



Understanding the skills sector in Jordan

- A baseline report of the technical education and vocational training system (TVET) in Jordan



Danish-Arab
Partnership Programme



Confederation of Danish Industry



غرفة صناعة الأردن
Jordan Chamber of Industry



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Executive Summary

The Jordanian labour market is characterized by a young population paired with one of the highest unemployment rates in the MENA region. Youth face discouraging job prospects, regardless of educational level, and the transition period from graduation to actual employment is long. The population growth, and thus labour supply and job demand endlessly surpass that of job creation. Moreover, low labour force participation rates, particularly amongst women, represent deep-rooted challenges. Therefore, the investment in youth through adequate education, training and accelerated job creation is imperative to the sustainable development of the country. This is necessary in order to secure sustainable job creation for the population, as well as create a long-term access to talent and the needed foundation for economic growth.

The technical vocational education and training (TVET) system poses a great potential to effectively integrate youth into the labour market, by accommodating essential theoretical practical knowledge and skills, alongside on-the-job training. However, for the TVET system to become more attractive for young Jordanians, a multitude of challenges ought to be tackled. The TVET system to date suffers from a social stigma, in that it is regarded as an option of last resort for students who have been unsuccessful in completing their basic education.

The preliminary challenges encountered by Jordan's youth often emerge from the vicinity of their own homes. Families feel a sense of humiliation and degradation if their child do not progress secondary higher education due to poor academic results. By a similar token, women in particular are limited in their educational choices due to cultural norms and social stigma. The influence of families and cultural norms are the initial shapers of youth decisions with regard to education and career. Furthermore, onto the enterprise level, it is worthwhile to mention that the majority of firms operating in Jordan encompass small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often do not offer formal apprenticeships, regardless of the potential benefits towards higher enterprise efficiency. In light of the aforementioned, the TVET education system effectively builds a bridge between labour market supply and demand. However, in order to fully realize its potential, enterprises are required to exhibit higher involvement in the TVET system by effectively steering the demand requirements of the labour market, in order to circumvent a supply mismatch. Therefore, it is crucial to align the TVET system and the private sector needs. The following recommendations have emerged through this baseline assessment:

- Effectuate a change in the perception of TVET in order to increase attractiveness in the eyes of parents and youth;
- Increase the involvement of businesses and emphasize benefits for firm efficiency;
- Increase the involvement of businesses in the design and implementation of TVET programs to close labour market supply and demand gaps;
- Streamline governance in the TVET system and ensure that quality conditions are met with relation to training;
- Ensure that companies exhibit commitment in the provision of quality education through-out student apprenticeships;

- Increase the involvement of social partners, e.g. employer’s organizations and labour unions within the TVET infrastructure.

In light of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), a multitude of socio-economic challenges which have been unresolved have exacerbated with the exact aftermath of the pandemic yet hard to specify. It is, however, of absolute urgency amidst ongoing economic turmoil to alleviate the further marginalization of youth, which may jeopardize Jordan’s window of opportunity towards a sustainable growth trajectory.



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Acronyms and Abbreviations

BAU	Al-Balqa Applied University
CAQA	Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DAPP	Danish Arab Partnership Programme
DoS	Department of Statistics
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ETF	European Training Foundation
E-TVET	Employment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRD	Human Resource Development Strategy
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JRP	Jordan Response Plan
LSE	London School of Economics
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MoL	Ministry of Labour
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NES	National Employment Strategy
NSPS	National Social Protection Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OJT	On-the-Job Training
QIZ	Qualifying Industrial Zone
SDG 4	Sustainable Development Goal 4
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation
WHO	World Health Organization

Preface

” *We cannot always build the future for our youth,
but we can build our youth for the future.*

– FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

The youth are fundamental to sustainable development and they are the key to economic growth, innovation, and social change. Jordan’s youth have particularly been affected by drastic unemployment and face tremendous challenges in transitioning into adulthood and finding employment. This report investigates the drivers that shape the current national labour market, the TVET system, and youth unemployment, with special focus on the perspective of young graduates/job seekers, as well as through the lens of employers.

The objective of this scoping study is to contribute to the project development phase under the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP) with the long-term vision to contribute to the reduction of youth unemployment through improvement of the TVET system in Jordan.

The DAPP is Denmark’s collaboration programme with the Middle East and North Africa. The programme helps to strengthen good governance and ensure economic opportunities, especially for young people and women in the region, through partnerships. This baseline report is a part of the joint pilot project between the Confederation of Danish Industry, the Danish Trade Union Development Agency, and Oxfam Ibis. While many other development projects support improvements in the TVET system, this particular project focuses on the role of the private sector and how to improve the learning obtained through on-the-job training. By improving the quality of the vocational education, the long-term vision is for more young people in Jordan to enrol into vocational education and thereby find employment in the private sector.

The Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) has 18,100 members consisting of private companies in industry, building, trade and services. DI’s goal is to promote good framework conditions for the Danish business sector. The employer and business organization has more than twenty years of experience in providing support and consulting in organizational development, capacity building, strategy development and public affairs in developing countries.

The Danish Trade Union Development Agency (Ulandssekretariatet) is the development and assistance organization of the Danish trade union movement. The objective of the Danish Trade Union Development Agency is to promote the sustainable and democratic development of labour markets in developing countries. This is done in collaboration with the trade union movement as well as employers’ organizations and government institutions in Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

Oxfam IBIS is the Danish branch of the worldwide NGO Oxfam International. Oxfam is very well established in Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and Jordan, where they have worked with social rights, gender equality and education and employment for young people for nearly fifty years.



This report is written by Ms. Karam Samman, who holds an MSc. in International Business and Strategy with extensive consulting experience in the Middle East region within both the public and private sector. Her expertise is centered around international development and strategy. She is experienced in capacity-building related to trade and competitiveness, while her work moreover addressed issues related to labour, employment and youth, contributing to building conducive business and policy environments.

This baseline study is organized into five key sections as follows:

- 1) The labour market background.** This section provides an in-depth analysis of the Jordanian labour market dynamics while including pertinent statistics and trends. The section furthermore provides a snapshot of national policy initiatives aiming to reduce unemployment.
- 2) An overview of the education system.** This section offers an overview of Jordan's educational landscape, with particular spotlight on the vocational education system.
- 3) Case studies; TVET from the perspectives of youth and businesses.** This section explores the perceptions of employers and youth in relation to the labour market challenges and opportunities faced; and furthermore, includes qualitative mini cases of TVET graduates' career paths.
- 4) TVET governance and systemic challenges.** This section assesses the TVET governance system and provides an overview of the inherent external and internal challenges present.
- 5) The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.** This section discusses the effects of COVID-19 on the economy, the education sector, and in particular on the TVET system.

Methodology

The methodological approach applied throughout this scoping study is primarily of a qualitative nature, based on literature review, as well as interviews with the target population under study. The study is furthermore supported by secondary quantitative data. This study and the results relied on the availability of data, detailed information, knowledge of relevant institutions, regulations and policies which bear an effect on education and employment sectoral dynamics.

Furthermore, the report draws on primary data through qualitative interviews. A sample of both Jordanian youth and employers was interviewed in order to examine perceptions on subject areas of the labour market and employment. The sample size consisted of 6 employers and 8 youths, with equal distribution amongst youth gender. The interviews of young females and males (aged 18-25) covered topics relevant to vocational education, transition to work life and challenges encountered, including aspirations and perceptions and influence of families related to youth career choice. Employers' interviews on the other hand, included questions on labour market dynamics, on-the-job training workplace practices, as well as challenges faced related to demand for labour. Data was collected through both telephone and face-to-face meetings.

It is to be noted, that the primary data of this study can neither be extrapolated nor deemed nationally representative. The findings, however, do provide generally valuable insights on the labour market dynamics and challenges faced by both young Jordanians and employers. The findings moreover hold high relevance for purposes of policy development and advocacy in the field of employment. Given that the investigation of youth unemployment and justification is critical to delineate a future project action plan, a coherent and objective stance was adopted throughout.

It is important to recognize the difficulty in accessing accurate data and statistics, and therefore the methodology relied on the use of various data sources, and comparison thereof in terms of accuracy. The ultimate aim of the systematic review and analysis of the socio-economic, regulatory and institutional environments is to identify core intervention areas for the advancement of youth employment development objectives.

1 Labour Market Background

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has within the recent decades undergone significant progress through adopting a highly liberal economic stance. Nonetheless, the country has encountered various economic challenges and repercussions mainly brought about by regional crises. Adverse regional developments have contributed to a massive influx of Syrian refugees, which in turn has escalated into an exceptional population growth, mounting unemployment, and decreasing investment levels.

According to the Department of Statistics (DoS), Jordan's population is estimated at 10.74 million (2020), to have virtually doubled from approximately 6.99 million in 2011. Since the outset of the Syrian crisis, Jordan has become a welcoming shelter for 1.3 million refugees, hosting the second highest share of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR, 2019). The influx of Syrian refugees in turn, has resulted in an economic shock, with far-reaching implications. One of the greatest by-products of the sudden surge in population is the state of disequilibrium of the labour market, which represents a heavy burden on Jordan's economic and social development. Unemployment accordingly signifies Jordan's most pressing issue to date. The unemployment rate has increased to 23% in the second quarter of 2020, in comparison to 19% in 2019 (DoS).

