Building government capacity to empower youth in Jordan

Key Findings
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With around 36%, Jordan's youth constitute more than one third of the population when considering the age group defined by the Ministry of Youth (12-30 years). Figure 1 illustrates the population pyramid for Jordan in 2020 and the projected developments within the next ten years. By 2030, the share of 15-25 year-olds is likely to grow further and may represent the single biggest age group according to UN projections.

Figure 1. Population Pyramids for Jordan in 2020 and 2030

Looking at the facts first demonstrates that, despite enjoying unprecedented levels of access to information, often facilitated by new digital tools, young men and women in Jordan continue to face significant challenges in their transition to adulthood.

The ILO estimates that around 37% of youth aged 15-24 years in Jordan are unemployed in 2019, which hits young women disproportionally hard (55% vs. 33% for young men). That compares to an average across countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) of 26% and around 12% across the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The challenging prospects in their home country create a desire among a significant share of young people to seek opportunities elsewhere. According to data from the Arab Barometer, 45% of Jordanian youth say they want to emigrate in 2018, up from 34% in 2010, primarily because of economic considerations.¹

A similar pattern characterises the share of young people not in employment, education or training (NEET). While the rate has been constantly decreasing for youth across OECD countries

Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan

since its post-crisis high of 17% in 2011 to 13% in 2018, NEET rates stand at 29% in Jordan (44% for young women; 15% for young men) in 2015. More than one in three youth with a job works in the informal sector and close to six in ten are receiving below-average wages. School enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education have dropped to a worrisome degree over the last decade (from 80% in 2010 to 63% in 2017; and from 37% in 2010 to 34% in 2018 respectively). In the 2018 OECD PISA test, pupils from Jordan scored below OECD average in reading, mathematics and science, however, the mean performance improved in all three subjects over the assessments in 2015 and 2012. For these indicators, the gender lens tips in favour of girls as they outperform boys in all three areas.

OECD data shows that non-formal forms of volunteering are embedded within Jordanian society as almost two in three youth, aged 15-29 years, report to have volunteered, donated money or helped a stranger. On the other hand, less than 3% of Jordanian youth are members of a charitable society and organised in a youth, cultural or sports organisation (2013). Against high levels of trust expressed in the armed forces (90%) and the police (86%), trust in political institutions is much lower (23% in the national parliament, 12% in political parties).

In this context, young Jordanians consider family and religion very important in life (96% and 94% respectively). This is confirmed by nearly 9 in 10 youth in Jordan acknowledging that they have relatives or friends they can rely on for help, which is anchored in a strong and continuous affiliation to family and tribal structures. In contrast, trust in people of another religion (3%) or nationality (3%) is very low. Subjective well-being among young people in Jordan is relatively high in a regional comparison and higher among adolescents (15-19) than among young adults (20-29). Data from 2015 suggests that personal life satisfaction is slightly higher among young women compared to young men and more elevated among the urban than the rural population.

**Rationale of the report**

The situation of Jordanian youth and the challenges they are facing are well documented. A myriad of publications discusses challenges and possible solutions from a sectorial perspective (USAID, 2015; Milton-Edwards, 2018; RAND Corporation 2014, UNDP, 2000), some of which take a regional perspective (UNICEF, 2019). Another stream of work focuses on children’s access to rights (UNICEF, 2017) and a child-friendly justice system (NCFA and UNIFEF, 2018); and the distinct challenges faced by girls and young women such as child marriage (UNICEF and HPC, 2019) and adolescent pregnancy (UNFPA, 2016).

At the macro level of laws, policies and institutions shaping young people’s access to public policies and services, however, available evidence is scarce. Notable exceptions are the mapping of youth activities in Jordan conducted by UNFPA (2015), a study of the structural, institutional and legislative aspects of youth policy by EuroMed, a synthesis paper of the review of youth policies in 5 Arab countries (2016), and a brief study on youth policies and institutional frameworks delivered by the OECD Development Center (2018) in collaboration with UNESCO and other partners. OECD’s (2019) “7 Key Findings from the OECD Youth Governance Survey” provides the first comparative assessment of the broader governance arrangements in place for youth-responsive policymaking and service delivery, covering seven MENA countries.

This paper presents the main findings from the OECD report (forthcoming, 2020) “Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan”. The report provides an assessment of the governance structures in place and discusses to what extent the existing administrative capacities deliver on the concerns of young people. Throughout five thematic chapters, the report provides an assessment of the current arrangements and capacities in place and, where feasible, presents comparative evidence from both MENA and OECD countries. Its main purpose is genuinely practical: to present actionable policy recommendations to decision makers, donors
and development partners, which can help build necessary government capacities within the Government of Jordan in general, and the Ministry of Youth specifically, to deliver on the concerns and needs of young people.

The report and findings paper is prepared in the context of the “Youth in Public Life” project (2016-20), which is financed by the MENA Transition Fund of the G7 Deauville Partnership. The project also covers Morocco and Tunisia.
Young people are addresses of government regulations, both in direct and indirect ways. At the macro level, opportunities to participate in social, public and economic life are shaped by the broader ecosystem of laws, policies, informal norms and institutions in the field of civic space, transparency, accountability and citizen participation.

At the micro level, licensing requirements to open youth clubs or establish a youth organisation have a more direct impact, for instance. Minimum age requirements set to protect or empower adolescents play a critical role in determining the access to public services and participation opportunities. Careful consideration must be given to defining these thresholds in order to avoid legal barriers and discrimination that might exclude young people from participation in decision-making and access to services that are critical for their transition to adulthood.

