystem for refugee entrepreneurship and identify ways to help support it.</li> <li>• To support research on specific themes including the impact of education in countries in the Levant like Jordan, on employment rates; What jobs are youth getting with their degrees (if any)? Ideas for minimising the brain drain from the region: who stays and who leaves, and why? For those who leave: where do they go?</li> <li>• Build evidence on which sectors it makes sense for governments to invest in so that they don't try to compete in industries where they are at a disadvantage in the global market.</li> <li>• Focus on the informal sector in the labour market and get data, if possible, on the scope of the informal sector, helping define what it means and what, if any, regulations could help.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Dr Maysa Shqerat</b>  Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton   January 2019</p> <p>Wilton Park reports are intended to be brief summaries of the main points and conclusions of an event. Reports reflect rapporteurs' accounts of the proceedings and do not necessarily reflect the views of the rapporteur. Wilton Park reports and any recommendations contained therein are for participants and are not a statement of policy for Wilton Park, the FCO or the UK government.</p> <p>Should you wish to read other Wilton Park reports, or participate in upcoming Wilton Park events, please consult our website <a href="http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk">www.wiltonpark.org.uk</a>. To receive our monthly bulletin and latest updates, please subscribe to <a href="https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/newsletter/">https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/newsletter/</a></p>