FIGURE 1: UNEMPLOYMENT RATES BY GENDER (%), 2018-2020



Source: DoS

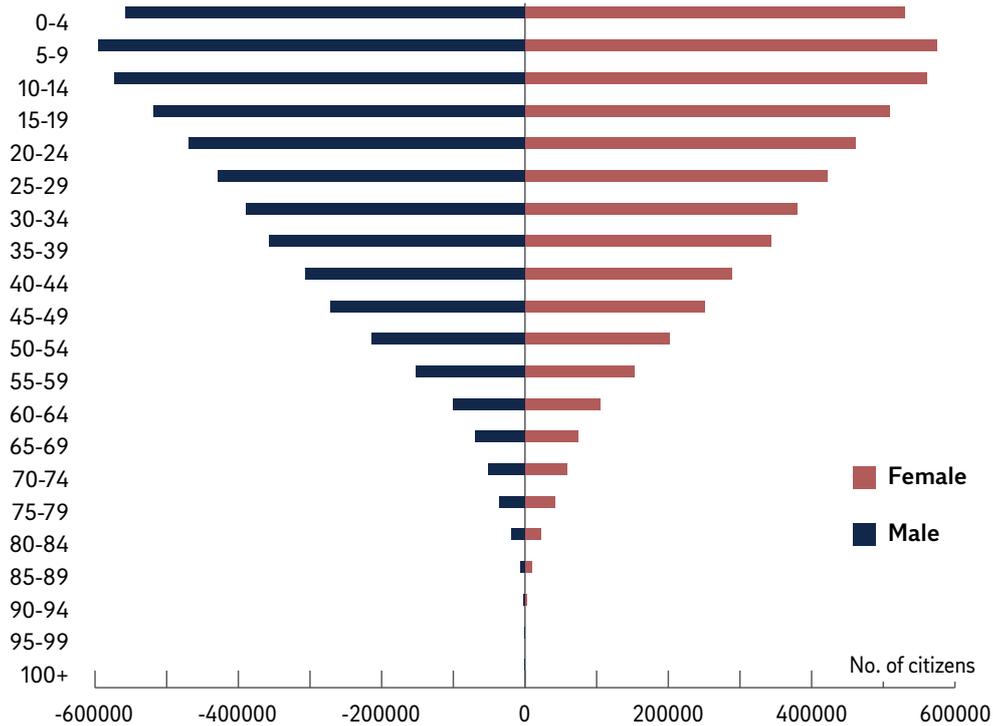
As illustrated by Figure 1, the unemployment rate discrepancy between genders is quite significant. The unemployment rate for Jordanian males stands at 21.5%, versus 28.6% for females. In comparison to the second quarter of 2019, unemployment has increased by 4.4 percentage points for males and 1.4 percentage points for females, respectively.

Demographic pressure is specifically centered on the country's youth, which is drastically affected by unemployment. According to the World Bank (2018), the economy of Jordan has been estimated to generate 50,000 jobs per annum, while in fact 200,000 new job

opportunities are required to absorb new labour market entrants per year. The lack and decline of net job creation hence result in immense economic and social strain.

According to the World Development Indicator released by the World Bank (2015), the national workforce is estimated to be growing by 2.5% per annum with more than two-thirds of the Jordanian population under the age of 35. Figure 2 exhibits the population distribution of Jordan by age and gender, illustrating the youthful characteristic of Jordan’s population.

FIGURE 2: JORDAN POPULATION-AGE DISTRIBUTION BY GENDER, 2019



Source: DoS

Individuals under the age of 25 constitute approximately half of Jordan’s aggregate population. With the proportion of youth growing, the challenge will be to ensure that the labour market is capable of absorbing the annual influx.

The upcoming sections explore labour market dynamics with focus on youth unemployment. The analysis is set out to highlight that Jordan’s key challenge revolves around the creation of jobs, while also to increase overall labour force participation rates.

1.1 Youth Unemployment

Youth dominate the population demographics of Jordan, whilst the country exhibits one of the highest unemployment rates in the MENA region (OECD, 2019). Roughly more than 70% of the population is estimated to be below the age of 30, while the youth bracket between ages of 15-24 makes up 22% of the population (DoS; UN Jordan 2019). According to the latest statistics, the unemployment rate of male and female youth aged 15-24 years amounts to 38.4%, with men (40.8%) and women (31.1%), respectively (DoS, 2020).

The prevailing status quo indicates that 39% of youth aged 15-29 are neither enrolled in education, nor employed or in training and fall under the “NEET” category (Amer, 2018; UNICEF, 2019). This particular group of youth exhibits one of the following characteristics:

- a unemployed but actively searching for a job;
- b unemployed and discouraged having the desire to work but not actively searching for a job; or,
- c complete detachment from the labour market.

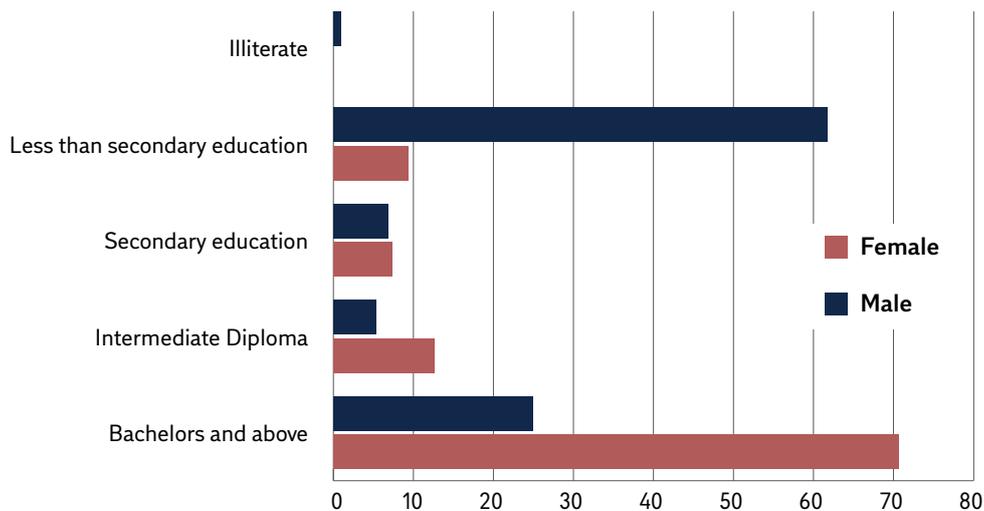
According to a survey conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO), the transitional period from graduation to first job is quite lengthy and takes on average three years until the stage of “stable” employment is reached (2014). In fact, national statistics indicate that for the bulk of unemployed Jordanians, it takes on average 12 to 23 months to find employment. Such lengthy duration of inactivity affects 34.1% of males and 36.5% of females. In 18.7% of males and 32% of females the period of unemployment exceeded 24 months (DoS, 2019). Thus, women on average take longer to find an employment opportunity. Studies on the effects of elongated periods of unemployment establish that youth literally become “scarred” by the lack of employment opportunities available to them. This so-called “scarring-effect” adversely affects job-seeker well-being, in that demotivation and lack of social integration, as well loss of optimism about the economy and its future direction take overhand (LSE, 2017). It could thus be inferred, that more and more youth get pushed into the “NEET” category, should transitional periods remain drastically long and future employment prospects do not sufficiently close the gap between supply and demand.



1.2 Youth unemployment by educational attainment

Within the Jordanian labour market, higher educational levels do not have the expected positive effect on improved employment opportunities. In fact, across all levels of educational qualification, having attained a bachelor's degree evidently represents a predicament. As per Figure 3, it is notable that unemployment is particularly prevalent amongst those who have completed less than secondary education at 48.5%, and bachelor's degree holders at 36.5%. Illiteracy is quite negligible amongst the young Jordanians, which indicates that educational foundations are sound.

FIGURE 3: UNEMPLOYMENT BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL AND GENDER AGED 15+ (%), 2020



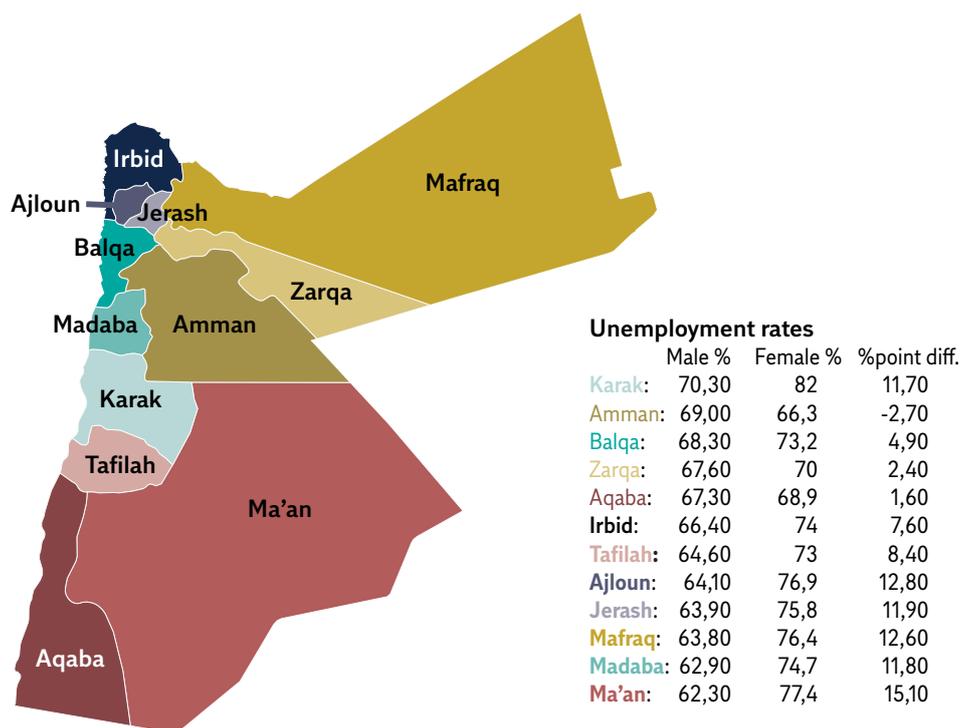
Source: DoS

Individuals holding university degrees and above exhibit a significantly high unemployment rate, which suggests that the economy is not creating sufficient jobs to absorb the large number of labour market entrants. With higher education, the skill sets of university graduates do not match the labour market needs. This mismatch explains the phenomenon of brain-drain, which causes the highly educated Jordanian workforce to migrate to knowledge economies, where they find opportunities which essentially suit their skills. Accordingly, it is estimated that around 600,000 Jordanians have sought to find employment in the Gulf region (ILO, 2014). From the above it is moreover evident that females who have attained higher education are less likely integrated as productive members of society. Reasons for the high unemployment rates in females could be deep-rooted and various such as discrimination, social and cultural stigma, workplace distance, or lack of childcare facilities. Given that gender disparity is a recurring theme, it will be further dissected within the forthcoming sections.

1.3 Unemployment by governorate

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is segregated into 12 governorates, with Amman being the capital. Although unemployment rate differences are negligible considering that economic inactivity in itself represents a drastic challenge, unemployment nonetheless is higher in rural and semi-urban regions of Jordan. Figure 5 depicts both male and female unemployment of Jordanians aged 15-29 within the different governorates.