**Defining Youth**

The definition of specific age brackets for “youth” is controversial and subject to the respective social and cultural norms of a society. However, this definition is important as it defines the beneficiaries (and non-beneficiaries) of government support programmes, their access (or non-access) to institutionalised forms of participation and shapes more generally the understanding of the rights, roles and responsibilities of different age groups.

The Ministry of Youth identifies as “youth” as the age group between 12-30 years. To apply to MoY’s programmes and activities, a more nuanced differentiation exists across three sub groups: 12-17 years, 19-23 years and 24-30 years. The group of 18-year olds is not covered specifically as it is considered to cover high school students studying for their graduation. Definitions of “youth” vary widely across OECD countries (e.g. 0-30 years in Slovakia, 15-19 years in Poland), covering a life period of 17 years on average.

**An Overarching Legal Framework**

At least seven OECD countries have adopted national youth laws/acts to identify main stakeholders in the youth field and to identify their responsibilities across state and non-state institutions. Most commonly, youth laws/acts define “youth”, youth institutions, age limits, actions to be taken by the state, in particular the executive branch, beneficiaries, and budgetary considerations. In Jordan, no such law exists.

The Ministry of Youth operates as the legal successor of the Higher Council for Youth under a new legal framework [No. (78) of 2016] which replaced the respective framework for the Higher Council for Youth Regulation [No. (30) Of 2002] in 2016. With the exception of some cosmetic changes, the law has not been updated. According to the survey answers, the most important updates required would include a national definition of “youth” to identify the roles and
Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan

responsibilities of different government and non-government entities. Indeed, the “weakness of coordination among government, civil and official agencies that [are] concern[ed] with youth” is also recognised in the General Budget Law for the Fiscal Year 2019 and the NYS 2019-25. Future amendments that are considered important by MoY include the definition of a clear mandate to guide its work and to reduce the minimum age required to establish youth clubs (currently: 25 years). According to MoY, the Legal Committee was informed about the intention to amend the law.

Addressing Legal Discrimination

In line with 34 out of 36 OECD countries, the legal age of majority in Jordan is 18 years. The minimum age required to vote is 18 years, however, the Election Law was formulated such that the Law Interpretation Bureau was prompted to clarify that citizens who complete 17 years 90 days before the Election Day or earlier would be added to the voter list. In comparison with OECD and other MENA countries, the minimum ages required to run for a seat in the national parliament and subnational elected councils are exceptionally high.

To run as candidate for national parliament, the minimum age stands at 30 years, exceeding the minimum age required in all other OECD-surveyed countries, followed by the Palestinian Authority (28 years), Lebanon and Mauritania (25 years), and Tunisia (24 years). This compares to an average age of 19 years across OECD countries. In 2011, the Royal Constitutional Review Committee issued a recommendation to reduce the candidacy age to 25 years in order to “reinforce the role of youth in public and parliamentary life”. At the local level, the threshold for candidates is 25 years in Jordan, Lebanon and Mauritania and 22 years in the Palestinian Authority.

Figure 2. Minimum age requirements in political life across MENA countries

Lowering the minimum age alone would not necessarily lead to a substantial increase in the number of young people in political positions in Jordan. Other challenges include the financial burden of running a campaign (e.g. all candidates are required to pay a 500 JOD registration fee and each list must pay a refundable collateral of 2000 JOD) and social norms considering young candidates to lack experience. The dominance of personal connections (“wasta”) is also
frequently cited as a barrier to young people’s participation in politics given a young person’s presumed lack of social capital.

Other important minimum age criteria concern the access of young people to services in the area of education, justice and health, among others. Compulsory education in Jordan begins at the age of 5 or 6 years. In public schools, only a few pilots exist in which kindergarten (KG) 1 starts at 4 years and KG 2 at 5 years. In private schools, pre-schooling can start from the age of 3 years, followed by KG 1 and KG 2 before entering the first grade in school. Compulsory education in Jordan ends at 16 years. In terms of criminal responsibility, the juvenile law applies until the age of 18 years in Jordan. According to MoY, the strategy of the Ministry of Justice foresees that Courts can refer young perpetrators of crime to MoY to work in playgrounds and sports places. However, according to available information, this has not been enforced yet in practice. Access to medical advice and counselling for reproductive health services is linked to marital status and available through Health Care Centres and private clinics.

Young women are often affected disproportionally by legal barriers enshrined in laws preventing them from passing on their nationality to their children and spouses, or family laws that affect a (young) woman’s right to marry, divorce, obtain child custody, and to inherit.

**Box 2.1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Amend law No. (78) of 2016** to clarify the mandate of the Ministry of Youth, in particular vis-à-vis other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to address the fragmented delivery of policies and services in the youth field.
- **Consider lowering minimum age requirements** where they risk excluding young people from participating in public (i.e. establish youth clubs) and political life (i.e. minimum age to run as candidate for national parliament).
- **Address legal discrimination faced by young women** to encourage the participation of both gender in all aspects of public, social and economic life.
In the presence of Prime Minister Omar Razzaz, Jordan launched its National Strategy for Youth (NYS) 2019-25 in July 2019 following its adoption by Cabinet in May. Coordinated by the Ministry of Youth, the adoption of a cross-sectional youth strategy builds on attempts since 2004 to set up a joint vision behind which different youth stakeholders can unite. In 2004, Jordan was the first country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to announce a multi-annual strategy, however, its results remained largely behind the expectations raised by young people, government officials and international partners. With the adoption of the 2019-25 NYS, Jordan joins Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania and the Palestinian Authority among the OECD-surveyed MENA countries and 27 OECD countries with an operational NYS (as of February 2020).

