



YOUTH LED MARKET ASSESSMENT

Identifying Market Opportunities in Jordan

JULY 2017

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Executive Summary

The Jordanian economy has been severely impacted by the Syrian crisis. With closed trade routes and decreased demand for exports, public services remained strained. Rising levels of youth unemployment are particularly concerning, for sustained employment challenges could increase regional instability. Mercy Corps' (MC), Access to Justice and Jobs programme, in partnership with the Dutch Addressing Root Causes Fund, aims to address this risk through a Market System Development (MSD) approach towards inclusive economic growth. The project provides referral and protection services, facilitates access to vocational training and apprenticeships programs, and strengthens micro, small, and medium-sized businesses in several sectors. Women and youth are key target demographics in all program activities. MC uses an MSD approach to economic development to facilitate activities alongside local stakeholders rather than engaging in direct implementation. The project provides an opportunity to apply, test and adapt best practices in monitoring, evaluation and learning for economic development programming.



Youth in Mafraq and Irbid take part in the Mercy Corps led focus group discussion around labour market access and constraints. Youth then led their own focus group discussions with other peers in their community during the YLMA.

As part of the initial stages of this programme, MC conducted market assessments to identify market demanded skills in Mafraq and Irbid Governorates in the north of the country, where the Syrian crisis has had the largest impact on the local economy. MC conducted a youth led market assessment (YLMA) as part of its larger labour market assessment to elevate, understand and incorporate the needs of youth in Irbid and Mafraq. The Access to Justice and Jobs project decided to have youth in Irbid and Mafraq lead the processes so that they would gain a hands-on understanding of the needs and opportunities available for youth within the labour market. The assessment process highlighted youth's lack of awareness of the existing opportunities and constraints in the labour market, and thus engaging in data collection and conducting interviews with business owners allowed them to see first hand the harsh reality of the current labour market.

The YLMA is a cornerstone assessment for the Accessing Justice and Jobs program, and its findings will aid in narrowing down sectors for program intervention. The program seeks to identify the most demanded skills in Mafraq and Irbid and improve the provision of skills training to address this demand. By investing in improved training programs, Mercy Corps will increase the number of skilled labourers and enhance youth's ability to find employment in growing sectors. The YLMA also facilitated important conversations between MC and key stakeholders, including private and public vocational training centres, governmental actors, and employment agencies. This YLMA report, along with the developed qualitative assessment tools developed by MC, can be used by other MC programs targeting youth within the region in inform program design and implementation.

Introduction

Mercy Corps' Approach to Youth Engagement

At MC, we believe that young people are transformative change agents. And yet they are often overlooked when it comes to funding and services. Far too often, youth are thought of as passive recipients of support rather than influential stakeholders worthy of engaging in the community development process. With 34% of Jordan's youth (ages 15-24) being unemployed, MC views this employment challenge as an opportunity rather than a crisis. Our Theory of Change reflects the importance of finding local, sustainable solutions to widespread



unemployment and underemployment and promoting efficient and effective labour market systems rather than short-term interventions. This is especially true under the Access to Justice and Jobs program. We know that labour markets are complex and dynamic; therefore, we cannot work in isolation with just jobseekers or employers. To improve the economic situation for the program's youth beneficiaries, the team must first ensure employment interventions respond to actual market needs and while increasing job availability.

Access to Justice and Jobs in Jordan Project Approach

The Access to Justice and Jobs program sought to build on this larger MC youth engagement initiative by bringing in youth as survey implementers and data collectors in a market assessment. Participating in labour market assessments helps youth learn how labour market information is gathered, and also provides them the opportunity to gain confidence, build relationships with business owners, and network with other key local stakeholders. Community participation helps youth gain agency and purpose, and in some cases allows them to engage in righting an injustice or protecting communities that have suffered in the past.

Based on their expanded labour market knowledge, youth who participate in labour market assessments are better positioned to obtain employment. MC partnered with local youth to survey businesses in Mafrq and Irbid Governorates to assess market demanded skills and identify skills gaps. This assessment built on MC's long history of implementing programmes that target youth (ages 18-25). MC believes that by building up youth's knowledge, skills and abilities, they will be better able to pursue personal and community development goals, build strong relationships with others, and contribute to social cohesion efforts in their communities.

The Access to Justice and Jobs in Jordan project sought to gather more information about the current labour market capacity and needs in Irbid and Mafrq in order to identify potential growth sectors for program intervention. Additionally, the assessment aimed to introduce youth to various monitoring, evaluation, and learning tools, and train them in data collection methods.

In order to further understand the supply and demand of the labour market, the project team followed Mercy Corps' eight principles of engagement outlined in the Employment, Entrepreneurship, & Job Creation Approach & Principles.

Methodology

MC aims to identify and facilitate opportunities for youth to inform the design and implementation of its programs. One method employed globally is the Youth-Led Market Assessment (YLMA), often complimentary to an overarching and more rigorous labour market assessment. The YLMA aims to include youth in the design, data collection and data analysis process, providing space for youth to inform and adapt tools, review and update the methodology, learn first hand from market research, and help to analyse findings.

The Youth-Led Labour Market Assessment process began with a regional Training of Trainers (ToT) to build the capacity of MC's teams to work with youth volunteers in the design and roll out the YLMA. Before YLMA implementation, the team developed three key qualitative research tools (a business survey, a focus group discussion guide, and a key informant interview guide), reworked the training of trainers' materials for a new youth audience, and created a detailed agenda.

The team also conducted secondary research help define the business selection criteria. The team identified the key economic sectors and main vocational training centres in Irbid and Mafrq. ILO reports, the Jordan Compact, and economic reports from the Government of Jordan also informed program background research.

The YMLA sought to target businesses that met the following criteria:

- Businesses that could support jobs for Syrian and Jordanian youth
- Sectors that could support Syrian and Jordanian youth
- Business which operate in sectors that Syrians can work in
- Businesses that are formally registered
- Businesses in stable markets
- Sectors that employ youth and women
- Businesses/sectors that are supported by the government (e.g. solar panels)
- Businesses that operate in sectors which align with MC humanitarian agenda

Figure 1 shows the break-down the actual businesses surveyed during the Access to Justice and Jobs YLMA:

FIGURE 1

Business Size (# of employees)	Irbid	Mafraq	Total
Micro (0-9)	138	102	240
Small (10-49)	47	19	66
Medium (50-250)	12	1	13
Large (250+)	8	4	12
Total	205	126	331

Youth Selection

The Accessing Justice and Jobs project selected a team of volunteers from Irbid and Mafraq from varying backgrounds and experiences. The team worked to create an inclusive environment that encouraged participation and cooperation between Jordanian and Syrian volunteers. Youth surveyors went out in mixed groups of both Jordanians and Syrians, and mixed gender teams when appropriate. MC designed and conducted a two days training course for the forty youth volunteers prior to the start of the assessment. The trainers aimed to help youth understand the goals of the assessment and how the findings would be used to tailor program activities. Youth helped design the survey tools and finalize drafts of the key informant interview (KII) survey and focus group discussion (FGD) questions. Youth also practiced conducting KIIs (Annex D) and FGDs (Annex C) with a partner through role play simulations.