FIGURE 4: GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYMENT PER GOVERNORATE AND GENDER; 15-29 YEARS, 2019



Source: DoS

The unemployment rates inclusive of both genders are particularly high within the governorates of Karak (73.2%), Balqa (69.3%), Amman (68.4%), Zarqa (67.9%), Irbid (67.6%) and Aqaba (67.5%). The top three highest unemployment rates per geographic distribution for male youth are prevalent in governorates of Karak, Amman, and Balqa. Female unemployment on the other hand is notably high in areas of Karak, Maan, and Ajloun.

1.4 Labour force participation by gender

With regard to labour force participation rates, data is skewed towards a higher rate amongst men. Jordan's ranking in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index 2020 has witnessed a wider and considerably below global average gender disparity, as its ranking score dropped from 93 in 2006 to 138 in 2020, out of 153 countries in total. According to estimates, the level of economic participation of women in the workforce is 7 percentage points below the average of that in the MENA region, and 46 percentage points lower comparable to other upper-middle income countries in the rest of the world (World Bank, 2020).

It is estimated that male labour force participation stands at 67.4%, while that of females stands merely at 15.1%. This signifies that male participation is higher, irrespective of educational background and attainment levels. Albeit female youth holds high levels of education with an estimated 70% having graduated with bachelor's degrees and above, the roots of female labour market disengagement are various and are herewith further explored.

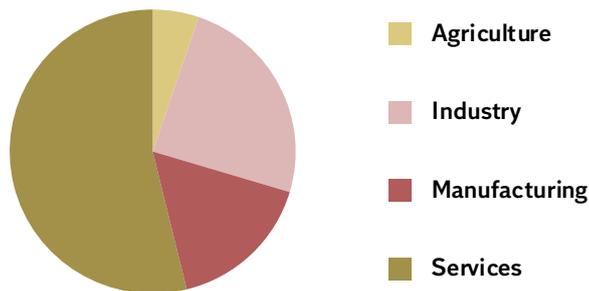
According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the gender imbalance stems from societal and cultural influence and the commonly held stereotype that women adopt the traditional home-maker role, which restricts women empowerment (2017). A survey by UN Women revealed that 57% of women who are unemployed would be willing to work, however, reasons for being unable to enter the labour market are from within their homes (2017). Another reason for abstaining from seeking employment is the gender pay gap that prevails for both men and women working in similar jobs, amounting to 17% (World Bank, 2020).

The creation of jobs for women is rather challenging, as a plethora of socioeconomic attributes ought to be considered ranging from the aforementioned social stigma, low wages, harassment, insufficient transportation means, or lack of childcare facilities. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), however, estimates that a closure of the gender gap in Jordan could bring about a 45% increase of GDP, since the contribution of women to the economy bears promising potential (2017). An analysis conducted by the World Bank (2020) estimates that an increase by one percentage point in female economic engagement would effectuate economic growth by 2.5% per annum until 2035, showing that even small improvements towards closing the gap will have great positive impact on the economy. In sum, the value added to economic growth through increased female participation is significant and could bring about enhanced and more sustainable economic prosperity.

1.5 Employment by economic activity

Jordan witnessed slow economic growth throughout 2019, due to subdued domestic demand. The country predominantly relies on its robust services sector, which primarily contributes to the growth in GDP, followed by economic sectors of industry, manufacturing and agriculture (Figure 4). Albeit timid economic development, sectors of mining & quarrying, electricity and water and manufacturing have witnessed growth, as compared to 2018 (World Bank, 2019, 2020). Furthermore, Table 1 provides a breakdown of the leading economic activity clusters that employ male and female Jordanians.

FIGURE 5: VALUE-ADDED SECTORS (% OF GDP), 2018



Source: World Bank

TABLE 1: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYED JORDANIANS AGED 15+ BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, 2019

	Total	Male	Female
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	27,7	30,6	14,9
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	15,2	17	7,1
Education	13,1	6,9	40,4
Manufacturing	9,1	9,7	6,4
Transportation and storage	6,7	8	1
Construction	4,7	5,6	0,8
Human health and social work activities	5	3,1	13,5

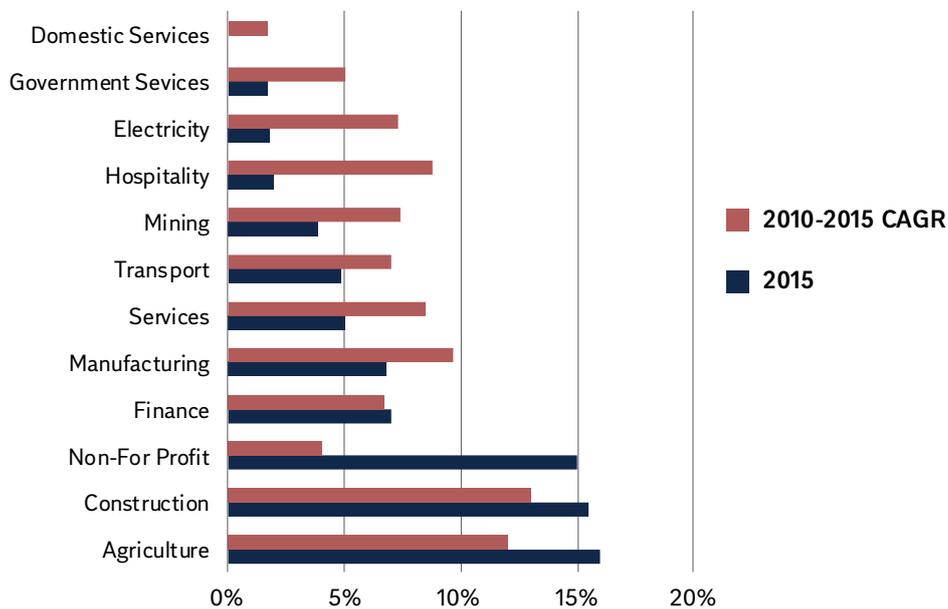
Source: DoS

The top three economic sectors which provide employment to the Jordanian workforce are public administration, defence, and compulsory social security; wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; and the education sector. While male labour is concentrated more within clusters of public administration, defence, and compulsory social security; wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; manufacturing and construction, the female workforce predominantly occupies the education and healthcare sector. In view of the preceding section which highlights educational attainment of males versus females, it becomes clear why women who hold higher education degrees thus are employed within clusters of education and healthcare, which by default demand higher qualification. Moreover, these professional fields are customarily regarded as female-dominated.

1.6 High potential economic sectors for job creation

The Jordan Economic Growth Plan 2018-2022 highlights that Jordan's sectoral growth has been dominated by agriculture, construction, manufacturing and services, as exhibited by Figure 6. However, sectors such as hospitality and electricity have potential to expand and thereby furnish additional job supply prospects. This is attributed to the shift to more sustainable energy sources, as well as the increasing popularity of Jordan as a destination for tourism. In fact, the tourism sector has exhibited robust growth in 2019 (World Bank, 2020). According to the Jordan National Employment Strategy (NES) 2011-2020, the information technology and pharmaceutical sectors furthermore could have the potential for accelerated job creation and contribute to sustainable economic growth.

FIGURE 6: GROWTH RATES BY SECTOR, 2010-2015



Source: Jordan Economic Growth Plan 2018-2022

1.7 Summary: Jordan's labour market challenges

This section reveals that Jordan's labour market dynamics are ailing, pointing towards discouraging job prospects. According to Brookings, a stable ecosystem necessary for youth employment is lacking, which represents the greatest obstacle to economic integration of young Jordanian males and females as productive members of society (2018). Therefore, paving the way towards a smooth move from education to employment is at the forefront of what is required to alleviate youth unemployment. With drastic unemployment figures and ongoing weak economic developments, youth represent the most vulnerable segment of the Jordanian labour market. Unemployment is a prevalent issue, regardless of educational attainment levels, and the transitional periods from graduation to actual employment are prohibitively high. The relentless growth in labour supply has overtaken that of the employment growth required to provide for an effective integration of youth into the labour market. Moreover, low labour force participation rates particularly amongst females represent deep-rooted challenges. The highly educated female population could contribute

to improved economic well-being and actual GDP growth, however, socio-cultural aspects represent the greatest impediments on employment. While such prevailing circumstances signify substantial burdens, they do, however, present a window of opportunity to enable change conducive to amplified growth. However, to effectively reach the objective of job creation, economic and social policy frameworks ought to be altered towards enhanced youth inclusion to promote decent work and growth. The investment in youth through adequate education, training and accelerated job creation is imperative to the sustainable development of the country. The ensuing section sheds light onto governmental strategies and initiatives aimed at contributing to the reduction of youth unemployment.

Policy frameworks to shape youth employment prospects

As part of national aspirations, the creation of ample employment opportunities and social inclusion are at the forefront of strategic agendas. Table 2 summarizes key policy initiatives that at their core target national goals towards the reduction of unemployment.