Figure 3. Selected MENA countries with a national youth strategy or elaborating

Source: OECD (forthcoming, 2020), Youth Empowerment in the MENA Region,
Note: Preliminary results as of October 2019. Qatar’s strategy focuses on “Cultural Enrichment and Sports Excellence” but it also includes commitments for youth more broadly.

Adopting a national youth strategy alone is not sufficient. A well-designed strategy presents smart objectives, measurable targets based on relevant indicators and transparent timeframes and assigns precise mandates and coordination mechanisms to ensure coherence. By integrating youth in its design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation, governments promote young
people’s ownership, foster transparency and make sure their needs and concerns inform each stage of the process. Robust performance and monitoring and evaluation frameworks play a crucial role in this regard, which in turn, require access to data and information that is disaggregated by age.

Previous attempts in Jordan to adopt and implement a NYS have suffered from similar shortcomings, such as a heavy reliance on international partners in the design and drafting stage and the lack of strong coordination and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in the implementation process.

This Chapter will benchmark the new strategy against the OECD analytical framework, which draws on eight principles. This framework is informed by a review and consolidation of international commitments, such as the 1998 Lisbon Declaration, the 2014 Baku Commitment to Youth Policies, the 2019 Lisboa+21 Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes and the guidelines developed by the Council of Europe and the European Youth Forum, among others.

**Backed by the Royal Court and Strategic Plans**

The NYS 2019-25 is backed by strong political commitment. King Abdullah II frequently commends the young generation as the "greatest asset and hope for the future" while urging subsequent governments to "tap into our young people’s intellectual, creative, and reproductive potential in order for Jordan to keep up with new developments in global scientific, economic and social factors." Discussion papers issued by the King reiterate the need for empowering youth by developing the state administration and enhancing the rule of law.

Moreover, the Renaissance Plan 2019-20 features commitments to integrate youth in public life and decision making; to develop their democratic culture, citizenship and pluralism; and to review legislation related to increasing the political participation of youth, among others. The participation of the Prime Minister in the launch event demonstrates the importance attributed by the Government to involve the whole of government in delivering on young people’s needs.

**Rich in Evidence but Important Gaps Remain**

The availability and use of reliable, relevant and up-to-date data is critical for youth policy to reflect the needs and realities of young people. This includes age-disaggregated data across thematic sectors, systems to facilitate the exchange of evidence across youth stakeholders and regular research on the situation of young people with their active involvement.

Led by a Steering Committee (SC) and Technical Committee (TC), the NYS 2019-25 was informed by various sources, including royal directives and sectorial strategies, the results of evaluation studies of previous draft strategies, a review of practices in other countries and a SWOT analysis of Jordan’s youth sector. Notably, young people were consulted through a survey, targeting the age groups 12-18 and 19-30 years, and face-to-face meetings. The surveys assess the extent of youth support for pre-defined objectives in the field of education, employment, health, participation and community peace/security. MoY produced a summary report of this exercise, which was not made public. MoY reports that it faced challenges in gathering age-disaggregated data in core areas such as the participation of youth in volunteering and elections, the share of school drop-outs, health data (i.e. smoking, obesity, mental health), and the social exclusion of vulnerable groups.
Surveys and Focus Groups to Consult Youth

The elaboration of the NYS 2019-25 coincided with youth-led protests over economic policies and the proposed tax law, and renewed demands for a citizen-centred political system and an end to corruption. Initially led by UNDP and other UN agencies, a Technical Committee consisting of experts from MoY, line ministries and other youth stakeholders took over the work on the draft strategy in 2018 as per the Cabinet’s decision. Young people were involved through focus groups and surveys conducted in 2017 which, according to MoY, resulted in 52,400 replies and the addition of the pillar “good governance/rule of law”.

This demonstrates that young people had actual impact on the strategy design, on the other hand, broad consultations took place in the review phase when core commitments had already been identified and no feedback was given on how their input was taken into account. Other important stakeholders in the process include MoY personnel, line ministries, the Youth and Sports Committee in the Parliament, private sector, academia and both organised and non-organised youth. Available information suggests that subnational authorities played a marginal role and that consultations with vulnerable groups, such as refugees, youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) and orphans, were covered in the context of the broader consultation exclusively.

Money Matters and So Do People

A strategy without sufficient resources dedicated to its implementation is just a piece of paper. This concerns the internal capacity of the entity in charge of steering the strategy and implementing partners, such as youth groups (through grants and other support structures made available by government, for instance).

According to MoY, 400,000 JOD were allocated to the first year of implementation by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) with the potential of receiving additional financial support by donors and development partners. The concrete allocation by the MoF will be determined by year and is therefore frequently subject to political considerations. As a share of MoY’s total budget of 34.8 million Jordanian Dinar (JD), representing a share of 1.1% for the implementation of the NYS 2019-25. Partners identified to support the implementation of the strategy – classified as governmental, non-governmental and international partners – are required to identify the necessary resources and design operational plans in their respective field.

A second dimension that deserves attention is the availability of human resources with the right skills set and knowledge to ensure the delivery of results. Currently, no training schemes exist to skill up MoY’s staff in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the national youth strategy. Limited capacity to steer this strategy presents a considerable risk and reflects a more fundamental concern with the available capacities for the design and delivery of policies, programmes and services (see Chapter 4). Finally, a clear allocation of tasks and responsibilities both within the steering entity and in collaboration with other implementing partners is crucial to create a sense of shared ownership and accountability.

