

Executive Summary

Youth aged 12-30 make up 36% of Jordan's population. Unemployment levels among 15-24 year-olds, exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, reached 50% in the fourth quarter of 2020, up from an already high level of 37% in 2019 (World Bank, 2021^[1]). The crisis has disrupted youth's access to public services and their trajectory toward decent jobs, financial independence and other milestones of adulthood.

Young people in Jordan have demonstrated resilience and solidarity in mitigating the crisis by supporting vulnerable groups. The needs of young people should be reflected in response and recovery measures to support their transition to an autonomous life, limit long-term costs and prevent a deterioration of trust in public institutions.

The report assesses the governance arrangements established by the Ministry of Youth (MoY) in Jordan to empower youth and build trust, covering four main dimensions:

- Designing, implementing and tracking progress of Jordan's National Youth Strategy 2019-25.
- Building administrative capacity within the MoY to deliver youth-responsive policies, programmes and services.
- Creating a legal and institutional environment to encourage youth participation in public life and young people's representation in state institutions.
- Reviewing legal frameworks to balance considerations of protecting and empowering youth and providing inclusive access to public services and participation.

A joint vision for youth in Jordan: The National Youth Strategy 2019-25

Jordan is one of only four MENA governments with an operational National Youth Strategy in place. While the strategy is backed by high-level political commitment, there are opportunities to strengthen its governance arrangements and overcome the "implementation challenge." To strengthen feedback loops with youth, in particular vulnerable ones, the Ministry could invest in its financial and human resources, clarify the allocation of responsibilities across stakeholders, and develop effective mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and multi-stakeholder coordination.

To support the implementation of the National Youth Strategy 2019-25, the Ministry of Youth could consider:

- **Building a system of data collection and storage**, including at the subnational level, and setting clear quality standards for submitting evidence from governmental and non-governmental partners to monitor and evaluate the implementation of MoY's strategic objectives.
- **Collecting age-disaggregated data systematically across all relevant policy areas** in combination with other identity factors in partnership with the Department of Statistics, universities or the private sector.

- **Creating a mechanism for young people and youth-led organisations to support the implementation** of the strategy as well as Jordan's response and recovery plans to mitigate the COVID-19 crisis, creating adequate organisational and technical support.
- **Creating a monitoring and evaluation unit** and building capacities among MoY employees to identify key performance indicators, monitor implementation and evaluate outputs, outcomes and impact of the strategy.
- **Fully operationalising the Steering Committee and creating a technical committee** in order to develop implementation plans, identify funding requirements and clarify monitoring and evaluation duties for all governmental and non-governmental partners.

Building administrative capacity to deliver for youth in Jordan

There is a need to provide targeted training opportunities for MoY's employees and for its staff working in the youth centres, in particular in policy making, youth programming, monitoring and evaluation. While 41% of the ministry's budget is allocated to "youth affairs", only 16% of these resources cover expenditures not related to facilities. Stronger administrative capacity at the local level would enable its network of Youth Directorates and youth centres to deliver youth-responsive programmes and services.

The government of Jordan could consider:

- **Drafting clear job descriptions for each job category** and reviewing the incentive system for employees, introducing transparent performance measures and a merit-based reward system.
- **Setting up a training programme** to strengthen skills and knowledge in policy and programme design, project management, and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Adopting an evidence-based approach to identify the budget needs** of different youth directorates and youth centres to address geographical disparities and inclusive access for youth.
- **Strengthening institutional mechanisms and capacities for co-ordination** across ministries and with sub-national authorities and non-governmental stakeholders to deliver effective policies and services for young people.
- **Mainstreaming the concerns of youth in policy making and service delivery** by considering to apply governance tools in the rule making and public budgeting process.

Youth participation and representation in public life in Jordan

Fewer than 5 in 10 young people in Jordan trust their government and youth tend to vote in elections less than older citizens. Youth's participation in the policy cycle and representation in state institutions remain limited, with a representation gap of 42 percentage points in parliament. At the same time, young people take part in the public debate through non-institutionalised channels. Jordan's National Youth Strategy 2019-25 recognises the importance of promoting youth engagement, effective citizenship and leadership. A strong relationship between youth and public institutions is crucial for ensuring the effectiveness, legitimacy and resilience of institutions.

The government of Jordan could consider:

- **Strengthening civic and citizenship curricula** in schools and out-of-school programmes to reinforce youth's association with democratic processes.
- **Providing programmes to help talented youth join and thrive in the public sector** workforce and promote inter-generational learning between older and younger employees.

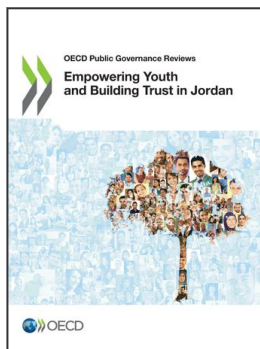
- **Adopting a government-wide policy on youth engagement in policy and strengthening in-person and digital means**, including participatory budgeting programmes, youth councils and youth advisory councils.
- **Ensuring an enabling environment and promoting youth participation in public life**, including by associating the MoY and youth stakeholders more closely with national action plans for the Open Government Partnership.
- **Promoting national youth volunteering programmes** and providing political support, resources, mandates and tools to the Higher Committee for Volunteer Work.

Legal frameworks to empower and protect youth in Jordan

Jordan has made significant efforts to align national laws with international standards in the area of children rights, gender discrimination, education, employment, health, justice and others. However, high minimum age requirements continue to exclude a significant share of youth from participation in public and political life. Citizens need to be 30 years old to run for parliament and 25 for local councils, far exceeding the minimum ages across OECD countries and in most MENA countries. In other areas, such as full-time work and hazardous employment, further efforts are needed to enforce existing laws.

To balance concerns about protecting and empowering young people, the government of Jordan could consider:

- **Clearly defining the responsibilities and mandates** of state and non-state institutions working with and for young people, for instance by amending law No. (78) of 2016 or drafting a national youth law to address fragmentation in the delivery of policies, programmes and services for youth.
- **Conducting a review of minimum-age requirements across public services areas** against international benchmarks to identify barriers for youth to access them.
- **Considering lowering minimum age requirements** for candidates for national and subnational elections in line with recommendations by the Royal Constitutional Review Committee.
- **Enforcing laws identifying minimum age requirements** to protect young men and women from harm, for instance working full-time and in hazardous employment.



From:

Empowering Youth and Building Trust in Jordan

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/8b14d38f-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2021), “Executive Summary”, in *Empowering Youth and Building Trust in Jordan*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/3b2c10b1-en>

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