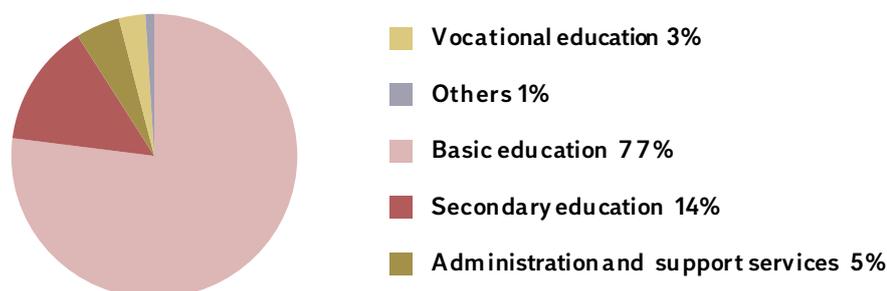
TABLE 2: POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Policy Framework	Objectives
National Employment Strategy (NES) 2011-2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short-term objective by 2014: to absorb the unemployed workforce - Medium-term objective by 2017: to foster the development and growth of SMEs, and conduct skill matching - Long-term objective: to accelerate investment measures into human capital with the aim to increase productivity; and create the foundation for economic restructuring
Jordan National E-TVET Strategy 2014-2020	- The objective of the E-TVET strategy is to foster the inclusion of youth, females and persons with disabilities into the active workforce through a demand-driven approach and effective E-TVET policy framework to harmonize the system into a more sustainable model for education and job catalyst
Jordan Compact (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The objective of the Jordan Compact is to attract amplified investment and trade opportunities to the Kingdom, and thereby boost job creation; - Integration of 200,000 Syrians into the labour market would act as a trade facilitation mechanism through eligibility for Relaxed Rules of Origin
Jordan Response Plan (JRP) 2016-2018	- The JRP came into force in order to alleviate the Syrian humanitarian crisis, that pledged the creation of ample employment opportunities for Syrian refugees and Jordanians in host communities to ultimately bring about an improvement of livelihoods
Human Resource Development Strategy (HRD) 2016-2025	- The objective of the strategy is to ensure that all children have access to quality education and to improve affordability and quality of higher education, as well as to increase enrolment to vocational education
Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2022	- The objectives of the ESP are congruent to that of the HRD strategy, in addition to providing inclusive, equitable quality education for all in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4)
National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) 2019-2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The objective of the strategy is to implement social programmes which are age- and gender-specific to alleviate poverty encompassing three tracks: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunity through labour market efficiency, fair and decent work and social security 2. Empowerment through provision of high-quality education, healthcare and social services 3. Dignity through dedicated services to vulnerable citizens
Jordan 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive socioeconomic development vision; - Key sectoral reforms targeted at unemployment, higher economic participation rates and poverty reduction

National aspirations towards SDG 4

From the above breakdown of the national strategic frameworks, it is evident that Jordan adopts a deep commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which encompasses inclusive and quality education opportunities for all. Particular focus categories are the improvement of primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education, skill development and lifelong learning, inclusion and equality of gender, with emphasis on integration of youth. Albeit the strategic plans appear quite ambitious, research conducted by UNICEF reveals that expenditure on the education system in 2017 has dropped below that seen prior to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2010. Figure 7 provides a breakdown of education expenditure by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

FIGURE 7: EXPENDITURE ON THE EDUCATION SECTOR BY PROGRAMME (EST. 2019)



Source: UNICEF

The expenditure on basic education amounts to JOD 757 million, and is estimated at 77%, followed by 13.6% on secondary education, while only 3% of the budget goes to vocational education. The category labelled as “others” includes expenditure on Kindergarten, special education, social and sports activities, as well as literacy and adult education measures. According to UNICEF, these programmes combined account for 1% of expenditure as a percentage of GDP in 2019. It was found that while the MoE’s overall expenditure on education has grown in real terms, it has since 2013 as a percentage of GDP witnessed a decrease.

In relation to vocational education, the enrolment rate targets set out by the Jordan Vision 2025 framework have not sufficiently been met. The below table provides the total enrolment rate result as of 2017 versus the originally set out target percentage (Table 2).

TABLE 3: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ENROLMENT BASELINE VS. RESULTS

Indicator	2014 Baseline	2017 Target	2017 Result	2025 Target
Enrolment rate	13,12%	20%	13,50%	40%

Source: Adopted from UNIFEF, 2019; Jordan Vision 2025

By a similar token, the same finding was emphasized within the NSPS 2019-2025, putting forward that the share of total enrolment into vocational education has witnessed a drop to 13.5% in 2017 from the aspired target of 20% for the same year. Furthermore, the split of enrolment between males and females has pointed towards an underrepresentation of females, with 57% of enrolled students being male, and 43% amounting to females. Further discussion on vocational education will ensue in the forthcoming sections.

Exhibiting enrolment rates below its potential and set out target, the potential of vocational education and training opportunities remains untapped. In light of the overwhelming numbers of university graduates who struggle to find post-graduation employment, and due to a mismatch in supply-demand dynamics, the TVET system could significantly contribute to a reduction in the staggering unemployment levels among youth. The forthcoming section will shed light onto the educational system in Jordan, and further delve deeper into the TVET sector.



2 Overview of the education system

The education system in Jordan is governed by different bodies in accordance with educational stage. The primary, basic and secondary education levels at schools are under the governance of the MoE, while higher education at the university level is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). Vocational training pathways are offered by the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), which is a public institution. Community colleges on the other hand are under the governance of Al-Balqa Applied University (BAU), which also provide TVET educational programmes.

FIGURE 8: OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Years of education	General education	TVET
1-6	Primary education (6 years)	
6-10	Secondary education (4 years)	
11-12	Upper secondary (academic) (2 years)	Comprehensive secondary (vocational + academic) (2 years) or vocational training (3 months – 2 years)
Tajihi National General Secondary Exam		
13	Bachelors programme (4-6 years)	Technical diploma (2 years)
14		Technical and vocational tertiary programmes (2-3 years)
15		
16		
17	Masters (2 years)	
18		
19	Doctorate (3-5 years)	

Source: Adopted from Unesco

As depicted by Figure 8, the education system in Jordan is comprised by several stages of education, namely primary, basic and secondary stages, followed by the tertiary stage towards higher education. To the right of the figure shows the formal educational way under the MoE. The left side shows the VTC educational pathway.

The primary and basic education stage is comprised by 10 years of mandatory schooling, starting from the age of 6 years until children reach the age of 15 years. The duration of the secondary education stage amounts to two years, and students are on average 16-17 years old. In addition to the applied secondary education, it comprises a combination of academic and vocational streams. Upon completion of the 10th grade, students have the choice to follow different streams depending on their aspiration and grades. Those who have obtained low but satisfactory grades are obliged to follow the comprehensive secondary vocational pathway. Students who, however, have less than satisfactory, failing grades enrol into VTCs to pursue apprenticeship training programs. The completion of the tertiary stage ranges between 2-5 years, and the respective institutions encompass universities and community colleges. Students could attain a bachelor's degree level or alternatively study at a community college for a Diploma certificate.

Students have the option to enrol into vocational training. It is provided through the following pathways:

- Institutionalized vocational education and training through the comprehensive secondary education stream under the oversight of the MoE that leads to the national Tawjihi certificate, if completed successfully. Students graduate with a vocational education diploma and thereafter have the choice for direct entry into the labour market or alternatively pursue further tertiary education, however, with limited choice of educational specialization streams.
- Post 10th grade vocational and technical education at community colleges under the oversight of Al-Balqa Applied University. Some community colleges offer continuing education towards Tawjihi, if enrolment has been successful after a period of 2 years. Programs offered at community colleges are implemented within their own premises.
- The VTC is the chief public institution to provide vocational education within its own established schools through a dual system approach. Dual education and training are conducted at both the VTC premises and at the workplace, leading to skilled, semi-skilled and craftsman levels upon completion. Youth employment projects which are initiated by the Ministry of Labour (MoL) in order to increase employment opportunities are run through the VTC, which provide apprenticeship programs within companies.

According to the MoE, 197 vocational education schools are present to date, of which some offer specialized education curriculums, while others integrate both academic and technical education. The VTC on the other hand has 43 institutes across Jordan and is semi-autonomous, governed by representatives from the private sector as well as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The core stream of vocational training under oversight of MoE is designed for students who have successfully completed 10th grade, aged 16-17 years, and encompasses a 2-year program which is implemented within the 197 vocational education schools per governorate. It offers students a choice of 4 specializations ranging from hospitality, home economics, agriculture, and industrial. The program encompasses general education, vocational, as well as practical components, with a mandatory one month on-the-job training (OTJ). Upon completion, and depending on the success achieved, students take the national Tawjihi secondary level certification exam and thereafter have a choice to either pursue tertiary level education or enter the labour market with their obtained vocational certificate.

TABLE 4: ENROLMENT IN TVET AS A % OF THE TOTAL ENROLMENT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	12,41	12,29	...	13,2	13,13	...	...	13,98	11,53	...
Female	9,31	8,84	...	8,62	8,72	...	...	10,74	8,58	...
Male	15,81	16,08	...	18,14	17,96	...	...	17,69	14,9	...

Source: UNESCO

Table 4 offers enrolment rates to TVET as part of secondary education. Noticeable are the lower enrolment rates of females vis-à-vis the male enrolment rates. Moreover, total enrolment rates have not witnessed a considerable increase since 2010 and remain centered around 13-14%. Table 5 was extracted from the MoE Strategic Plan and shows enrolment

percentages of the vocational secondary education streams by gender. By a similar token, enrolment rates are lower for females for all streams except of Home Economics. Higher enrolment rates within particularly this path could be the nature of the specialization being more “female-oriented”. Several sources emphasized that selection choices of TVET programmes for females were limited, thus bearing a restrictive impact on their career path, which is already hampered by socio-economic factors.

TABLE 5: ENROLMENT IN VOCATIONAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SECTOR STREAMS BY GENDER, 2016-2017

	Male	Female
Hospitality and Tourism	96%	4%
Home Economics	2%	98%
Agriculture	81%	19%
Industrial	98%	2%

Source: MoE Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Community colleges which are either public or private offer various technical and vocational streams to students who choose to drop out of school or have obtained insufficient grades in the Tawjihi exam. Programs differ and duration towards technical diplomas is on average 1-2 years. According to the European Training Foundation (ETF), 42 Community Colleges are present across Jordan (2018).

2.1 Overview of the VTC: The chief provider of TVET in Jordan

The programs offered through the applied VTC apprenticeships, which have been in place since 1977, are various and encompass specializations, such as electricity, automotive, welding, air conditioning, carpentry, refrigeration, garment manufacturing, food and beverage, hospitality, hairdressing/barber and cosmetology. New trades and programs include specializations such as renewable energy, pharmaceutical manufacturing, in addition to water and environment.

The institution collaborates with an estimated 2,400 private organizations, while apprenticeship programs are also implemented within the public sector through partnership agreements with for instance the Greater Amman Municipality, apart from numerous other prominent institutions and local partners.

The VTC implements the apprenticeship training program which offers students the opportunity to attain the occupational levels of skilled workers, as well as semi-skilled and craftsman levels. The main program implemented by the VTC through workplace apprenticeships falls into the skilled-level category, which trains grade 10 students for a duration of 2-4 terms, according to specialization. The training programs offered by the VTC are captured in Table 6.

Upon completion of the apprenticeship program, students are required to undertake a final occupational exam in order to attain their training certificate and work license. Students who graduated have the choice to upgrade to more advanced levels depending on work experience accumulated postgraduation.