YLMA Scheduling and Youth Pairing

The 40 youth volunteers were divided into 4 primary groups, with one quantitative and one qualitative data collection team per governorate. The quantitative teams carried out the business surveys (Annex B) while the qualitative teams facilitated FGDs and KIIs. The groups were comprised as follows:

1. Mafraq quantitative data collection group: **13** youth volunteers divided into **6** teams
2. Mafraq qualitative data collection group: **6** youth volunteers divided into **3** teams
3. Irbid quantitative data collection group: **18** youth volunteers divided into **8** teams
4. Irbid qualitative data collection group: **4** youth volunteers divided into **2** teams

None of the youth had a problem working in mixed nationality teams, thus all 19 teams had a least one Jordanian and one Syrian volunteer. However, only 4 of the 14 quantitative teams were mixed gender. Since all FGD were conducted in single gender settings, none of the qualitative teams were mixed gender.

The entire YLMA took three weeks, including a five day ToT for the Access to Justice and Jobs team and a two day youth training. The teams conducted their qualitative and quantitative assessments over seven days, and then concluded with a one day debriefing session.

Findings

Labour Market Overview

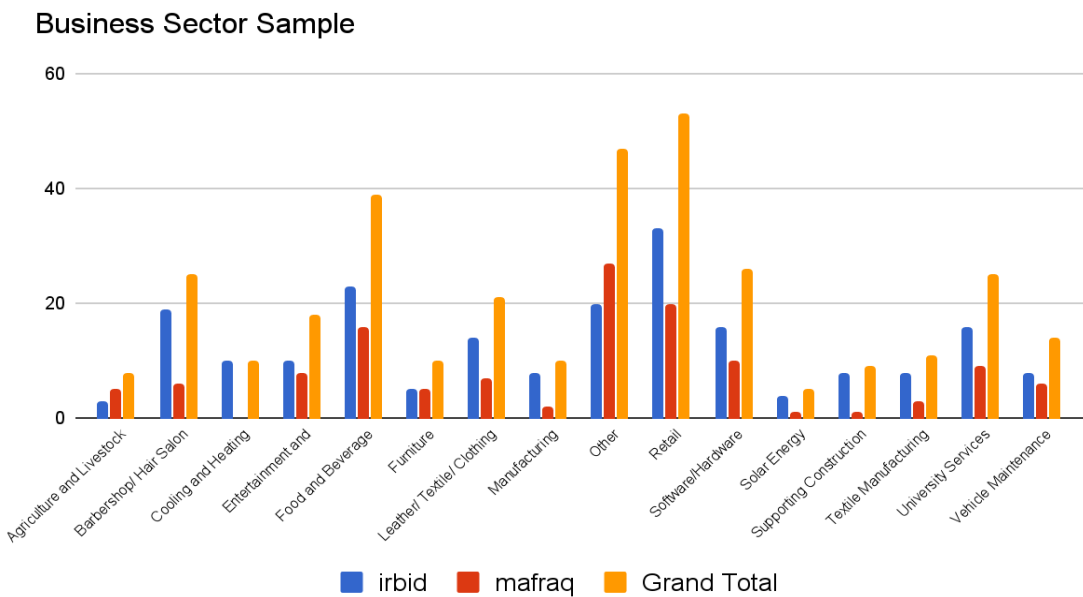
The 40 youth volunteers spent four days in Irbid and Mafrq surveying businesses. The team conducted 331 surveys - 205 in Irbid and 126 in Mafrq. The teams visited businesses that met the criteria outlined above and represented a cross-section of the predetermined sectors. Figure 2 shows the exact breakdown of business surveys completed by sector. Sectors surveyed include:

- Agriculture and livestock
- Barbershop/ Hair Salon
- Cooling and Heating
- Entertainment and Wedding Services
- Food and Beverage
- Furniture
- Leather/ Textile / Clothing workshops
- Manufacturing
- Retail
- Software / Hardware maintenance
- Solar Energy
- Supporting construction functions
- Textile Manufacturing
- University Services
- Vehicle Maintenance
- Other



The other sector includes: bookshops, pharmacies, printing shops, daycares and pre-schools, and sports clubs/ gyms. Youth indicated that they were interested in working in these sectors, and some suggested that these sectors might have more job vacancies available.

FIGURE 2



The majority of the businesses surveyed were micro and small enterprises, especially those in Mafrq, where businesses operate on a smaller scale. Medium and large businesses represented 10% of firms surveyed in Irbid and 4% of firms surveyed in Mafrq. The majority of respondents indicated that business is stable, with a few reporting firm growth. Sectors with the largest rates of growth included textile manufacturing and university services; 18% of textile manufacturers and 12% universities surveyed reported business expansion. None of the textile manufacturing firms surveyed indicated business decline.