Being Transparent about Who is in Charge of What

Easy access to the strategy document is crucial to promote transparency and public scrutiny. In turn, the strategy can serve as a communication tool for government to demonstrate its efforts for young men and women across multiple topics, sectors and stakeholders.

The NYS 2019-25 is available on the website of MoY in Arabic and English (http://moy.gov.jo/ar/node/2769). As per the available information in the strategy, MoY is in
charge of monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategic objectives and projects, based on the periodic submission of reports by the implementing partners (see below). No public information is available in terms of the distribution of roles and responsibilities within MoY. For instance, the Organisation Chart available on the website (http://moy.gov.jo/ar/node/23) does not clarify which thematic division(s) will be in charge, nor does a “who is who” section with contact information exists. In line with Jordan’s strategic efforts to foster open, transparent and accountable policy making through the Open Government Partnership (OGP), MoY could generate quick wins by publishing a description of the respective teams, tasks and contact information along with the results of the youth consultation exercise, among others.

The Importance of Building Stronger Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Each project listed in the NYS 2019-25 is linked to a strategic, sectorial and national objective and theme, and to a number of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and timeline. The serious attempt to measuring performance is an important development compared to previous draft strategies. The decentralised approach chosen to evaluate performance and submit periodic report has the potential of creating a sense of shared ownership and accountability among all implementing agencies if quality standards are met. However, the selected KPIs first and foremost represent output indicators (e.g. to count the number of trainings, workshops and awareness raising activities) and only a handful assesses outcomes.

As per the decision of the Cabinet, a Monitoring and Evaluation Committee is expected to be formed with MoY and the implementing partners listed in the strategy to prepare the quarterly reports. It is unclear whether this Committee has been set up and whether it performs its task. No information is available as to whether the results of these exercises are intended to be made available to the public. Furthermore, the scarcity of internal capacities in MoY to monitor and evaluate programme implementation presents another major risk, which may undermine achieving the strategies’ ambitious objectives.

Figure 4 illustrates that, in 2018, more than two-thirds of OECD countries established concrete monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to keep track of the progress in implementing their NYS.

Figure 4. Monitoring and Evaluation of NYS across OECD countries

A Cross-Sectoral Strategy with MoY as Lead Implementer

A cross-sectoral youth strategy implies that all relevant policy areas are addressed through a “youth lens” and that clear coordination mechanisms exist between among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders (horizontal) and between the central and subnational levels of government (vertical).

The NYS 2019-25 covers seven thematic areas: education/technology, effective citizenship, engagement/effective leadership, entrepreneurship/economic engagement, rule of law/good governance, community security/peace and health/physical activity. In around two-thirds of the projects, MoY is listed as the main or co-responsible body, followed — with a big gap — by the Ministry of Education, Labour, Information and Communication Technology (each four projects), and the Ministries of Health and Awqaf Islamic Affairs and Holy Places (both three projects). The Ministries of Culture, Environment, and Public Works and Housing, are responsible for one project each.

Despite its cross-sectorial character, this illustrates the dominance of MoY in the implementation of NYS commitments. It must be noted that some thematic areas are not covered despite their significant impact on youth, such as mental health and mobility/public transport. The Steering Committee is tasked with “supervising the implementation of the strategy and for coordinating the efforts between the relevant authorities and for facilitating the procedures required to achieve the objectives of this strategy” (translated from original in Arabic).

Gender: A Largely Unexplored Dimension in the NYS 2019-25

Young women face a much higher risk of being unemployed and encountering obstacles to participate in public life than their male counterparts. In turn, girls outperform boys in school. In combination with age, gender-based discrimination can act as a “double barrier” perpetuating unequal access to opportunities and participation in social, economic and public life. However, the gender dimension remains largely unexplored in the strategy.

On the other hand, other identity factors may also increase the risk of vulnerability and marginalisation. While the NYS 2019-25 does not include specific commitments for youth living in poverty, NEET youth or orphans, for instance, it acknowledges the specific needs of disabled youth and the importance of integrating them into the educational process and by equipping youth centres accordingly.
Box 3.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Consider publishing online the results from the consultation of young people** that informed the elaboration of the NYS 2019-25.
- **Build up a system of data collection and storage** within MoY and set clear quality standards for the submission of evidence from implementing partners to monitor and evaluate progress.
- **Collect age-disaggregated data** in areas where it is scarce (e.g. volunteering, education, health, social exclusion) in partnership with relevant institutions such as the Department of Statistics and universities.
- **Dedicate adequate financial and human resources** to the implementation of the NYS 2019-25.
- **Invest in building up administrative capacities** with a focus on MoY staff to steer and monitor and evaluate the strategy, for instance in collaboration with the Youth Leadership Centre.
- **Institutionalise monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** and clarify the mandates, roles and responsibilities of the Steering Committee and each implementing agency.
- **Design an Action Plan to engage young people** in all stages of implementing, monitoring and evaluating the strategy.
This Chapter examines the formal organisation of youth affairs within the Government of Jordan with a focus on the institutional set up and coordination mechanisms established between all relevant stakeholders. Building on the previous Chapter, it will examine in detail the financial and human resources allocated to the Ministry of Youth and thus identify strengths and needs for building administrative capacity to steer the NYS 2019-25 across the whole of government.