TABLE 6: VTC TRAINING PROGRAMS BY OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL

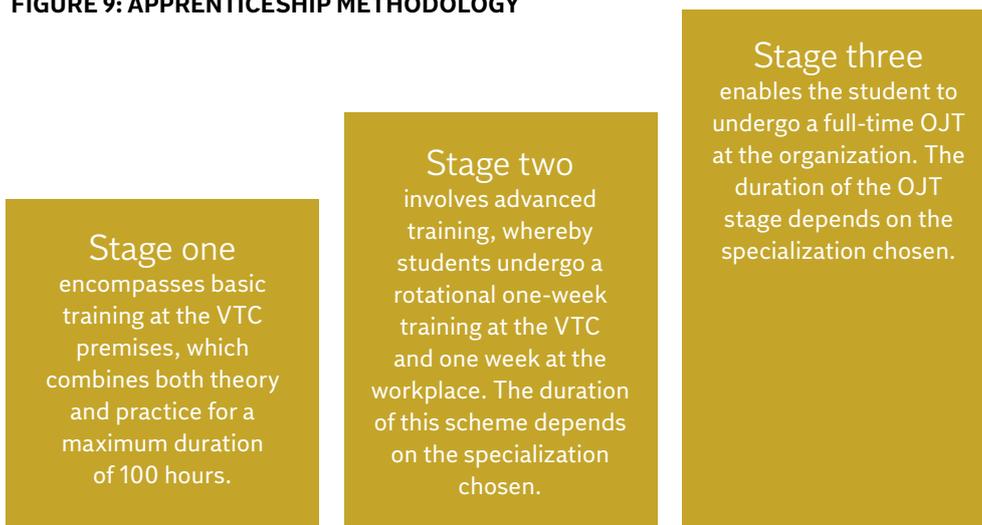
Training level	Enrollmet Prerequisites	Duration
1. Semi-skilled	Literate (16-19 years old)	150-700 hours
2. Skilled	Grade 10 graduate (16-19 years old)	2-4 terms; 1.400-2.800 hours
3. Craftman	Grade 12 graduate (above 17 years old)	2-4 terms; 1.400-2.800 hours
4. Applied secondary education program	Grade 10 graduate (16-19 years old)	2 years

Source: VTC

2.2 Training methodology of applied apprenticeship programs

The applied apprenstage involves a compulsory 200-hour training provided to students covering skills such as occupational health and safety, and necessary soft skills for success at the workplace.

FIGURE 9: APPRENTICESHIP METHODOLOGY



Source: VTC

As a means of best practice, the VTC signs a contractual agreement with the organization for the provision of the OJT stage. The contracts stipulate the roles and responsibilities of each party throughout the duration of the training program. Students who enrol into a program are eligible for an allowance in the form of pocket money to cover for essential personal expenses and transportation expenses throughout the training period.

According to Jordanian Labour Law No. 8, 1996, and articles 36, 37 and 38, training undertaken in organizational environments must have necessary preconditions. As such, the workplace must be adequate in terms of health and safety standards, and the trainer must have the required qualifications. The signed contractual agreement between trainer and trainee must be present, stipulating terms and conditions such as duration, stages of training and the wage paid, which ought not be less than what on average the industry pays.

Upon successful completion of the apprenticeship, it is mandatory for students to undergo a final occupational exam in order to obtain certification.

2.3 VTC statistics at a glance

TABLE 7: VTC KEY INDICATORS, 2018/2019

VTC Indicators, 2018			VTC Indicators, 2019		
Enrolled	Male	7.912	Enrolled	Male	7.073
	Female	6.207		Female	4.691
Dropouts	Male	1.206	Dropouts	Male	409
	Female	403		Female	176
Graduated	Male	5.734	Graduated	Male	5.640
	Female	5.685		Female	4.258
Employed*	Male	1.088	Employed*	Male	2.091
	Female	380		Female	728

*Figures reflect employment within the same year post-graduation.

Source: VTC

Table 7 depicts the enrolment to the VTC. This study found various reasons for dropouts, including general dissatisfaction, lack of student motivation, transitional choice, or socio-economic reasons, to name a few. Congruent to the previously identified pattern of low female education enrolment and employment, the trend upholds. The VTC enrolment rates and employment rates of males are significantly higher than those of the female gender. Out of the males who graduated in 2019, 37% have found employment within the same year, while 17% of the female graduates have found employment within the same annum. In light of the long transitional period until graduates find employment, these figures indicate more than half of the graduate cohort require an extended average transitional period to find an employment opportunity.

2.4 Summary: Untapped potential of TVET

The sectors that contribute to the greatest job supply and growth, with the greatest potential to absorb unemployed youth, are concentrated on low and medium-skilled professions. The TVET sector accordingly is regarded as a feasible corridor to contribute to a significant reduction of youth unemployment to counterbalance the oversupply of university degrees.

As aforementioned, the enrolment into TVET has not reached its full potential in accordance with various national strategies. The majority of labour market entrants have either attained a basic education level or tertiary education, which points towards a bimodal distribution. Nonetheless, the labour force participation of TVET graduates implies promising results, with significant untapped potential yet to be expanded upon.

The forthcoming section discusses TVET and employment perceptions of youth and businesses, which will provide interesting insights and reflect upon the foundational basis established hitherto.

3 Case studies: TVET from the perspective of youth and businesses

In this section, the findings from the interviews and the perspectives of both employers and students are presented. Herewith, various angles on employment and work are highlighted, in addition to the respective opportunities and challenges faced. Equal numbers of male and female graduates with a vocational background were interviewed, in order to capture gender differences. Furthermore, this section includes success stories of young TVET graduates.

Employers' perceptions of TVET graduates' skillsets are mostly positive, and newly hired employees demonstrate satisfactory workplace readiness. Interviews with employers furthermore revealed that they generally prefer to employ graduates with a technical acumen, rather than graduates with a purely theoretical background, which is to the advantage of TVET graduates compared to university graduates. The mismatch between supply of graduates from educational institutions and the requirements of the labour market was echoed by one male graduate interviewee as:

” *I initially had second thoughts about enrolling into vocational education, as my parents always expected me to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, I did not score very well on the Tawjihi exam, which could have qualified me to pursue education as an electrical engineer. My parents were disappointed, constantly comparing me to others. I instead enrolled into technical education in the electricity field. I am so glad that I took this step – if you look at those who graduated with a bachelor's degree, they struggle to find employment or are even practicing professions which have nothing to do with what they studied.*

- A MALE GRADUATE INTERVIEWEE

In fact, theoretical experience is valued more by employers than theory. An employer within the vehicle maintenance field emphasized:

” *Nowadays, the labour market demands hands-on graduates, rather than those who are merely book smart. I need someone who knows what he is doing from day one, even if he initially needs some orientation. It saves time and effort. We give priority to practice, rather than theory. Practice is king.*

- AN EMPLOYER WITHIN THE VEHICLE MAINTENANCE FIELD

Accordingly, another male VTC graduate made the following remark:

” *Why pay large sums of money towards a bachelor's degree, without a promise to get employed? The future looks grim.*

- MALE VTC GRADUATE

3.1 The case of auto mechanic Hassaan

This is Hassaan. After one unsuccessful attempt, Hassan repeated the Tawjih exam again. The second time around was once more unsuccessful. He initially was not enthusiastic about enrolling into vocational education due to the negative perception it receives from society. His father, however, who holds a background in vehicle maintenance was the encouraging force that guided him to the VTC, apart from Hassaan's own interest and passion for automobiles. Throughout his studies, this passion he had for cars translated into an unparalleled work ethic. He was hailed as one of the top students at the VTC and received an offer to work at Honda just prior to graduating.



” I was hesitating about vocational education due to the bad reputation it receives, however, my love for cars made me excel. I received all the support required from the VTC, especially from my trainer.

- AUTO MECHANIC HASSAAN

After gaining initial experience at Honda and working at a renowned local vehicle maintenance firm simultaneously, he after a year was on the lookout for another employment opportunity. Soon enough, Hassaan was employed by the Jaguar-Land Rover dealership in Jordan as a vehicle mechanic.

” My grandfather used to always tell me to live for the moment but keep the future in mind. It is so important to have a vision of what one aspires to become. Some of my fellow course mates ended up working as taxi drivers, simply because they lack motivation and perseverance.

- AUTO MECHANIC HASSAAN



The Jaguar-Land Rover dealership as his employer adopts a distinctive approach to continuous training through its top-notch facilities, whereby human capital is placed at the core of the business. Technical graduates from vocational establishments are fostered and developed through focused in-house technical trainings which take place both in Jordan and in Dubai. Employees moreover receive training in English language.

According to Hassaan’s supervisor:

” We welcome fresh graduates and develop them gradually for the real technical work. We adopt an open-door policy for talented graduates like Hassaan. It is our responsibility as an employer to train and motivate our people.

- HASSAAN’S SUPERVISOR

According to Hassaan, the mindset to growth and progress is necessary. His employer is proud to have such a dedicated employee. It is a win-win situation for both.

3.2 A perception of shame

It is necessary that industry and educational institutions continuously collaborate in order to tailor curriculums that match the requirements of the labour market. Practical knowledge supersedes merely theoretical knowledge, knowing that the majority of jobs on the market demand low to medium skill sets. However, the industries with the highest potential to supplying jobs resort to sourcing foreign labour, in order to meet the local labour shortcomings faced.

The interviews revealed a phenomenon of shame that is further discussed in the forthcoming section. Young male interviewees and employers echoed the sentiment of “shame” that dominates the decision making of youth in deciding whether to work or deliberately remain unemployed. Sectors such as construction or manufacturing supply a great amount of jobs into Jordan’s economy. These sectors by their nature require physical labour and are dominated by migrant workers. The perception by a large number of youth deems such occupations as shameful, and thus represents an impediment to employment.

According to research conducted by the World Bank, a “culture of shame” outweighs the drive of youth to pursue employment (2008, p. 13). The interviews revealed that there is in fact a mismatch between youth expectations and market realities, which confirms a paradox. Sectors such as garments or any other manufacturing field supply a large number of jobs, however, the “culture of shame” deliberately deters youth to become economically active. This phenomenon is upheld by the high unemployment rates of Jordanians in the governorate of Irbid, which is host to the largest qualifying industrial zone (QIZ) in the Kingdom and generates thousands of jobs, particularly within the garment sector. Paradoxically, this QIZ would contribute to a decrease in Jordanian unemployment, however, unemployment figures remain relatively high, albeit plenty of opportunities exist. It is, however, attributed to lower wages or the nature of the job that causes young Jordanians to be reluctant and voluntarily opt out of employment, with the reasoning that such jobs are “beneath them”.