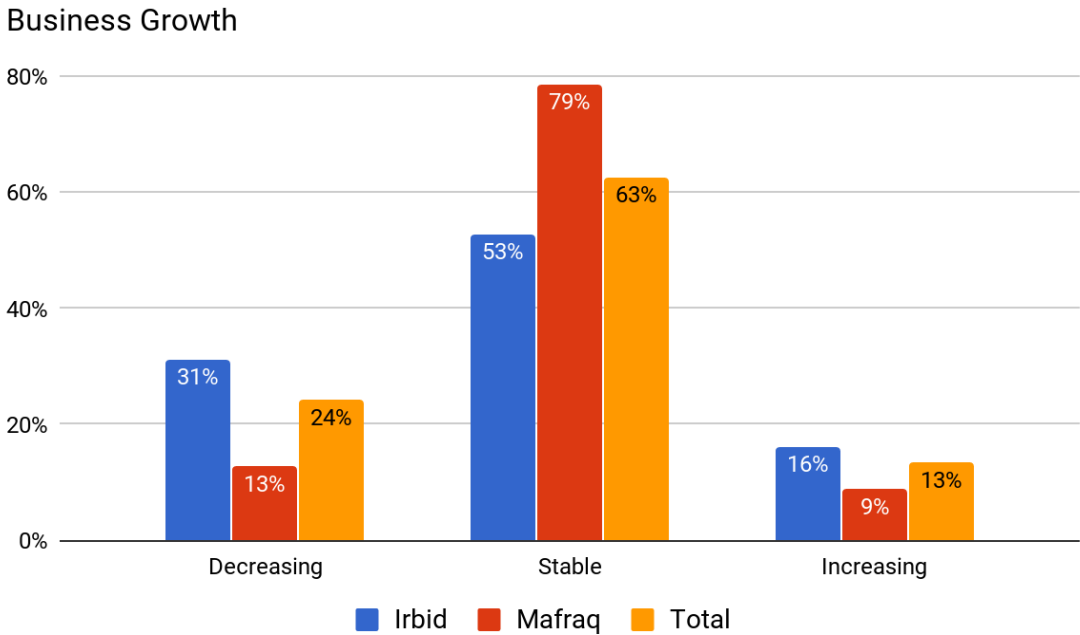
Micro Enterprise: less than 9 employees

Small Enterprise: between 10 and 49 employees

Medium Enterprise: between 50 and 250 employees

Large Enterprise: greater than 250 employees

FIGURE 3



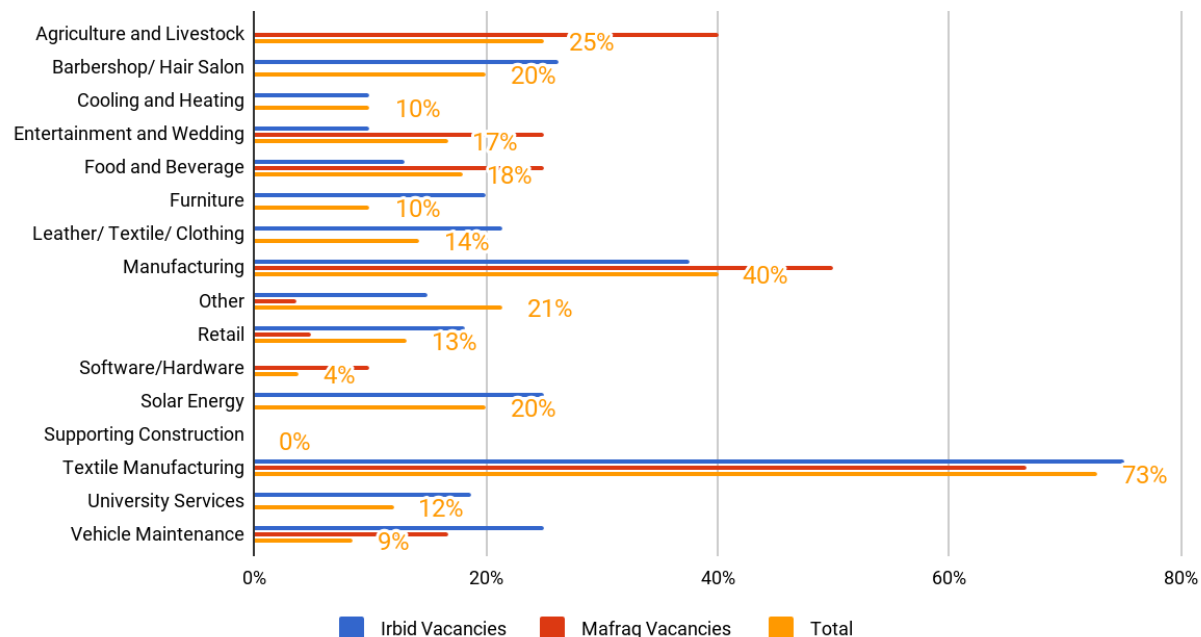
Labour Market Demands

There is currently not a large demand for labour in Irbid and Mafrq. Only 53 (16%) of the businesses surveyed have vacancies and are actively hiring. Figure 3 shows the percentage of businesses in each sector that are hiring or looking for youth recruits. Youth are aware of this harsh reality. During one FGD, a Jordanian youth claimed, “Me and all my friends apply for jobs via Akhtaboot and Bayt but we never hear back.” Two of the four livestock businesses interviewed have openings. The textile manufacturing sector has the most consistent demand for labour, comprising 73% of the total labour demanded in both governorates.

Youth attitudes reflect this difficult employment forecast. One young Syrian woman indicated that, “The labour market is not promising for either nationality,” referring to the fact that jobs are scarce and young people are often overlooked for employment opportunities. Another young Jordanian female said, “There aren't many job openings available right now, there are more volunteer opportunities, also there are a lot of training programs.”

FIGURE 4

MSMEs In Demand for New Hires



There are 800 current job vacancies in Irbid and Mafraq among the MSMEs surveyed. 600, or 68.2%, of these vacancies are in the textile manufacturing sector and 123, or 14%, are in the manufacturing sector. The remaining 18% are concentrated in agricultural work and various other sectors. While employment opportunities are scarce for all, some feel that nationality plays a role in employability. A Jordanian male volunteer said, "I work in a bakery and the owner prefers to hire Syrian employees because they are more experienced and accept lower wages." Irbid and Mafraq have fairly large Industrial cities where there is high labour demand, however these factories are hiring Southeast Asian workers. Factory owners claim that Southeast Asian workers are more productive and committed than local labourers. They find that Jordanians and Syrians usually leave after two weeks and do not take the job seriously.

Youth indicated they could not take jobs in these industrial cities due to familial pressure. One Jordanian female indicated that she would rather remain un-employed than work in a textile factory, even if the factory only hired females. There is cultural factor at work here, as jobs in the manufacturing industry are considered shameful due to the predominantly foreign labour force and late working hours.

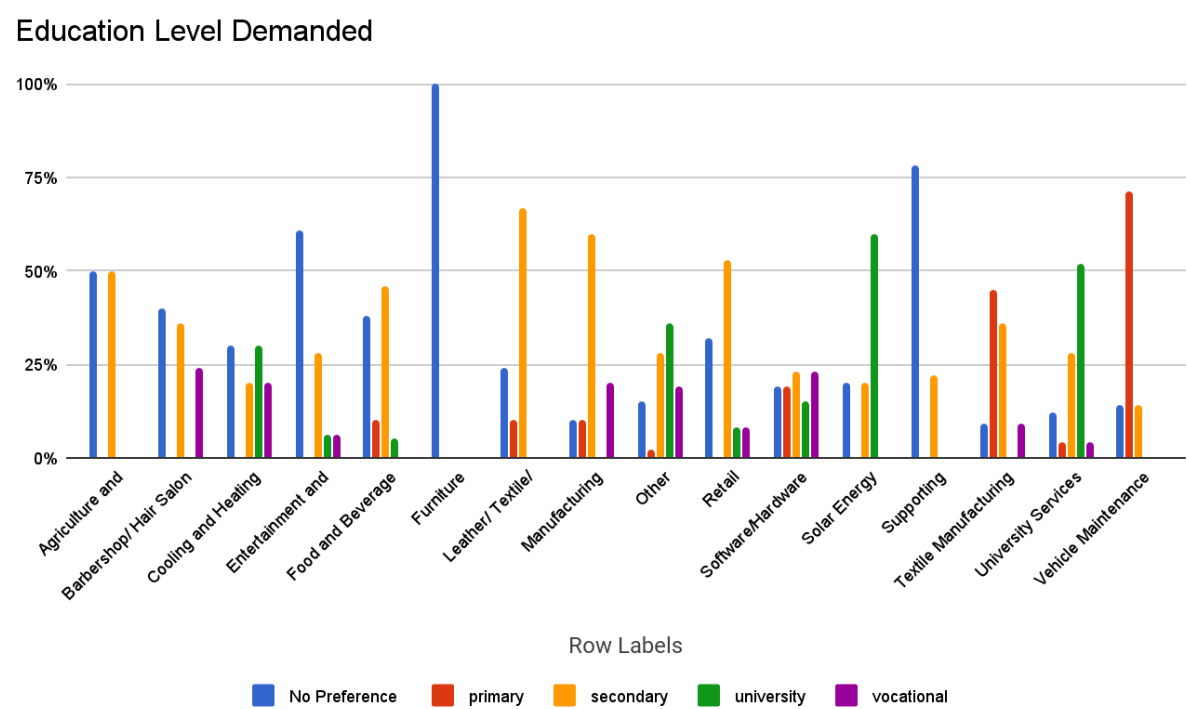
51% of all businesses surveyed prefer to hire employees with a secondary education or higher. While 331 of firms surveyed are vocational type businesses, only 9.7% require employees to have vocational certification or formal training. Vocational training programs are largely seen as insufficient, lacking technical rigor and applicability. Some governmental actors within this space claim that vocational training courses offered at various vocational training centres (VTC) and private vocational training providers are too general and thus not beneficial. KIIs revealed that many of these courses are generalized because they aim to train participants for a variety of sectors and positions. However, many Jordanian and Syrian VTC graduates find the programs largely useless due to their lack of specificity. While quality may be poor, vocational training centres claim that employers do not understand the benefits of having a trained employment pool and/or are

unwilling to invest time and resources in training employees. One solution, put forward by the Jordan Chamber of Industry (JCI), is to redesign the VTC curriculums to train participants for specific jobs; while sectorally similar, a sewer technician and sewer assistant require different skill sets.

