

# Adolescents in Jordan: education and learning

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**Authors:** Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Nicola Jones, Sarah Baird with Agnieszka Malachowska

The Jordanian government—together with international development partners—has made considerable strides in meeting the global commitment to ‘No Lost Generation’ and in scaling up educational opportunities for refugee populations. By converting hundreds of schools to run double-shifts, and hiring thousands of teachers, the Ministry of Education is providing formal schooling to over 130,000 Syrian children.<sup>1</sup> Despite efforts, however, a large majority of (70%) Syrian adolescents are not attending secondary school.<sup>2</sup> GAGE’s 2018 baseline findings, from research with host and refugee communities, highlight the fragility of adolescents’ high educational aspirations and underscores the need for significantly more support if Jordan is to deliver on its new National Youth Strategy’s goal of providing learning environments that are ‘safe, supportive and stimulating’.



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## GAGE research findings

Approximately 82% of all GAGE adolescents want to attend secondary school, just over 70% want to attend university, and many would like to eventually have professional careers. As one 16-year-old Syrian girl explained, ‘I want to study to defend people who are facing injustice’. On average, girls have higher aspirations than boys (74% of girls aspire to tertiary education compared to 66% of boys) and Jordanians have higher aspirations than refugees (80% of Jordanians aspire to tertiary compared to 69% of Syrians and 62% of Palestinians). Most parents support adolescents’ educational aspirations as a route out of poverty, but are realistic – mindful of the opportunity costs of continued education and the limited scope of work permits for which refugees are eligible.

Unsurprisingly, we found a significant gap between aspirations and reality – a gap that grows as adolescents approach adulthood. While 94% of younger adolescents (aged 10–12) are enrolled in school, only 54% of the older cohort (aged 15–17) are still enrolled. Across age groups, Jordanians are significantly advantaged compared to refugees (89% of Jordanians enrolled versus 86% of Palestinians and 71% of Syrians). While married girls are extremely unlikely to be enrolled (9%), unmarried older girls are more likely to be enrolled than their male peers (65% versus 54%), primarily owing to boys’ engagement with paid work (nearly two-thirds of older boys have worked for pay in the last year). Learning outcomes also favour girls:



**52% of girls—but only 39% of boys and 23% of Palestinian boys—were able to read** a simple story.

Our qualitative research highlighted how gendered social norms shape school-leaving. For girls, the main barriers are parents’ limited buy-in to formal education (especially in informal tented settlements (ITS)), concerns about safety, and child marriage. A 15 year old girl in an ITS noted, ‘They told me that I can write and read, so no need for school’. Boys are seen as providers from an early age. A 15-year-old Syrian boy living in a host community noted that his parents ‘even wanted me to pay rent for the whole household’.

**They [my parents] told me that I can write and read, so no need for school.**

(15 year old girl in an ITS)

<sup>1</sup> See: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67597.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The most recent Demographic and Health Survey reports a net attendance rate of 87% for Syrian children for basic education and a net attendance rate of 30% for secondary education (see: <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR346/FR346.pdf>).

Quality education is compromised by overcrowded classrooms and teacher burnout. *'They attend school but they do not learn anything ... This is because of chaos and large numbers of kids,'* explained a mother living in Azraq camp. Violence at the hands of teachers and peers is also endemic, with 41% of GAGE adolescents having experienced corporal punishment at school and 42% peer violence. Boys are much more likely to encounter violence than girls (58% versus 25% for corporal punishment). While Syrian students reported less violence than their Jordanian peers (39% versus 45% for corporal punishment and 40% versus 53% for peer violence), our qualitative work suggests this is likely due to under-reporting.

## Makani programme effects

GAGE findings suggest that UNICEF's integrated Makani programme has had a significant effect on school enrolment. Older boys who have ever attended Makani are 48% more likely to be enrolled in school than their peers who have never attended. They are also 35% more likely to be able to subtract. Older girl participants (15-17 years) are not only 51% more likely to be enrolled than non-participants, they are 16% more likely to be able to subtract and those who are enrolled are 38% more likely to hold a leadership position. Provision of transport to school accounts for part of the positive dividends, as do proactive referrals to formal schooling. As one programme implementer (Mateen) at an informal tented settlement explained: *'We receive children who don't go to schools and rehabilitate them so they can return to schools, their natural places'*. Another implementer (Islamic Centre Charity Society) from a host community added that Makani has *'clear results on [student] behaviour'*, helping adolescents *'to learn and to exchange information with friends'*. There remains a gap for older adolescents, many of whom have been permanently shut out of formal education because they are too many years behind (due to displacement). An older boy explained that he would be very interested to participate in Makani Classes if they could support linkages back to formal education:

***'[if Makani taught] history, maths, science and geography ... and gave an opportunity for return to official school.'***

## Programme recommendations

**Scale up efforts to raise parents' and adolescents' awareness of the importance of secondary education and work to help families overcome the barriers keeping their children out of school, including through social protection programmes (e.g. labelled cash transfer initiatives).**



**Expand investment in programming to support adolescents who have dropped out of school and need to work, and include curriculum options that are attractive to older adolescents and with opportunities to educational access.**

**Promote national efforts to develop and finance an accessible school transportation system to ensure children and adolescents' safety en route to public schools, with particular attention to children in remote rural communities and ITS.**



**Partner with schools to help teachers adopt child-friendly pedagogies to improve classroom discipline, reduce bullying and expand opportunities for meaningful adolescent participation in the school community—each of which is vital to realising the National Youth Strategy's goal of developing a generation of capable and committed young people.**

**Maintain and expand access to formal education by increasing the number of classrooms and trained teachers for all adolescents, irrespective of nationality.**