A CEO of a large garment manufacturing firm located in the governorate of Irbid echoed:

” Jordanian youth lack the fire in their belly to pursue employment. Lack of willingness and motivation is the biggest detriment that Jordan is facing.

- A CEO OF A LARGE GARMENT MANUFACTURING FIRM LOCATED IN THE GOVERNORATE OF IRBID

Accordingly, he emphasized that absenteeism and turnover rates amongst new joiners are particularly high, potentially owing to a false sense of expectations amongst Jordanian youth.

A human resource manager raised the following:

” *Jordanian youth are not willing to pursue employment for lower-class jobs which are carried out by the expat community. They will consider themselves as degraded as they believe that such jobs don't match their skills and education. They fear to be looked at by others in a different light.*

On the contrary, a male participant whose dream is to become an electrical engineer, however, due to financial circumstances is unable to afford higher education, states the following:

” *I completed a diploma in electrical education. I currently support my father in his business. He works as a carpenter, and I take an active role in his business. In order to save up funds to be able to afford further education, I trade with used furniture. It is critical to work towards a secure future, and there is no room to feel ashamed about taking on extra work responsibilities. If I buy a used piece of furniture and resell it, I am happy and grateful even if I just gain JD20. During such harsh times, every penny counts.*

- A MALE PARTICIPANT

As recognized by the E-TVET strategy, “there are too many academically qualified Jordanians, while the market asks for lower-skilled labour and technicians. Once graduated, many Jordanians prefer to wait for a suitable job instead of accepting employment below their level. At the same time, their education does not match the demands of the industry even in the corresponding profession as the skills learned are too academic and not sufficiently practical” (National E-TVET Council, 2014; p. 9).

3.3 The case of kitchen chef Ihab



This is Ihab. Ihab graduated in 2016 from the VTC's program in hospitality. He received an immediate employment offer at the workplace he trained at while he was still a VTC student. After 2 years of gathering job experience, he chose to change his first workplace and found employment at a hotel in the tourism hub of Jordan, the Dead Sea. Since then, he was gradually promoted to have reached the level of a kitchen chef and is very content with his choice of study and the path that he eventually pursued. Albeit his parents initially were hesitant about vocational education, constantly comparing him to other students from his former school cohort,

and how they performed better, they slowly but surely started to accept his choice and path after seeing him excel and grow as a vocational student. At home, he used to cook and be creative in his mother's kitchen to show off his skills to his family, who now are very proud of their son. In addition, Ihab has become a well-established and trusted trainer whom the VTC contacts in order to provide training to younger students.

” *University degrees in Jordan are overrated. Sole knowledge by the books will not get me anywhere. Hands-on skills are required, otherwise studying towards a degree to hang onto the wall is just a waste of time...Time is precious.*

- KITCHEN CHEF IHAB

He recommends those who do not have the will and intention to pursue higher education to not waste two years of their lives to attempt passing Tawjihi, but rather to immediately jump into vocational education. By the time they would finish the National Graduation Exam, they would hold essential practical experience, which they would otherwise not have by going through the conventional university path.

3.4 Families' expectations

The lack of family support and encouragement is often a problem for youth who have not been successful in reaching the secondary national certification level, as a male interview participant voiced:

” *My parents always had high expectations. I felt pressured and constricted. The pressure to perform well in school actually backfired. It felt very suffocating, so I did poorly in 10th grade and it was just a horrible phase. My parents kept on blaming me for underperforming. I enrolled into technical education as a kitchen chef – to the demise of my parents who gradually changed their mindset afterwards.*

- A MALE INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT

The perception of TVET in Jordan is negative, as students who enrol into TVET are generally regarded as substandard, having attained failing grades at school. Therefore, enrolment rates continue to be low, as highlighted by recent statistics. The social stigma is deep-rooted, and particularly parents regard under-achievement at school as a disgrace to the entire family. Youth therefore get immensely discouraged and demotivated. Referring to the scarring effect which was mentioned at an early stage within this report, young males and females who have not performed particularly well at school, and due to negative pressure and influence exerted upon them by their families could avoid further education altogether. Apart from scarring due to long transitional periods, emotional scarring is moreover a crucial aspect to consider. This in turn could lead to an increase of the aforementioned youth NEET population. Even when enrolling to vocational school, as a matter of last resort, it has been reported that youth who have undergone extreme stress often drop out due to tremendous lack of drive and motivation. According to a conversation held with a trainer in a vocational training institute, students in many cases required some time and extra attention to recover from the negativity they had faced from their immediate family for “ending up” in vocational education. Correspondingly, according to an employer:

” *I employed a graduate from a vocational school who initially required some extra attention. He was so scared to make a mistake and would become noticeably nervous when given the simplest task to complete. It was our responsibility to ease early fears and nervousness at the workplace. His insecurity originated from his father, who exerted negative energy onto his son. Some young males just happen to be late bloomers...The boy now excels at every task, without the fear of being judged.*

- AN EMPLOYER

The statistics reveal that women exhibit lower enrolment rates into TVET, potentially attributed to the social stigma and societal perceptions on women working. Interviews with female TVET graduates in fact revealed that some young females enrol into a given program initially, but then drop out once they reach to the stage of workplace training. The reasons for program discontinuation stem from not being aware of the program structure pertaining to the apprenticeship period, reluctance to undergo training in mixed-gender facilities, as well as discouragement and opposition from their immediate family. Albeit the low female labour force participation, the majority of females interviewed expressed their excitement and motivation to work. In contrast to statistics, female youth have a positive outlook on work, however, face external barriers such as family perception, distance, working hours to mention a few. A mother of two girls, who both graduated from technical education – one as

a kitchen chef, and the other as a pâtissier stated:

” *I encourage my daughters to follow their interest and I am proud of them. After they graduated, they received offers at hotels...this is impossible – I would never allow my daughters to work at a place where alcohol is served, let alone the freely open environment. Other job offers they received were at restaurants or bakeries. It’s a mixed gender environment – I am not fully comfortable with the thought of such environments. Our society is simply male dominated. My daughters now are undergoing a change in specialization within fields of cosmetology.*

- A KITCHEN CHEF

In some cases, conservative families as well as societal pressures hinder females’ independent decision on their future career path. This, however, is not the absolute norm, in that some females interviewed in fact were encouraged to enrol into vocational education and pursue a job in their specialized field. The forthcoming case exemplifies this.

3.5 The case of patisserie chef Ahlam

This is Ahlam. Ahlam works as a patisserie chef in one of the hip and popular coffee-houses in Amman. After completing 10th grade, she used to teach younger students at home – until she felt that she needed a purpose in life. She decided to pursue education at the VTC, having received the blessing and encouragement of her family. She particularly praises her father who was supportive of every decision she chose to make. During her studies, she always exhibited distinctive performance and differentiated herself from the other students due to her passion and dedication.

Of course, her work ethic did not go unnoticed and she received an employment offer just prior to graduation.



” *I am so lucky to receive the constant support of my family. I wouldn’t have been able to succeed otherwise. My old friends from school, who have completed Tawjihi and decided to pursue higher education actually envy me, since they fear what the future holds for them.*

- PATISSERIE CHEF AHLAM

After just 2 months of being employed at her first job, she was offered the responsibility to be the sole person in charge of an entire pastry production line and took extra shifts to manage the workload. She is grateful to still receive follow-up calls from her trainer at the VTC in order to keep in touch with her professional development.

” I am very proud of my accomplishments and hard work throughout such a short period of time. Other graduates in my field end up doing mundane work, such as washing dishes. At the end it’s within your own self – you either love what you do, or you don’t. Of course, as a girl you need to show extra strength and confidence, otherwise you will not succeed.

- PATISSERIE CHEF AHLAM

Ahlam received rather demotivating remarks from family members on her employment situation. As a young female, carrying out a job at a mixed-gender workplace is generally frowned upon, let alone the late work shift that she sometimes experiences. However, she emphasized that as long as her parents support her, the opinions of others do not matter. At her workplace, Ahlam receives support from her colleague Zahi (pictured on the left), who also graduated from the VTC and currently works as a chief baker at the coffeehouse. Unlike Ahlam who was encouraged to enrol into the vocational training, he was pressured by his father due to lack of monetary means to enrol into vocational education, as they could not afford to pay university tuition. His path involved having held several jobs at Jordan’s five-star hotels. According to him:

” Nowadays, the youth need to be patient and be willing to go the extra mile. A lot of fellow graduates just didn’t succeed because they couldn’t tolerate constructive criticism. Some either dropped out, changed the profession or graduated but work in jobs with no predetermined career path. One needs to paint his or her future with the brightest colours.

- AHLAM’S COLLEAGUE ZAHİ

Ahlam is very happy to have Zahi’s support as a male colleague, and as fellow vocational education graduates they support each other when the going gets tough at their workplace.

3.6 Summary: E-TVET opportunities and challenges

This section presented the findings from the interviews and cases gathered for this study. It emerges that TVET ought to be promoted to the youth and portrayed as an attractive educational pathway. Changes in perception, which originate from the notion that vocational education represents a failure to not having been able to pursue higher education and from social stigmatization on the part of the youth's immediate families, require intensified attention by means of campaigns which are organized and coordinated with the private sector. Such campaigns need to be of an encouraging, motivational nature and portray attractive career pathways. Moreover, gender disparities ought to be neutralized by emphasizing the numerous constructive opportunities that young females have in the workplace.

The entrenched challenges which are prevalent from the perspective of young graduates and job seekers raise the question whether the contribution of the private sector with relation to reduction of youth unemployment is prevalent and sufficient to effectuate a reduction of the burden borne by the government. SMEs constitute the bulk of businesses operating in Jordan, accounting for 40% of Jordan's nominal GDP, and making up 98% of all operating companies in the country. As such, this criterion opens the door to ample potential in the creation of employment opportunities, aggregate production, and ultimately rank up on global competitiveness and overall economic growth. According to a World Bank policy paper, "SMEs suffer disproportionately from the burdensome Jordanian business climate. Although SMEs contribute significantly to GDP and are a major source of private sector employment in the region, they often lack access to the type of business development and financial services that they need to start up, operate and grow" (World Bank Group, 2013; p. 5). Within that context, SMEs operating in Jordan are recognized as having the capacity to absorb labour and thus contribute significantly to a reduction in unemployment. The Jordan E-TVET strategy recognizes that the private sector lacks interest in cooperating with the TVET providers and policy makers, due to perceived gaps between employers and training providers. Accordingly, "the private sector is concerned with short-term business interests and productivity, largely driven by their small size and short-term orientation. Therefore, involvement in the design of the training programmes and in the internship/apprenticeship components would require extra "unproductive" efforts and costs for the private sector employer"(National E-TVET Council, 2014; p. 8).