FIGURE 5

Figures 5 and 6 highlight the educational requirements for new employees in surveyed firms. Irbid employers had a higher educational expectation than those in Mafraq. 67% of employers in Irbid look to hire new employees with a secondary education or higher, compared with only 50% of businesses in Mafraq. Youth indicated that educational requirements can be a barrier for young Syrians, as most do not have proof of prior schooling. Young Syrian women in Mafraq stressed that providing Syrians with training courses and certification would alleviate some employment challenges.

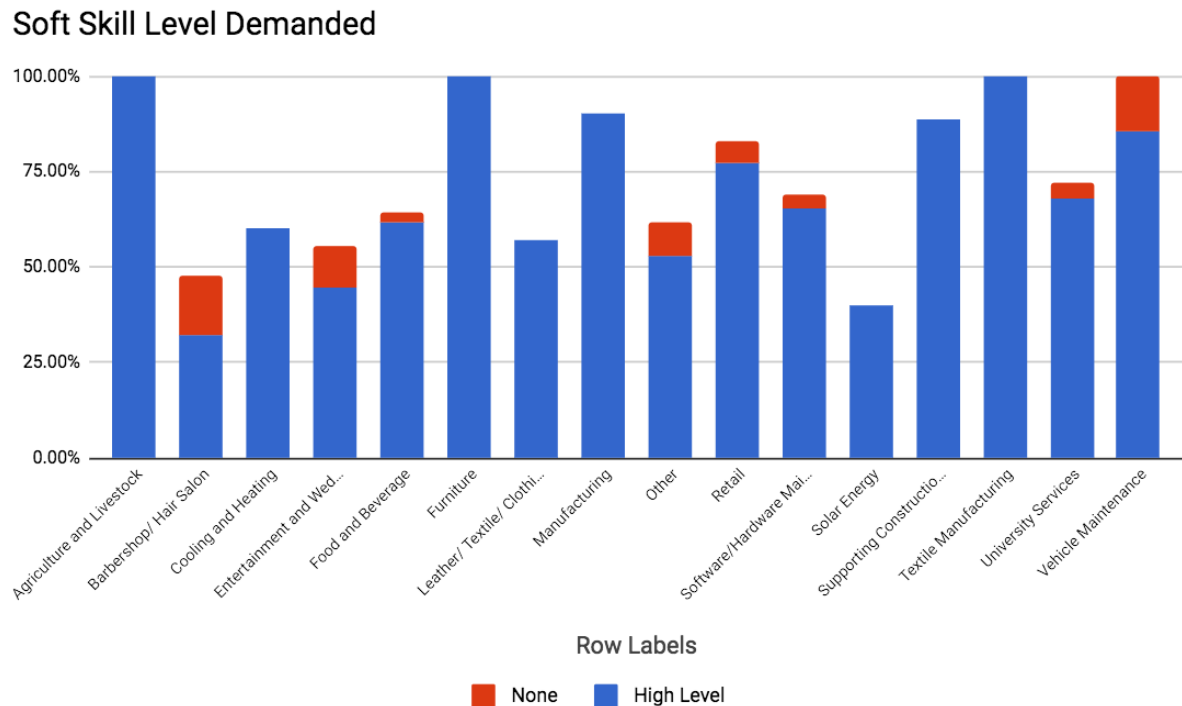
FIGURE 6



Soft Skills

66% of businesses look for employees with soft skills in addition to hard skills. Very few businesses required no soft skills, and these firms were largely concentrated in specific sectors such as barbershops, hair salons and vehicle maintenance shops. KII interviews with various employment agencies revealed that training programs largely neglect soft skills. Furthermore, youth surveyed did not think soft skills were important in gaining employment; when youth were asked how a successful employee should compose him/herself, most listed physical attributes, such as professional dress, rather than interpersonal skills. However, Irbid firms felt that employees can learn soft skills on the job, so this may not be a large barrier to employment. Mafraq businesses had lower soft skill expectations than those in Irbid.

FIGURE 7



Businesses look for communication skills, customer service and work ethic in new employees. When asked to define work ethic, most employers listed professionalism and job commitment. Youth's lack of commitment was a reoccurring theme throughout the business surveys and KIIs. However, youth claim they often leave vocational jobs because they were not given the technical training needed to succeed, or their supervisors do not give them enough responsibility.

It seems that while employers take technical skill sets into consideration, soft skills can make or break a potential candidate. USAID's Workforce project also identified a mismatch between employer and job-seeker expectations around the skills needed for labour market entry. Syrian and Jordanian youth hold varying labour market perceptions. Jordanians are more likely to have higher levels education and thus have negative attitudes towards vocational training. They are typically more interested in obtaining soft skills, feeling that VCT programs are designed for those who did not go to university. Syrians have less education than Jordanians and as a result are interested in completing vocational training courses to give them a leg up in the job market. As discussed previously, negative perceptions of VCTs often stem from poor curriculum design and a lack of sectoral focus. The Jordan Times reports that:

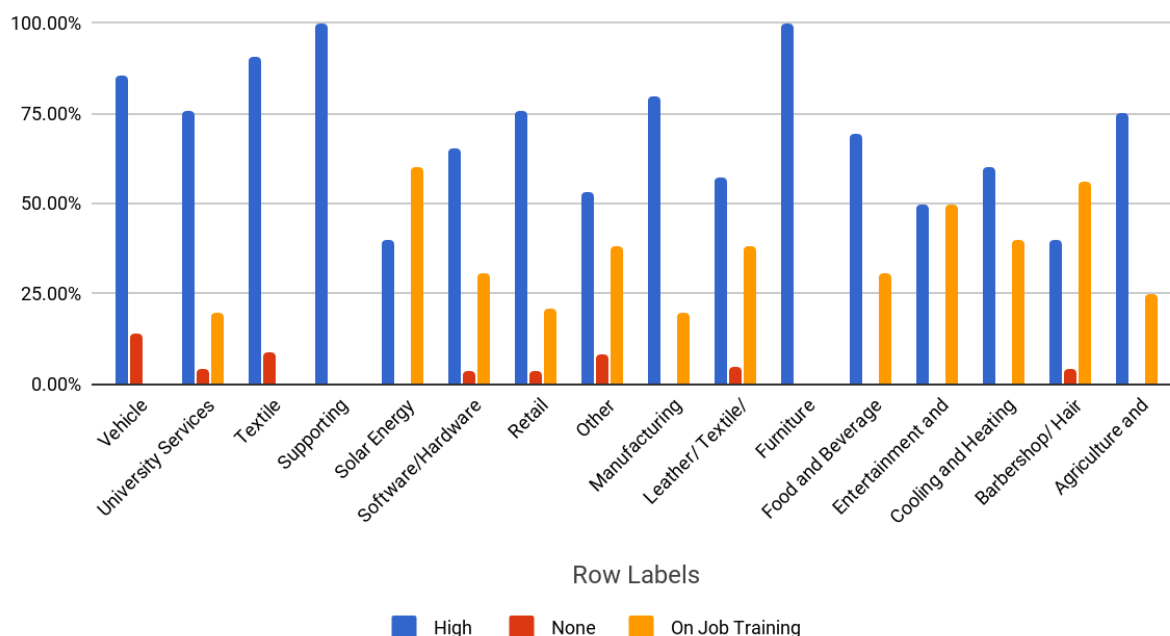
“Sector experts and officials have over the past years attributed the lack of interest in vocational training to the fact that training stops at the level of skilled worker, without giving excelling students a chance to seek higher degrees in a community that values college education and respects people with university degrees. The Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) is working on a plan to encourage young people to join two diploma programs that teach highly demanded skills and open the door for students to pursue higher degrees.” (Jordan Times)

In 2016, the Ministry of Education approved a new VCT program and the Vocational Training Corporation admitted 4,000 students with high school exam scores between 50% and 59.9% to applied secondary education programs. The programs seeks to increase the percentage of students in applied education programs from 12% to 20% in the next few years, with a goal of reaching 30% to 40% by 2026. The Princesses Basma Vocational Training Centre claims that, “Youth are this country's economy,” and as a result is committed to ensuring their services cater to youth and businesses demanded skill sets.