A Dedicated Ministry for Youth Affairs

Jordan established a dedicated Ministry of Youth to organise youth affairs, succeeding the Higher Council for Youth and Sports in 2016. The youth and sports portfolios continue to be assigned to MoY while distinct directorates exist for each. The combination of youth and sports within the same ministry is a frequent form of organising these portfolios across MENA countries. For instance, youth affairs are chiefly being dealt with by a ministry of youth and sports in Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia (see Figure 5). In contrast, around half of the OECD countries (19) deliver youth policy and programmes through a unit or office inside a ministry, most commonly the ministry of education (stand-alone or in combination with research, science, culture, among others)\(^24\). As of 2018, five OECD countries were organising youth affairs at the Centre of Government (CoG)\(^25\).

In Jordan, the Minister of Youth is assisted and advised in his functions by the Committee for Planning, Coordination and Follow-up, created within the ministry, and a Secretary General. The committee is presided by the Minister and tasked to study and submit recommendations to the Minister on MoY’s plans, programmes and activities. This Committee is also responsible for drafting laws, budgets, regulations and instructions. According to MoY, the Committee has been working on a Structural and Institutional Development Strategy (2020-23) since 2018, which is expected to define the needs for capacity building support in MoY across all units at the central and subnational levels.

Providing Incentives and Training for Employees

Sufficient human and financial resources are crucial to develop, implement and monitor youth-related policies and services and to coordinate youth affairs more generally. As outlined before, the NYS 2019-25 admits a lack of allocations for youth programmes in the Government Budget and the lack of efficiency of human resources working with young people. These challenges risk distorting youth policy outcomes and tangible improvements in the lives of young people.
Among around 1900 employees (including staff in youth centres and youth/sports cities), 18% are aged 18-34 years (2018). Among the 312 employees working in the youth centres, 43% are younger than 35 years according to the survey results. Representing 53% of all MoY employees, the vast majority is classified as "Supportive Jobs (third category)", followed by 37% in the job group "Other jobs" and 6% "Accountants". As of 2018, 24 employees work as legal researcher or programmer, 24 as engineers and only 42 work in the job group "General Administration and Local Administration Jobs (including the Senior Category). 35% of all MoY employees are women, however, their share declines to around 8% in the job category "General Administration and Local Administration Jobs". The age structure, in particular among youth workers, and professional background of employees more generally (only 38% have a university degree) is seen as a challenge within MoY. Currently, younger temporary staff is primarily recruited through the collaboration with donors and international partners.

The rather low share of young people working in MoY is due to the selection process by the Civil Service Bureau (CSB), which is responsible for public sector employment across the public administration in Jordan. Selection criteria include graduation year, grade, and experience, which advantages candidates above 30 years over younger applicants. According to the survey results, MoY employees are not always selected based on a specialisation or university degree in this field. Job descriptions are vague or do not exist, even at the level of directors. Until a few years ago, the Minister was free to hire additional staff at his discretion without going through the formal process with CSB. These and other challenges in the human resource management system have resulted in concerns about limited incentives for staff.

The lack of training opportunities for MoY staff is highlighted by the NYS 2019-25 and presents one of the main challenges the ministry is facing. The Youth Leadership Centre is in charge of conducting research and studies and of organising trainings for MoY employees, including for new staff in the Youth Directorates and youth centres. Available information suggests that existing trainings (i.e. around five courses per year) focus on Life Skills, internal rules and the objectives of the National Youth Strategy rather than building fundamental capacities in the field of policy/programme design, implementation and follow-up. Moreover, no formal mechanism exists for young people to conduct internships with MoY, depriving the ministry of an important resource for innovation. Important steps have been taken by MoY to understand the parameters driving work-life satisfaction by sharing an online survey among employees. It is unclear, however, to what extent the results have been evaluated and used internally.

**Scarce Budgetary Resources**

In 2019, Jordan was reported to devote 0.35 percent of its central government budget to the Ministry of Youth, which amounts to 34.8 million Jordanian Dinar (JD) up from 27 million JD in 2018.

MoY's expenditures are classified according to three programmes: 1) Administration and Supportive Services; 2) Youth Development; 3) Sport Development. The highest share of the budget is allocated to youth affairs (41%), followed by an allocation of 35% to administrative and support services and 24% for sports development. The expenditures in the category “Youth Development” are almost exclusively dedicated to establishing and maintaining new youth centres, youth hostels, youth camps and playgrounds in the governorates. In the category "Administration and Support Services", an estimated 170,000 JD is allocated to "Enhancing the institutional capacities of the Ministry" and 750,000 JD to "Establishing a new building for MoY". In contrast, 91% in this category is allocated to current expenditures (administrative and support services). The total salary expenditures represent 31% of the total budget allocated to MoY in
2019, down from 47% in 2017, mainly due to much higher expected investments into "Buildings and Constructions".

Comparative data on the resources allocated to youth programming by governments is often lacking (and challenging to estimate conceptually). This makes it difficult to compare the level of resources dedicated to youth affairs across countries. Demonstrating Jordan’s progress in promoting fiscal transparency in the past years, the General Budget Department, within the Ministry of Finance, set up an online platform to exchange fiscal data across ministries and departments. MoY’s overall financial allocations and expenditures according to governorates, portfolios and years are now available on the platform in English and Arabic.

**Coordination Across Ministries and Levels of Government**

The cross-cutting nature of youth policy requires strong coordination mechanisms across governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to avoid a fragmented delivery of youth programmes and services as outlined in the previous Chapter. It remains to be seen whether the coordination body envisaged to monitor and evaluate the NYS 2019-25 will improve what is considered to be one of the key challenges in Jordan’s youth sector. Traditionally, in the absence of an institutionalised body such as an inter-ministerial working group or youth focal points, MoY has been coordinating with other line ministries bilaterally through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs). Table 1 illustrates that coordination in the field of youth affairs across MENA countries is often ad hoc, underlining the need for a more systematic and sustainable mechanism to improve horizontal coordination.