The CEO of a garment manufacturing firm in Irbid emphasized that 200,000 jobs can be created for Jordanians, however, the prerequisite that expectations between both employers and employees ought to be in alignment must be met. As such, he highlights that Jordan's labour market in itself does not lack the necessary cadre or necessary firm engagement. However, certain dynamics ought to be fine-tuned in order to effectuate an inclusive change, necessary to economic progression amongst all market players.

The ensuing section sheds light on the TVET governance system, and further touches upon the role of employers within more technical educational aspects, which are essential to the creation of an inclusive and sustainable TVET environment.



4 TVET governance and systemic challenges

The TVET system in Jordan is governed by the MoE, which assumes the key function of strategic direction, and is supported by the Employment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training Council (E-TVET) for coordination and governance purposes. The E-TVET Council in turn is chaired by the MoL, which in essence acts to represent key stakeholders, such as the vocational training centres, trade unions, chambers of commerce, associations and business organizations.

The division between responsibilities of the 3 governance bodies of the TVET system is as follows:

- **The Ministry of Education:** Secondary level TVET education and oversight of the Al-Balqa Applied University pathway and associated technical colleges.
- **The Vocational Training Corporation (VTC):** Formal TVET in coordination with Al-Balqa Applied University (secondary and post-secondary levels).
- **E-TVET Council:** Coordination efforts between both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, alongside the VTC. Responsible for policy development and implementation. Coordination and development of TVET programmes. Assumes supervisory function of quality-related matters in close cooperation with the Centre for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA). The CAQA serves as the authority responsible for accreditation of TVET institutions and vocational students within Jordan.

According to the European Training Foundation (ETF), social partners within the system mainly adopt a consultative stance in delineating objectives and implementation of strategic aspirations. It is further put forward that, “the institutionalized participation in VET governance bodies is either minor (E-TVET Council) or non-existent (CAQA)” (European Training Foundation, 2018; p. 1). Accordingly, the system is centralized, which hinders effective coordination processes between the key institutions, who govern the system, with each having its own strategic agenda. As such, policy dialogue is deemed to be insufficient and inefficient.

The ETF governance assessment study moreover found that the dialogue between social partners and chambers has generally improved over time with regard to joint planning of initiatives, however, both chambers and businesses have no degree of involvement within aspects of E-TVET assessment and evaluation, content design and competency assessments. The aforementioned lack of involvement of businesses within the TVET system as such explains the mismatch between labour demand and supply, since programs and curriculums are developed ad-hoc and the system tends to be supply-driven. A dialogue with key stakeholders such as businesses is not sought after, which represents a major shortcoming.

Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are highlighted to be inconsistent and data generation and analysis conducted ad-hoc, also bearing in mind that each institution acts in isolation, rather than having a collaborative system. As such, missing information impedes evidence-based policy development, which in turn obstructs effective implementation thereof. The lack of performance measures and KPIs adversely affects quality and effectiveness of TVET programs, and thus centralized and rather bureaucratic systems adversely affect progress.

4.1 Employer participation

The vocational training infrastructure in Jordan exhibits constructive linkage between theoretical training and in-company apprenticeships. This downstream training approach integrates business involvement through a dual training apprenticeship approach whereby students experience alternating rotation, combining both training at the institute and the enterprise.

According to research conducted by ETF, however, the TVET system limits employer involvement in directing, monitoring and assessing vocational training. As such, it is emphasized that the downstream training approach is deemed quite effective in the provision of in-company apprenticeships, yet “Jordan has so far had limited success in achieving employer involvement upstream in the training process – in planning, setting standards, designing content, and testing the competencies acquired” (European Training Foundation, 2006; p 24). This challenge to integrate employer interests is attributed to “bureaucratization of the training process” whereby employers are not sufficiently integrated into the TVET governance system.

It is, however, also established, that employers face significant time constraints and lack of interest, which hinders their playing a role in aspects of training development, monitoring and evaluation. Further, according to the E-TVET strategy, “industries and enterprises which employ TVET graduates need to be involved in the design, development, delivery, assessment and review of programmes that prepare trainees for roles in their workplaces” (National E-TVET Council, 2014; p. 8). Subsequently, Chambers of Industry and Labour Unions are required to adopt a role which encourages stronger linkages between the TVET system and enterprises and as such highlights the importance of TVET, enterprise productivity, competitiveness and economic well-being.

4.2 TVET teaching cadre

According to research conducted by ETF, the teachers within Jordan’s education system generally are well qualified, however, within TVET it is estimated that more than 45% of the instructors only hold secondary education qualifications or less. It is, however, highlighted that academic qualifications do not necessarily correspond with technical qualifications. Therefore, within the recruitment process of trainers, particular focus is retained on the practical know-how and technical skills, even if a candidate is not formally or sufficiently qualified in a given specialization. The research conducted by ETF also recognizes the limited capacity of businesses to conduct effective training throughout a students’ apprenticeship period. Facilities and equipment for training are mostly insufficient, and efforts of supervision of students who undergo their work placement at the enterprise level through the TVET instructors is deemed to be inconsistent (pg. 32). The ensuing section recaps key findings in relation to the TVET system, and moreover highlights the inherent challenges.

4.3 The future TVET system

Jordan's TVET system offers extensive education through a well-established vocational training infrastructure to the country's youth. It has, however, not reached its full potential and objective in the reduction of youth unemployment due to various internal and external reasons. A review of Jordan's E-TVET strategy reveals the following key insights towards a more successful TVET system:

- The breadth of TVET provision ought to be expanded to provide students with the competencies and transferable skills to exhibit readiness within wider occupational environments, essential to the economic development of Jordan;
- Occupational level focus must be placed on supplying cadre at the technician level, as the majority of training provision in Jordan is concentrated at lower skill levels, i.e. semi-skilled, skilled, craftsman;
- The perception of the TVET sector is regarded as a “dead-end”, since the provision towards higher education and lifelong learning is not granted, in addition to limited career advancement prospects;
- Responsiveness and strategic involvement of all stakeholders is essential in order to enhance training relevance with relation to employability and employment prospects;
- The delivery of TVET ought to be market-driven and based on high quality standards related to meeting the critical parameter of having qualified teachers/and trainers staffed who hold key industry experience to deliver essential technical knowledge to students.

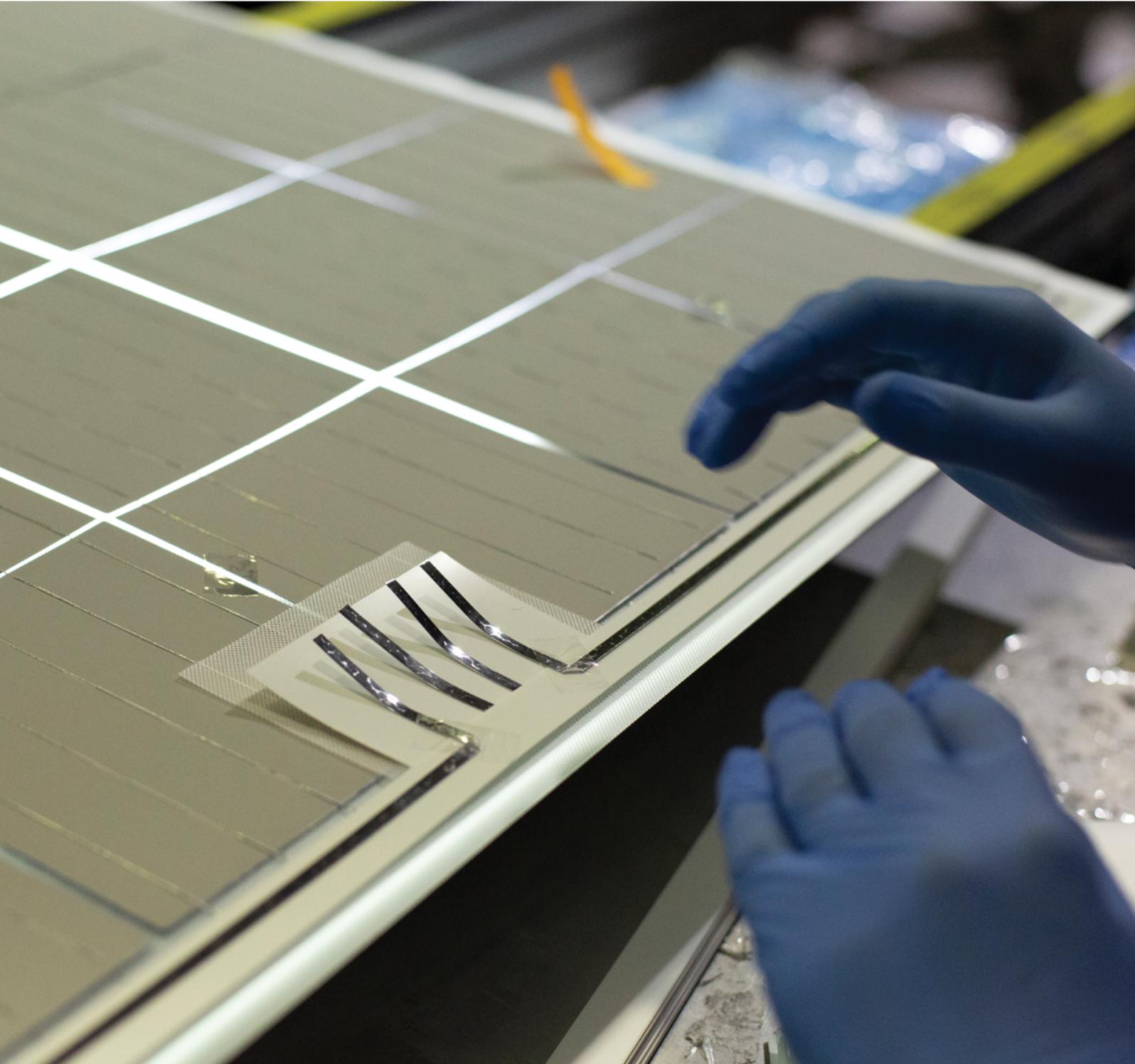
Table 8 provides a breakdown of the internal and external challenges which the TVET sector faces found by this reports research. These challenges in essence hinder the system from reaching its full potential in its contribution to a more significant and sustainable reduction in youth unemployment figures.