In one KII with the National Employment and Training Company in Mafrq, the team met a Jordanian university graduate enrolled in a solar energy vocational training course. Though he holds a Bachelor's degrees in Mechanical Engineering with honours, he believes this new certificate will be a value added to his previous education and will open the door to better employment opportunities.

FIGURE 8

Technical Skill Demanded



Technical Skills Demanded

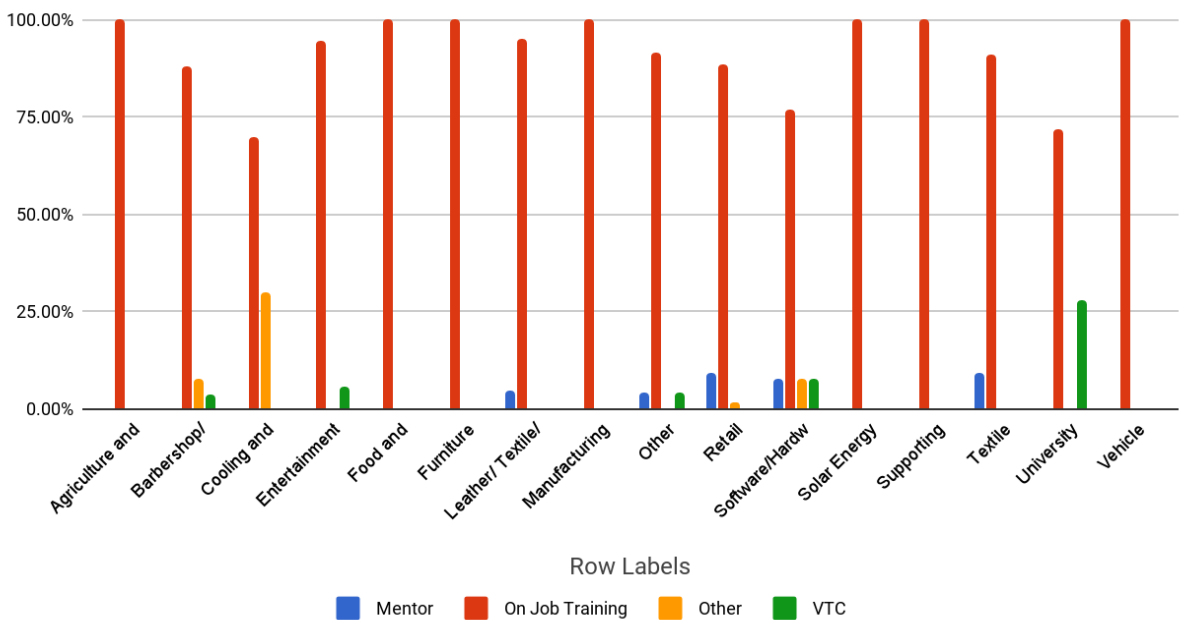
On the technical side, while 67% of businesses surveyed require potential employees to have a high level of technical skill, only 29% offer their new hires on-the-job training. 90% of businesses claim they train new hires, but upon further questioning, most admit the program is more of a orientation than a technical training course. This is one reason why new hire turnover is high in vocational type jobs. New hires are promised on the job training, yet only receive a general one to two week orientation. One young Jordanian woman stated, “Most of the time these jobs are not sticking because the manager/employer is not giving youth a chance nor are they training them properly.” Construction and furniture manufacturing sectors had the highest technical skills requirements, preferring employees with backgrounds in metalworking and wood carving. Employers seem to have higher standards for new hires than current employees, both in terms of soft and technical skills.

Vocational training centres in Irbid and Mafraq admitted that there is minimal collaboration between businesses and vocational training providers. VTCs believe that businesses do not want to invest in new hires because they fear they will not be committed and quit soon after training. Vocational training providers within the public and private sector claim that better employee retention requires greater investment in employee training programs, particularly for youth hires. Employees that feel invested in are more likely to be committed to their job.

Youth also cited the need for greater collaboration between recruitment centres and businesses. Youth feel that these centres in their current form are currently largely useless. One Jordanian female said, “I paid 13 JODs every month last year hoping for a job match but nothing, my friends had the same experience so now I don’t trust employment agencies.”

FIGURE 9

Training for Employees



Labour Market Challenges



“The challenges we face as youth can create opportunities for us, for example: I know a 21 year old girl who failed high school but did not give up and worked as a babysitter in one of the nurseries and then she worked as a waiter in a restaurant, this girl is responsible for 10 boys. She was able to overcome the cultural obstacle of a women being unable to provide for a household. She was able to encourage the youth in her community to look for job opportunities. Surely she struggled at the beginning but she was able to improve her self-confidence and experience.”

— Young Male Volunteer, Irbid, Jordan

Businesses were asked to rank the major challenges they face on a scale of 1-5 (5 most challenging, 1 least challenging). The most common challenge reported was government services and regulations. Most businesses feel cumbersome government regulations and shifting regulatory requirements inhibit firm growth and prevent future planning initiatives. Figure 10 lists the 13 most commonly cited business challenges and the perceived severity of each.

FIGURE 10

Type of Challenge	Severity of Challenge (1= small, 5= extreme)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Labour Cost	24%	22%	37%	10%	8%
Demand Cost	21%	25%	26%	17%	11%
Financial Services	37%	25%	18%	11%	9%
Production Cost	23%	19%	28%	14%	15%
Government Services	20%	14%	17%	15%	34%
Access to Technology	36%	19%	18%	13%	14%
High Salary	19%	21%	31%	18%	11%
Technical Skills	31%	25%	23%	11%	10%
Soft Skills	32%	25%	23%	11%	10%
Experience	34%	20%	20%	14%	12%
Commitment and Discipline	31%	15%	15%	14%	26%
Education Level	30%	24%	27%	12%	8%
Commute Distance	40%	19%	26%	8%	7%

Business owners also feel that shifting labour regulations make it difficult to stay abreast of new labour law codes, especially in regards to Syrian workers. Thus, many feel it is too risky to consider sponsoring a Syrian for a work visa.

Businesses also cited a lack of employee commitment and discipline, and rising production costs as inhibiting factors for firm growth.

“Syrians have it much harder, they must find a manager that is willing to hire them (which is already hard for all youth) then Syrians need to work extra hard because of fear of losing this job. Also Syrians cannot work in all sectors.”