**Table 1. Inter-ministerial coordination in selected MENA countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Institution responsible for horizontal coordination</th>
<th>Main coordination mechanisms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>No specific mechanism; informal and ad hoc meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauritania</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>No specific mechanism; Informal or ad hoc meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); Institutional coordination bodies and committees; formal meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth and Sports</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding (MoU); Institutional coordination bodies and committees; formal meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Ministry of Youth</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD (forthcoming, 2020), Youth Empowerment in MENA countries.

**Youth Affairs at the Subnational Level**

Effective vertical co-ordination is indispensable to translate the commitments and programmes set out in the NYS 2019-25 into concrete activities on the ground. Indeed, the first contact with the public administration for young people often takes place at the municipal or district level. The involvement of subnational levels of the government through regular upward (local to central) and downward (central to local) exchanges is therefore critical. While Jordan is historically highly centralised, the country has engaged in decentralisation reform, which has raised high expectations to result in reduced territorial disparities and more opportunities for citizen participation in the identification of local needs and priorities.
In 2017, MoY started giving youth directors in the governorates greater administrative and financial autonomy and decided to facilitate approval procedures. Youth Directors oversee the work at the level of governorates, including of the youth centres. However, the unequal access of youth from more remote areas to services and programmes offered by MoY illustrates the need for continuous efforts and administrative capacity building at the local level.

**Box 4.1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Provide a clear job description for each job family and review the incentive system for employees with a focus on introducing transparent performance measures and a merit-based reward system.
- Design a training programme to skill up MoY staff in policy/programme design, implementation and follow-up, for instance through the Youth Leadership Centre, and encourage staff to join the courses.
- Consider setting up an Internship Programme for young people to gain valuable work experience and foster innovation within MoY.
- Institutionalise coordination between MoY and other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the youth field, for instance through an inter-ministerial working group, “youth focal points” across line ministries or an annual forum.
- Upgrade the system of data collection and exchange between MoY and Youth Directorates at the level of governorates with a view to involving youth more systematically in the identification of local priorities.
5 Youth participation and representation in public life

The empowerment of youth in the political, social and economic field along with the promotion of youth engagement, effective citizenship and leadership are listed as strategic objectives in the NYS 2019-25.

Youth participation in public life across OECD countries takes various forms: from volunteering to the participation in public consultations to political engagement through voting, campaigning, membership in a political party or involvement in a social movement. As of 2018, 27 out of 36 OECD countries had a national youth council or similar body to act as advocacy body of young people’s interests; moreover, local youth councils are widespread across OECD countries. In some countries, an advisory council, led by young people, advises ministries directly on sectorial legislation. In Denmark, for instance, the Danish Youth Climate Council was set up to advise the Ministry of Climate and Energy on climate policy.

Promoting Youth Participation through Jordan’s Open Government Agenda

Jordan was the first Arab country to join the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2012, followed by Tunisia and Morocco in 2014 and 2018 respectively. Meanwhile, the Government of Jordan has elaborated its 4th National Action Plan (2018-20), which was launched in October 2018.

The open government agenda provides a largely untapped potential for MoY and young people alike to encourage youth participation in public life. The current Action Plan is indeed the first to refer specifically to youth institutions, which shall be included in the national dialogue (Commitment 3). The elaboration of future plans could involve youth already in the design phase to ensure that their concerns inform the elaboration of objectives and commitments.

Creating an Enabling Environment for Youth Participation

The protection of civil rights and liberties, such as access to information, freedom of speech and expression, association and assembly, is an important condition for citizen engagement.

The right to access information (ATI) and public data is a key element in implementing Open Government principles to facilitate public access to government-held data. Access to information is thus a condition for good governance, transparency, citizens’ understanding of public policies and their participation in shaping the process. All OECD countries have adopted access-to-information laws. Jordan was the first country in the MENA region to enact the right to information in 2007, however, a recent comparative report published by OECD finds that the law presents limits due to its vagueness.
A number of indicators to assess the status of political rights, civil liberties, voice and accountability demonstrates that Jordan continues to face challenges in creating an enabling environment for youth to participate. For instance, in the 2019 Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International Jordan ranks 60th among 180 countries, down from 55th in 2014, and 6th among 18 countries in the MENA region.

Results from the Arab Barometer survey indicate that 75% of Jordanian youth are not interested in politics (compared to 25% of youth, aged 15-29 years, in OECD countries who stress to be “not at all interested” in politics), among others due to the perception that their civil liberties are not protected. This is confirmed by 44% of Jordanian youth reporting that freedom of expression is not guaranteed, while 53% stress that their freedom to protest is not guaranteed. On the other hand, young people in Jordan show strong awareness for the importance to engage in community development. Data from the International Republican Institute suggests that, as of 2017, approximately 77% of Jordanians aged 18-34 believe in the importance of engaging in the development of their community.

**Civic and Citizenship Education**

The 2017 OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity acknowledges the importance of “carrying out, where appropriate, campaigns to promote civic education on public integrity, among individuals and particularly in schools”. This resonates with findings from a recent OECD report "Education for Integrity: Teaching on anticorruption, values and the rule of law" (2018) that educating children and youth in the field of integrity and anti-corruption will likely have a positive impact on future civic behaviour.