TABLE 8: TVET SYSTEM CHALLENGES

Internal	External
Governance structure inefficient due to institutional silo-mentality and fragmentation	Social stigmatization and lack of awareness on the part of the youth's immediate families with regard to vocational training
Different governance mandates and hence centralized and difficult coordination mechanisms leading to ad-hoc decision making	Lack of sufficient youth counselling and guidance mechanism to lift them out of the NEET category or support in the transition from education to work
Weak links between the TVET system and employers which contribute to labour market mismatch (needs of companies remain neglected due to not providing them with the capacity to plan, design and implement TVET programs)	Weak involvement of employers in the training in terms of trainee selection, program design and skill evaluation (centralized mechanism by TVET provider)
Increased involvement and empowerment of unions as well as chambers lacking; e.g. capacity development for TVET initiatives to implement and evaluate OJT in member companies	Lack of awareness or unwillingness on the part of businesses to engage in OTJ (represents an opportunity cost)
Lack of monitoring, evaluation and data management systems	Low total enrolment rates to vocational education
Ongoing specialized development of trainers' knowledge and skills not apparent/sufficient	Particularly low female enrolment rates due to cultural/social stigma or lack of variety of programs



Having explored the environments of employment, education, policy as well as individual perceptions, it is of importance to put into spotlight the current global situation in relation to the pandemic of COVID-19. The ensuing section discusses the effects on Jordan in relation to the touched upon themes within this report.



5 The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jordan has been at the forefront in implementing drastic preventative measures to mitigate the spread of the novel virus. Similar to other countries, the government of Jordan has been rigid in following the recommendations set forth by the World Health Organization (WHO) and implemented regulations which put an abrupt halt on travel, education, work and business, as well as religious and social events. A nationwide curfew was declared on March 20, 2020, which brought about a restriction of individual movement through a complete country lockdown, until further notice. The subsequent suspension of work duties within all private and public sectors as well as the closure of all industrial activities have caused an unfavourable impact on the economy having brought it to a complete standstill.

From the aforementioned discussion, Jordan evidently struggles with pre-existing challenges within its labour market, with the outbreak of the pandemic having added additional strain on businesses and their employees. According to a rapid impact assessment conducted by the ILO,

“Daily or seasonal workers such as those employed in agriculture and construction; workers and their families who are not covered by social security or other safety nets; refugees living inside camps as well as in urban settings; or Jordanians in impoverished conditions – these are only a few examples of people whose existing vulnerabilities have been or will be compounded by the current crisis” (ILO, 2020).

Similarly, a rapid impact assessment was conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to explore the impact of COVID-19 on some of the most vulnerable households. The assessment revealed that the bulk of the respondents surveyed have lost their livelihoods during the lockdown, having experienced difficulties in meeting the most basic needs such as food and rent. Accordingly, households that were the most affected during the pandemic are situated in the governorates of Jerash, Mafraq, Tafileh and Ma’an.

In comparison to other countries, Jordan has been quite effective with the harsh measures to combat the novel coronavirus. However, despite these efforts the economic repercussions are yet difficult to fathom. While businesses were already going through ailing conditions pre-pandemic, they have even more witnessed significant interruptions of cash flows, increasing the burden to economic survival. This pressure in turn forced them to reduce costs, whereby lay-off of employees has been commonplace. Downsizing will further augment unemployment in the country, and the pressure on the already low aggregate demand for workforce will further exacerbate the problem of unemployment.

The sector undoubtedly the most impacted by the pandemic is tourism, one of the biggest contributors to Jordan’s economy. As a chief source of job creation and foreign currency inflows, the shutdown and international travel restrictions have put a damaging halt on its activity.

In view of the effects of COVID-19 on the education sector, all academic institutions have also witnessed closure since mid-March, and teaching resumed via online learning platforms. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the TVET sector has been seeking to ensure that the most vulnerable youth

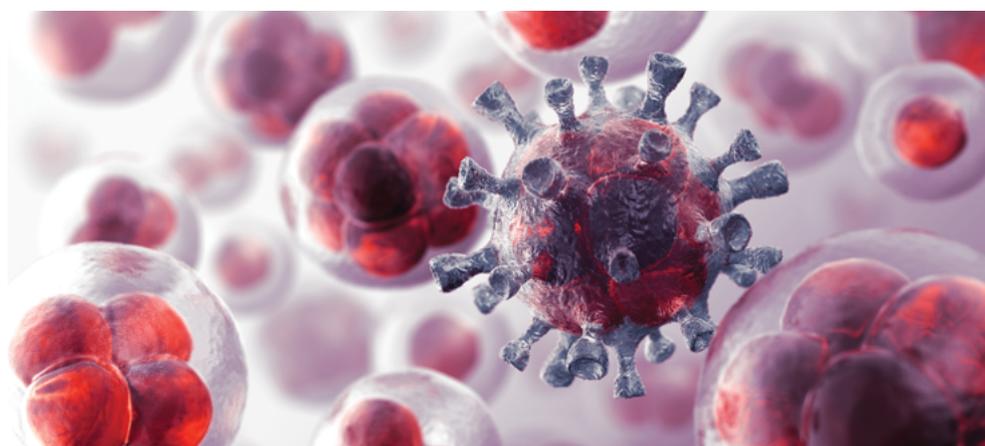
enrolled in education do not witness a disruption due to the pandemic. Hence, the VTC has implemented online learning alternatives in order to safeguard the need for social distancing yet ensure continuity in student engagement. Analogously, a survey aimed to shed light on the effect of vocational education during the time of COVID-19 conducted jointly by the ILO, the World Bank and UNESCO revealed that TVET students in Jordan have due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic felt “confused and demotivated” (ILO, World Bank, Unesco, 2020). Vocational education has been distinctively affected by the epidemic through an interruption of in-class learning and apprenticeships. Further beyond the measures implemented by the government and the ensuing lockdown period, COVID-19 has brought about an earthquake to the labour market, of which the long-term aftermath cannot be foreseen.

The ensuing economic recession causing a deterioration of sectors, such as tourism and hospitality, would bring about less postings for apprenticeships and eventual employment opportunities. In light of the aforementioned, enrolment into certain TVET programs could significantly witness a decrease due to inherent labour market uncertainties.

A policy brief developed by the OECD in light of the pandemic highlights the crucial importance of engagement between employers and trade unions. More communication, coordination and planning for future contingencies amongst the parties is necessary as the pandemic has affected each sector by a different extent. Moreover, OECD emphasizes that vulnerable youth ought to receive special attention throughout. Limited financial resources and limited access to internet would hinder successful completion of a given study programme. Further, employability is uncertain post VTC graduation, thus measures to mitigate exclusion from the labour market would require to be implemented.

Finally, to ensure quality within the vocational system, continuous training of vocational trainers and mentors is deemed essential as the shift to the online teaching landscape requires digital skills and competencies as well as content delivery models, which are easily replicated. Since the long-term magnitude of the pandemic is indistinct, steps towards a resilient vocational education system require the collective efforts of all key stakeholders involved.

According to World Bank projections (2020), Jordan’s economic outlook amidst the pandemic is gloomy, with an expectation of an economic contraction by 3.5% in 2020, which would signify the country’s worst recession since 1989. As the country gradually recovers from the setback, it is facing multiple deep-rooted socio-economic challenges which are augmented amidst staggering economic pressures and exceptionally high youth unemployment rates.



6 Conclusion

Jordan has experienced a significant degree of economic liberalization over the past decade, however, the associated growth has not balanced out the unrelenting issue of youth unemployment. The window of opportunity lies in orchestrating labour market demand and supply in a manner which is conducive to job creation, given that one-third of Jordan's population is comprised of youth. The environment in which youth grow up is generally not conducive to a healthy transition into adulthood, as it is plagued by numerous challenges, including an unfavourable job market, lack of educational support systems, conservative social and gender norms, and generally ailing economic prospects. These aspects disrupt a healthy trajectory of youth into adulthood, causing stagnant and lengthy transitional periods until stable livelihoods through secure employment are accomplished.

As highlighted by various national strategies, the TVET system in Jordan is promising in terms of having the capacity to absorb youth and therefore contribute to a significant reduction in unemployment. The importance of vocational education could very well be regarded as an alternate pathway to the country's oversupply of university degrees. With its unequivocal potential to act as a catalyst to improving employability of youth and supply a skilled workforce, effective labour market outcomes require an interplay of different parties, and foremost is the engagement of employers to steer demand requirements.

To sum up, one major challenge that the TVET infrastructure in Jordan is facing is the lack in connection to the labour market through the continuous cooperation between TVET and businesses. An interplay between both parties needs to be present in order to more effectively steer supply and demand dynamics which are more reactive to changes in the labour market. Companies ought to furthermore safeguard the quality of training throughout student apprenticeship periods. Finally, the complete infrastructure of an efficient TVET system ought to include the participation of the social partners, namely labour unions and employers' organizations.

Jordan is facing a twin challenge, whereby it must both adapt to the skillsets demanded by the labour market to ensure that businesses remain competitive, as well as generate sufficient employment opportunities to absorb the growing number of entrants per annum.

Apart from the aforementioned, youth are burdened by social norms, as well as the perception of their families concerning their career choices. Females in particular are facing various challenges which impede inclusion into the economy. In light thereof, it is of crucial importance to effectuate a gradual change in society's mindset, by raising awareness in relation to education and employment. Jordan can benefit from a window of demographic opportunity through effective integration of youth in the economy, thereby realizing a dividend conducive to productivity and bolstered growth. With the working age population outweighing, effective public policy can well lead to a significant reduction of youth unemployment and in turn accelerate the way towards sustainable growth.

As a low to middle-income country, with very few prevalent cases of extreme poverty, a slowdown of economic growth particularly during the time of COVID-19 could, however, be detrimental to Jordan's marginalized or vulnerable youth.

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