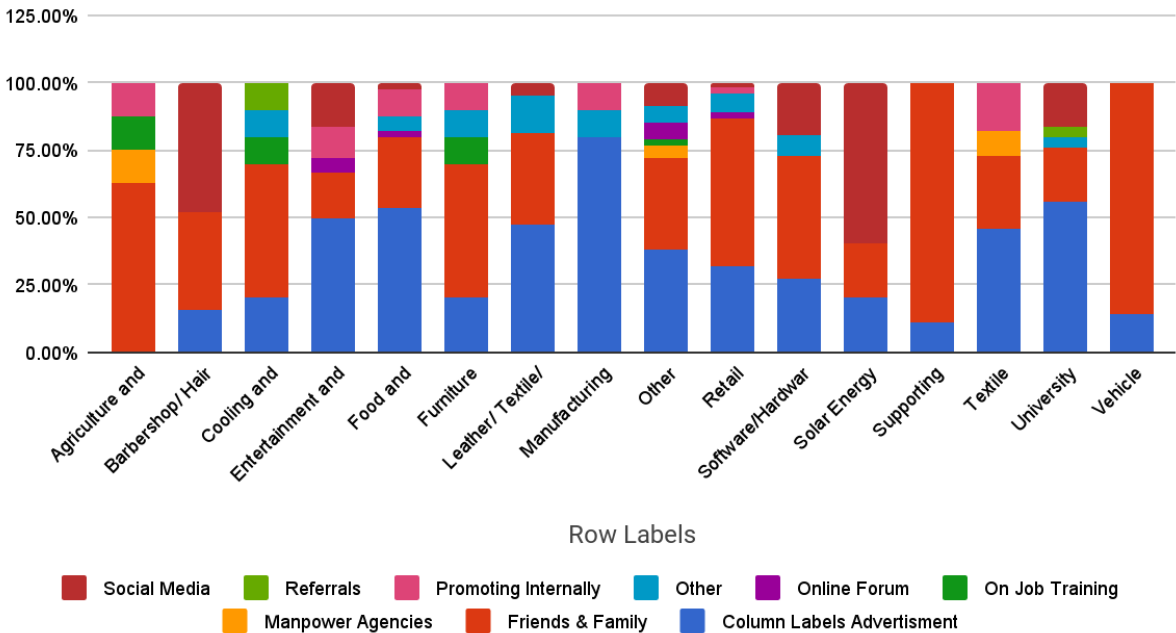
-Young Jordanian Man, Mafrq

Hiring Practices

During the survey, businesses leaders were asked how they recruit and hire new employees. The majority of businesses did not know how to answer this question, indicating that HR and formalized hiring practices are not common. 39% of those surveyed recruit for open positions through word of mouth, largely to family members or friends. Word of mouth recruitment is more common in Mafrq than in Irbid. 37% of firms utilize advertisements to recruit, typically in newspapers and through posted flyers.

FIGURE 11

Current Recruitment Practices



Recruitment practices seem to vary by firm size. Micro businesses (0-9 employees) typically find employees through family and friends. 42% of small business recruit with advertisements and 24% utilize family and friend networks. 54% of medium sized businesses use advertisements as their main tool for recruitment, and these firms were also most likely to use social media to recruit.

Youth perceive that most hiring is done through word of mouth and family connections. The issue of ‘wasta’ came up in most focus group discussions. Youth indicated that limited personal connections were a major barrier to employment. One young Syrian woman stated, "Wasta plays a big role in finding a job- or rather knowing the right people."

FIGURE 12

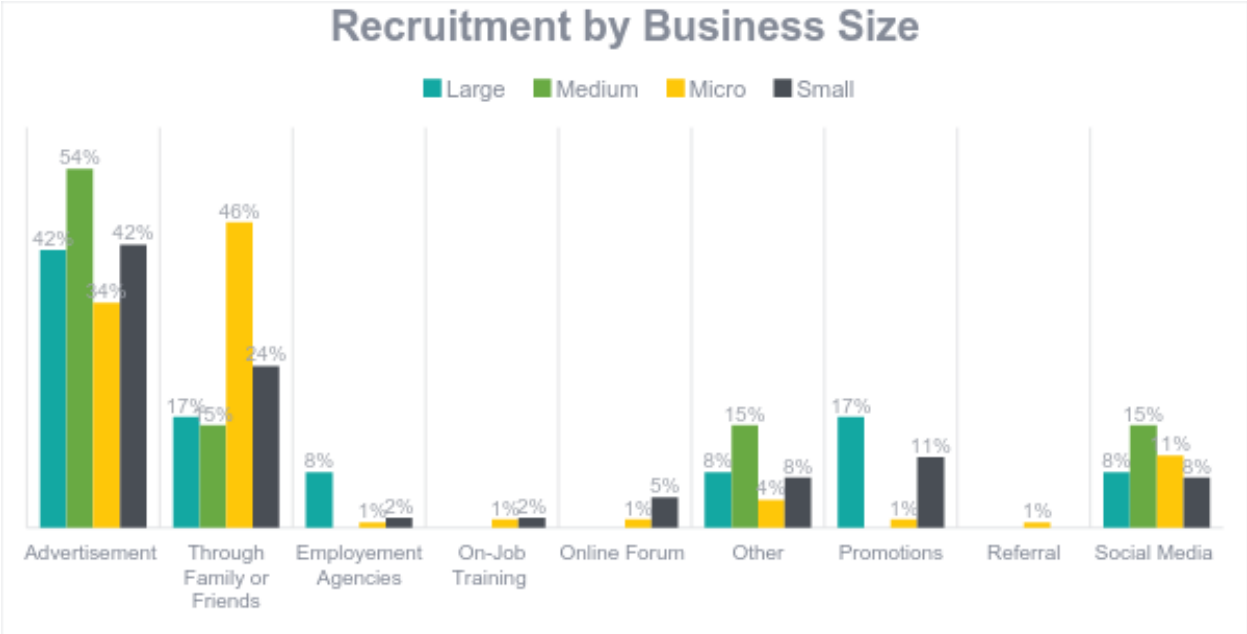
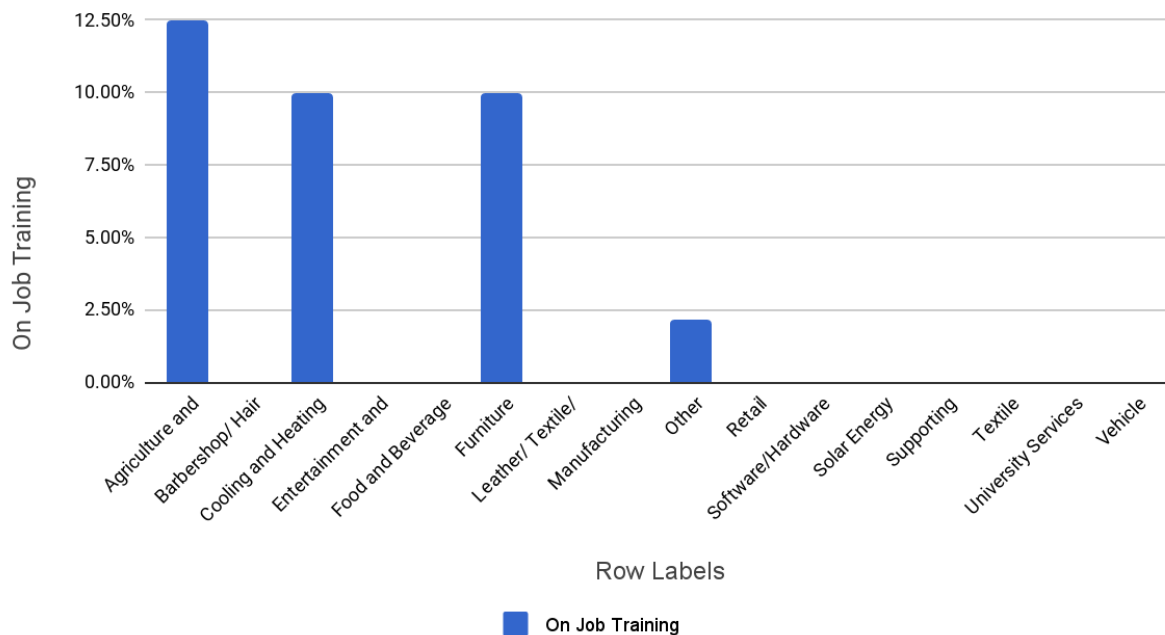