Civic and citizenship education support youth in understanding and exercising their rights, embrace democratic values and acquire the skills to communicate, think critically and engage in decision making. Civic and citizenship education should not be merely a theoretical exercise and limited to discussions in classrooms. The participation of students in school governance (e.g. student councils), community service and in extra-curricular activities provide spaces to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. Volunteering and engagement through associations can enhance young people’s personal skills and make an important contribution to national development. Support structures, such as training schemes and funding programmes, are crucial to create an environment in which civic and citizenship education can flourish.

The NYS 2019-25 targets to increase the number of youth workshops on democracy and citizenship to 36 workshops per year by 2025, primarily through its 199 local youth centres (2018). The youth centres provide a space for young men and women to participate in workshops and seminars to improve their skills, knowledge and attitudes; participation, networking, partnership and volunteerism, and support youth initiatives, innovation and creativity. The centres are spread across all 12 governorates and are separated for young men (112) and young women (87). 43% of the centres are in the North region, followed by the Mid region (27%) and then the South (30%).

The need to activate and restructure the youth centres in Jordan has been discussed frequently. In December 2019, MoY and the Ministry of Education started to carry out a study on transforming inactive youth centres into kindergartens (KG), in light of the government's decision to include all 5-year olds in KG 2 education during the 2021 academic year. According to the survey results, youth centres used to receive a fixed financial contribution by year in the past. As of 2019, youth centres are required to submit operational plans on a quarterly basis while the financial contributions to each centre are linked to the implementation of activities (as opposed to monthly or annual allocations). Reportedly, the first experiences with the new system are positive as it allows MoY to redirect funds into operational centres.
Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan

Digital Tools and Innovation to Foster Youth Participation

The Recommendation of the OECD Council on Open Government defines stakeholder participation as “all the ways in which stakeholders can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery, including information [...] consultation [...] and engagement”. It calls upon countries to grant stakeholders equal and fair opportunities to be informed and consulted and actively engage them in all phases of the policy-cycle and service design and delivery (Provision 8).

Most young people in Jordan are growing up as “digital natives” and demonstrate strong awareness and skills in mastering new digital technologies. This development comes with new challenges, such as the spread of false news against which the Government of Jordan launched the electronic platform “Haggak Tiraf” (“You have the right to know”) in November 2018 to combat false rumours and enhance access to information. On the other hand, the digitalisation of all aspects of life provides new opportunities for young people to participate and engage.

Indeed, youth in Jordan is rapidly adapting to the digitalisation. In 2019, 96% of young people in Jordan uses the internet of which 99% are active on social media daily. More than 60% report to rely primarily on social media for breaking news. While social media has become the most important tool of information and communication, studies suggest that there is a common perception among Jordanian youth that their needs are not taken into consideration. According to data from the International Republican Institute (IRI), as of May 2017, 52% of the respondents believe that politicians do not listen to the needs and ideas of young people. The statement is slightly more pronounced among the age group of 18-24 year-olds (55%).

To counter this trend, MoY has undertaken significant efforts to open up new information and communication channels through its Twitter, Facebook and Instagram profiles since 2016. As of February 2020, the Facebook and Twitter account, which are updated with information about the activities of the ministry on a daily basis, count more than 111,000 friends and 10,000 followers respectively. Since 2016, MoY also has its own Youtube channel, which is visited less frequently though. MoY’s website is available in both English and Arabic and provides general information about the ministry, youth cities and sport facilities as well as youth clubs. It features a platform for young people to submit their ideas and initiatives. Moreover, important conferences in the field of innovation in Jordan include the Arab Artificial Intelligence Summit, held in October 2019, and the Innovation Forum, organised with the Minister of Youth in February 2020.

The efforts invested by the ministry into sharing information with youth through social media are remarkable. Building on these steps, future efforts could focus on moving gradually from the provision of information to a more regular consultation of youth with the support of digital tools.

Low Representation of Youth in State Institutions

Like any group in society, young people should be represented fairly in political life and across state institutions. However, young men and women continue to remain underrepresented in the traditional political institutions due to their age, limited opportunities and presumed lack of experience (see Chapter 2). Although the situation varies significantly among countries, MPs below 40 years account for only 22% of all parliamentarians in single or lower houses in OECD countries (see Figure 5). In comparison, only 10% of MPs in the House of Representatives in Jordan are younger than 40 years.
Youth in Jordan express very low levels of trust in political parties (7% among 18-29 year-olds, 2018)\(^54\). In the local elections on August 2017, despite a reduced minimum age for candidates to 25 years, only 6% of the 6,623 candidates were under the age of 30 and only 14% under the age of 40\(^55\). The average age of elected candidates in the governorate and municipal elections in 2017 was around 50 years. Similarly, the youngest mayor elected in Jordan was 27 years old with an average age of 46 years in the three provinces with the youngest mayors (Madaba, Aqaba, and Kerak)\(^56\).

In collaboration with the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, MoY launched the Jordan School of Politics (JSoP) in 2019. JSoP is a training programme that aims to encourage youth participation in public life through building trust and democratic values and develop skills and knowledge to aspire a political career. Among others, it intends to support parties and activists to develop their capacities in light of the upcoming 2020 elections\(^57\).
Box 5.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Associate MoY and youth stakeholders more closely** to the design and implementation of National Action Plans for the Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- **Design programmes to support young people in the design and implementation of their own initiatives**, based on seed funding mechanisms, to promote citizenship education and create employment opportunities
- **Establish incubator programmes for young entrepreneurs and innovators** in Jordan to start their own business
- **Increase the representation of young people in state institutions**, for instance by establishing peer-to-peer dialogue programmes and networks between young elected officials and young candidates at national and subnational level
Young people are in a distinct phase in their lives. For many, this phase is characterised by the continued protection provided by their families and the pursuit of greater autonomy, for instance in the form of moving from school to higher education or finding a job. As heterogeneous as they are, “youth concerns or interests” are not limited to the realm of education, employment and health. A mainstreamed approach across all national and sectorial strategies, action plans and programmes is critical to create an environment in which young people can thrive.

