

Adolescents in Jordan: voice, agency, mobility and social cohesion

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Due to generational hierarchies in Jordan, opportunities for adolescents to exercise voice and agency—over their own lives, in their households and their broader communities—are fairly limited. Our research suggests that government and humanitarian programming could do much more to provide young people with opportunities to participate in community affairs and to build social cohesion and a sense of shared belonging.



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GAGE research findings

Our survey found that while adolescents feel they have a medium degree¹ of decision-making within the family, opportunities for young people to meaningfully contribute to decisions (even those that will shape their lives) are limited. While this affects boys, who report that their parents are always *'checking up on me'* (Syrian boy living in Mafrq), it has much stronger impacts on girls. Compared to their male peers, girls are:



- 23%** less likely to **leave home** every day
- 44%** less likely to **go outside of their communities** on a weekly basis
- 43%** less likely to have a **mobile phone**

As a Palestinian mother explained, *'For girls, everything is forbidden'*. A Makani facilitator at a centre run by the Islamic Centre Charity Society noted that parents' restrictions on girls' mobility are driven by their belief that *'the girl is like a glass'*. Another added that parents are often less worried for girls and more worried about girls' behaviour: *'We have Syrians who have girls aged around 14 that say "if my child leaves the house I'd shoot her".'* Girls have very little say in one of the biggest decisions about their future – when and whom to marry. As an older Palestinian girl explained:

I'm disagreeing about the proposal and don't want to get married. My parents don't acknowledge that I have an opinion and that I disagree with their opinion. They don't listen to me.

Our survey found that older adolescents perceive a medium level² of social cohesion in their communities, with girls reporting lower levels than boys (6% less) and adolescents with disabilities reporting lower levels than those without disabilities (15% less). This may be due to girls' greater social isolation and the stigma experienced by adolescents with disabilities. Our qualitative work highlighted that while Syrian adolescents living in informal tented settlements, where the community is often comprised of extended family members, perceive relatively greater social cohesion – settlements are often quite isolated from the broader host community. Refugees living in host communities are more likely to report feeling unwanted and excluded by their Jordanian neighbours and peers. Adolescents' opportunities to make meaningful contributions to their communities, which might foster social cohesion, are rare: only 5% of all GAGE adolescents, and disproportionately Jordanians (10% versus 4.5% for Syrians and 2.6% for Palestinians), reported having ever taken action with others in their community to solve a problem.

¹ A mean of 5.0 on a scale that ranges from 1-8.

² A mean of 2.5 on a scale that ranges from 1-4.

Makani programme effects

Our research finds that UNICEF's integrated programming is supporting adolescents to exercise voice and agency and opening opportunities for young people to work together to solve community problems. For example, compared to their peers who are non-participants, older girls who participate in Makani are more than twice as likely to participate in a sport. They are also 34% more likely to leave home daily and 19% more likely to be allowed to access the internet when they wish. Older adolescent participants are also 76% more likely to have worked with others to solve a community problem, often through Social Innovation Labs or volunteer initiatives arranged through Makani. An older girl in a host community explained:

'We like [the volunteer] initiatives. We go to the clinic and orphanages, we can help them, take things that might make them feel happy.'

Our qualitative work highlights how Makani centres that mix host community and refugee populations can improve relationships between the two and help build social cohesion. A 17-year-old Jordanian girl participant from Mafraq stated:

'We don't want the Syrian students to feel unwelcome and to be cast away. They should feel welcome, like at home, and that we are sisters.'

Programme recommendations

Use Makani parent education sessions to address the importance of adolescents' role in decision-making and to counter restrictive gender norms.



Over time, work to ensure that public schools are mixed in terms of student nationality, so as to enhance young people's appreciation of diversity, foster social cohesion, and strengthen their sense of shared belonging. This will in turn have positive spillover effects on the attendees of extra-curricula programmes like Makani given that class composition depends to a significant extent on the hours during which students are in school.

Expand Makani Social Innovation Labs and volunteer initiatives (and other safe space programming) that promotes adolescent decision-making and community engagement, ensuring that older and married girls have equitable access.



Continue expanding the Ministry of Education's Nashatati Programme into more schools in order to reach more adolescents with lessons and collaborative experiences that encourage respect for diversity and foster social cohesion.



Use Makani centres to expose adolescents to inspirational role models (female and male).

Work with schools to adopt child-friendly pedagogies that open opportunities for meaningful participation in the school community in order to better foster civic engagement in adulthood.