Figure 13 shows that only firms in agriculture and livestock, cooling and heating, and furniture offer on-site training. This contradicts the information we gathered earlier from KIIs with VTC, which indicated that most firms offer on-the-job training. Business owners said they preferred to train new hires on-site to ensure they learn specific skill sets rather than general skills. However, most businesses do not have the capacity to train all new hires, leading to high employment turnover. Youth hired without proper orientation and training often feel undervalued and therefore quit quickly. One female Jordanian FGD participant said, "When I work within something, which is not related to my major, I feel uncomfortable even if the wage is high." However, another female participant suggested salary was more important than sector for her, stating, "I used to work in the archives department in one of the hospitals and it was related to my major. I was happy and satisfied but I had to quit that job because the salary was not suitable for me - very low." Due to conflicting qualitative data about training preferences by both employers and youth potential hires, the team will conduct additional follow up research to understand which training methods contribute to the largest gains in youth employability and employee retention.

FIGURE 13

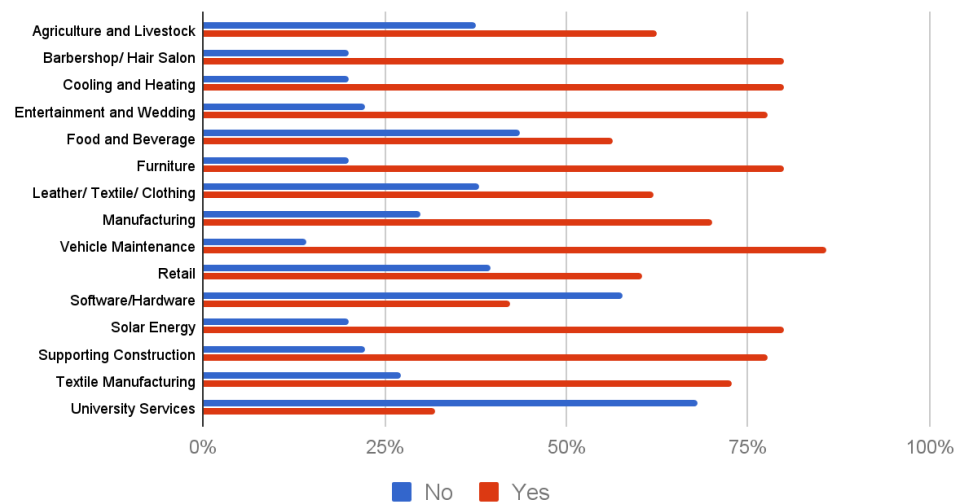
Sectors Offering On Job Training



Across both Irbid and Mafrq, 67% of businesses surveyed said that they would be willing to host an apprentice for on-the-job training, although the majority of these firms are located in Irbid. As seen in Figure 14, businesses in a variety of sectors were willing to host a youth apprenticeship, contradicting the negative perceptions business owners hold about youth workers. However, it should be noted that many businesses owners did not see apprenticeship as an automatic pathway to future employment.

FIGURE 14

Willing To Host An Apprenticeship

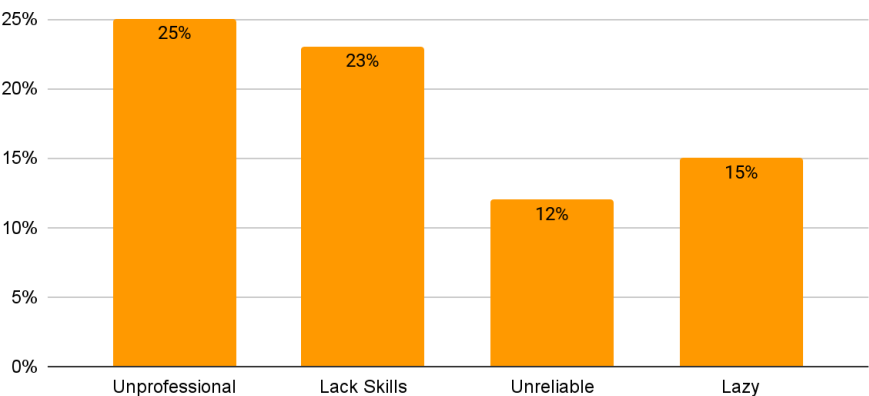


Employer Perceptions of Youth

Overall, survey results revealed that businesses generally held positive perceptions of youth. Figure 15 highlights the top negative perceptions business owners have of youth labourers. The common most critique is that youth are unprofessional.

FIGURE 15

Negative Perceptions



Managers feel that youth often come into work on late, lack of professional communication skills, fail to display appropriate respect towards supervisors, and do not take their work seriously. However, many firms who feel most strongly that youth are unprofessional do not offer any formal training for new hires. 12% of businesses surveyed believe youth are unreliable and thus are disinclined to invest in young employees for fear they will soon leave. They feel youth only look for temporary positions and leave as soon as a better offer comes along.

Youth feel that business owners hold unfairly negative views of young people. One young Jordanian female stated, “Youth face the challenge of not being trusted. Many employers do not trust youth to be loyal or willing to stick to a certain job. Most of the time these jobs are not sticking because the manager/employer is not giving youth a chance nor are they training them properly.” There is a lack of trust between business owners and youth. Business owners fail to invest in youth because they fear they will, “leave to start their own businesses, or work for someone else.” Youth claim they leave positions due to a lack respect or being given tasks below their level of expertise.

During the YLMA debrief, youth surveyors felt they understood why employers hold negative perceptions of youth workers. One Jordanian male said, “Talking to business owners, I now understand why they are hesitant to hire youth, we are so unreliable most of us do not know what we want or we are not patient enough to get properly trained and then succeed. We just all want to be promoted within 2 weeks of working.” Another Jordanian male said, “Before I used to just say yes to any job that came my way, I would assume that if I didn’t like it or did not like the boss I can just quit. Now I think I will be more picky as well as try to stay longer because it seems that there are no ‘good’ jobs at the entry level, you need to work towards that.” Female participants’ view of business owners did not change as dramatically over the course of the assessment process. Many still believe that ‘wasta’ is the only way to get a decent job. Many still have high

expectations for their employers, with one Jordanian female stating, “I will not tolerate a job if my supervisor/boss tells me I need to complete tasks which are not part of my job title.”

Female and Syrian Perceptions

Both Jordanian and Syrian female youth participants expressed an interest in working in a variety of sectors, including public, private, and non-profit. Most youth believe the private sector offers higher salaries and more flexible working hours. Yet young women were more drawn to public sector employment, especially teaching, and also felt volunteering with INGOs could open the door to future career opportunities. Females surveyed were most interested in working in the education, beauty, retail and hospitality sectors.