Lack of Age-Disaggregated Evidence

Evidence from the survey for line ministries suggest that the lack of age-disaggregated data poses a serious challenge to pursue a mainstreamed approach. This might be linked to a traditional understanding of youth’s needs, which is defined in rather narrow terms across most departments although the demographic reality in Jordan would suggest otherwise.

Anticipating the Impact of Regulations and Budget Allocations

A number of OECD countries experiments with new governance tools to apply a “youth lens” across the whole of government, such as “youth checks” (i.e. ex ante impact assessments of draft regulation, currently applied by 5 OECD countries). Other countries are now analysing the impact of public expenditure decisions across older and younger generations in the pursuit of intergenerational justice (e.g. such as the Gender Budgeting Analysis+ in Canada). Indeed, the OECD Recommendation on Budgetary Governance characterises the public budget as the central policy document of government, showing how annual and multi-annual objectives will be prioritised and achieved. In the context of Jordan, the implementation of such tools might not immediately result in better outcomes for young people given the absence of an administrative culture applying impact assessments.

On the other hand, in the field of public budgeting, Jordan has implemented important initiatives to increase transparency and participation over the last years. For instance, the General Budget Department publishes the general budget law, detailed budgets for each government unit and a Citizen Budget on the website of the Ministry of Finance. With the support of the National Council for Family Affairs and UNICEF, child-friendly budgeting analyses were conducted among eight ministries since 2009, followed by a commitment by some ministries to develop a Child Budget Engagement Strategy. The summary of the General Budget for each fiscal year estimates the allocation to children (aged 0-18 years) by ministry, which presents an important step to increase transparency and accountability. These exercises are important and could be expanded to cover
the category of “youth” in the future. When public resources are invested into the protection and empowerment of children and youth they will be in a better position to contribute to the social and economic development of their country. Likewise, OECD evidence confirms that investments at an early stage can help youth move out of the poverty trap and avoid an accumulation of inequalities over the life cycle.

Young people could play a much more active role in the elaboration of national and sectorial strategies and the allocation of public resources in Jordan. However, currently, the support structures to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge falls short of what is needed. It is indeed noteworthy that the high-level political commitment to involve youth in decision making often remains unmatched with concrete action on the ground or limited to community engagement and volunteering.

Box 6.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase the sensitivity of public officials in line ministries** to design policies and services in a youth-responsive manner, for instance by organising awareness/training programmes and providing incentives (e.g. by including commitments in the performance evaluation)

- **Elaborate a manual/toolkit to encourage policy makers** across ministerial portfolios to inform, consult and engage young people across the design and delivery of public policies and services

- **Consider publishing a “Youth(-friendly) Budget”** demonstrating the total public expenditures benefiting young people across all ministries

- **Engage young people in the allocation of public resources** at subnational level through participatory budgeting programmes
Notes

5. idem
15. UNFPA (2015), Who is doing what for youth in Jordan


The list of principles include: 1) Supported by political commitment; 2) Evidence-based; 3) Participatory; 4) Resourced/Budgeted; 5) Transparent/Accessible; 6) Monitored and Evaluated/Accountable; 7) Cross-Sectoral/Transversal; 8) Gender responsive.

According to the decree 8/11/1/21182 from 19 May 2019, the SC is chaired by the Secretary General of MoY and composed of the Secretary Generals from the Ministries of Culture, Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research, Political and Parliamentary Affairs, Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, Awqaf Islamic Affairs and Holy Places and Labour along with representatives of the Prime Minister, Ministry of State for Media Affairs, Interior and the General Command of the Armed Forces.


http://moy.gov.jo/ar/node/172

OECD Survey.


The only exception is the allocation of 400,000 JD for the implementation of the NYS 2019-25 (see Chapter 3).

http://w w w. g b d. g o v. j o/ G B D/ e n/ B u d g e t / M i n i s t r i e s/ g e n e r a l- b u d g e t- l a w - 2 0 1 8

Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan


34 The OGP is a multilateral initiative launched in 2011 that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. As of November 2019, the Partnership holds 79 participating countries and thousands of civil society organizations. For more information: http://www.opengovpartnership.org/


38 A country’s score notes the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). Transparency International Index, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2019;

39 According to surveys conducted across the MENA region by the Arab Barometer from September 2018 - April 2019 which included more than 25,000 face-to-face interviews.


41 idem

42 https://www.iri.org/resource/iri-expert-highlights-importance-jordanian-youth-national


45 Civic education focuses on people’s knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and the processes of civic life (such as voting in elections), while citizenship education focuses on knowledge and understanding of opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society. OECD (2011), How's Life?: Measuring Well-being, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264121164-en.


47 A document offered by the MoY, issued on 17 November 2019 on youth centres and camps


49 The Recommendation defines stakeholders as: “any interested and/or affected party, including: individuals, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, religious and political affiliations; and institutions and organisations, whether governmental or non-governmental, from civil society, academia, the media or the private sector”
Building Government Capacity to Empower Youth in Jordan

50 https://haggak.jo/website/
52 http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2017-7-12_jordan_poll_slides.pdf.
55 https://www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/youth-playing-more-prominent-role-jordan%E2%80%99s-upcoming-local-elections
56 https://www.brookings.edu/research/marginalized-youth-toward-an-inclusive-jordan/
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