Female participants value working in a secured building with a high percentage of female staff, or at least an equal mix of both genders. Most feel that day shifts from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm are best for women, but indicated that any morning/afternoon shift is suitable. Most are not interested in working a night shift, which eliminates many jobs in the industrial sector. Commute time is an important factor in females’ job hunt, as many women surveyed do not take public transportation on their own and thus need to find a job in a high trafficked area where friends/family can drop them off. This transportation concern manifested itself during the labour market assessment when two female teams did not want to go out alone, instead preferring to work as one larger group.

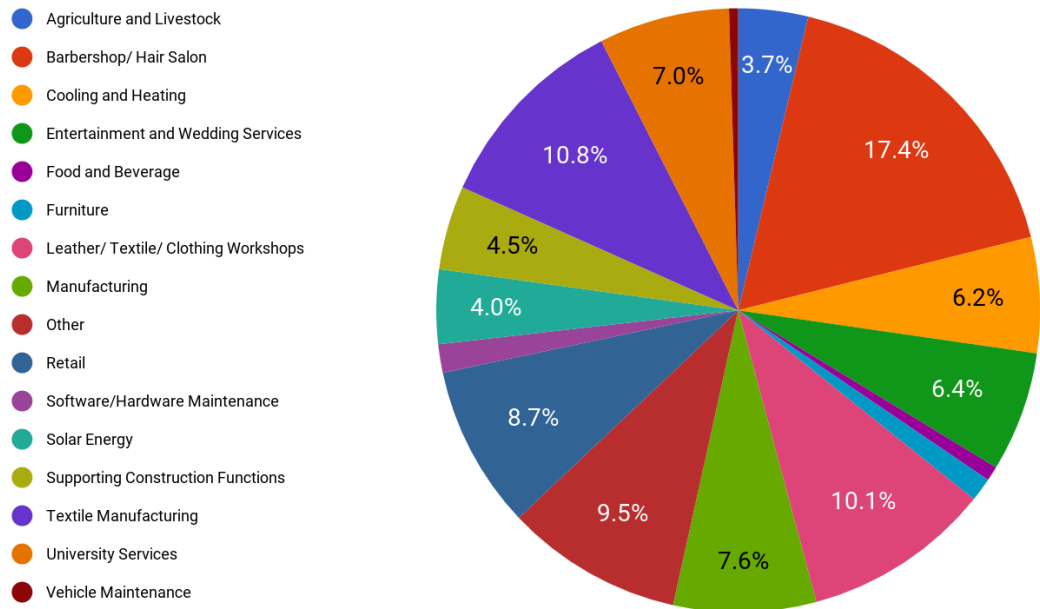
Females make up 47.5% of the labour force in Irbid and Mafrq, according to the market assessment surveys. However, the World Bank puts the female employment rate in Jordan at 17.5%. Though this statistic contradicts the data gathered from female focus group discussions, our assessment did specifically target female-led businesses and sectors with high female employment. Female youth feel there are few employment opportunities available for women in their communities. There are a select number of public sector and government jobs that recruit young women, but full-time positions are limited. Figure 16 disaggregates female employment by sector. Furniture, vehicle maintenance, and the food and beverage sectors have the lowest female participation rates. Of these three sectors, female participants indicated they would be most willing to work in food and beverage. Though this sector is dominated by males, a barrier for some conservative women, female youth stated they would be willing to work a morning or afternoon shift in this sector. According to the Economic Research Forum Working Paper Number 701, female barriers to labour market participation in Jordan extend beyond mobility and social norms, but also include institutional gender discrimination. For example, many private sector firms avoid hiring married women.



Jordanian and Syrian female and male youth participated in the YLMA. Participants conducted KIIs and FGDs in mixed nationality teams, and four KII teams were mixed gender.

FIGURE 16

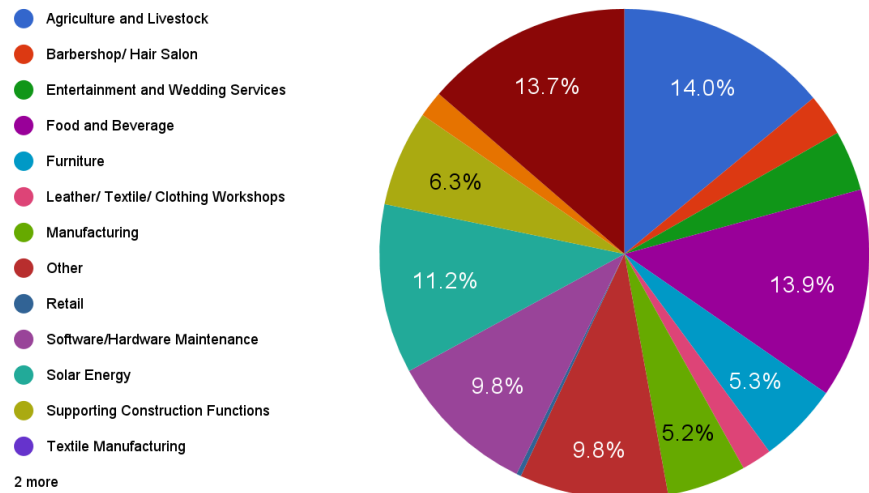
Female Presence in Labour Market



Syrians make up 1.54% of the labour force among businesses surveyed. Firms in the cooling and heating, retail, and textile manufacturing sectors did not employ any Syrians. Syrian women feel their employment opportunities are confined to farm and select factory positions. Many expressed a desire to start their own business rather than continue looking for work; they felt they might be more successful working informally than navigating formal sector work permit restrictions. Many employers will hire Syrians informally and underpay them. Syrians have little means of redress, for employers threaten to report them to local authorities if they complain about mistreatment or low wages.

FIGURE 17

Syrian Presence in Labour Market



Jordanian and Syrian Male Perceptions

Young men surveyed expressed an interest in working in a variety of sectors, including a number of vocational trades (construction, wood work, electrical work) and technological fields (computer or phone repair). Tired of looking for short term employment, many want to focus their energy on finding a position with long employment stability and the potential for upward mobility.

Young Syrian men face limited employment opportunities and typically work factory or agricultural jobs. Jordanians men are more likely to work as taxi drivers or in various trade sectors.

What Youth Took Away From the Experience

The YLMA provided MC's team with key information about the current labour market landscape in Mafrq and Irbid while giving area youth the opportunity to learn new skills. The vast majority (90%) of youth had never volunteered before and had no prior experience with MEL tools. Youth self-reported that their data collection skills increased by approximately 40% after conducting the market assessment. Youth not only learned to use the quantitative and qualitative field tools, but also understood the rationale behind the various tools. Most expressed an interest in learning more about quantitative and qualitative data and how to use various collection methods to triangulate data points.

60% of youth reported that they made new business connections as a result of the survey process, though most felt these were of average quality. Many came in with doubts about the possibility of employment in the existing labour market due to the importance of 'wasta'. However, after the training, youth were able to differentiate between wasta and general networking for business connections. According to one of the Syrian male volunteers, "I am not as upset about the idea of wasta, I can go out and make my own wasta and just start a conversation with business owners."

Youth were asked to list their biggest take-aways from the youth led market assessment process. The following options were given:

- Willing to apply to jobs within the businesses interviewed
- Got more familiar with new businesses in my community
- Gained a new grasp on the reality of the labour market
- Experience has opened up new doors

FIGURE 18

Self-Reported Youth Benefits of Survey (Irbid and Mafraq)

- Willing to apply to jobs within the businesses interviewed
- Got more familiar with new businesses in my community
- Gained a grasp on the reality of the labour market
- The experience has opened new up new doors

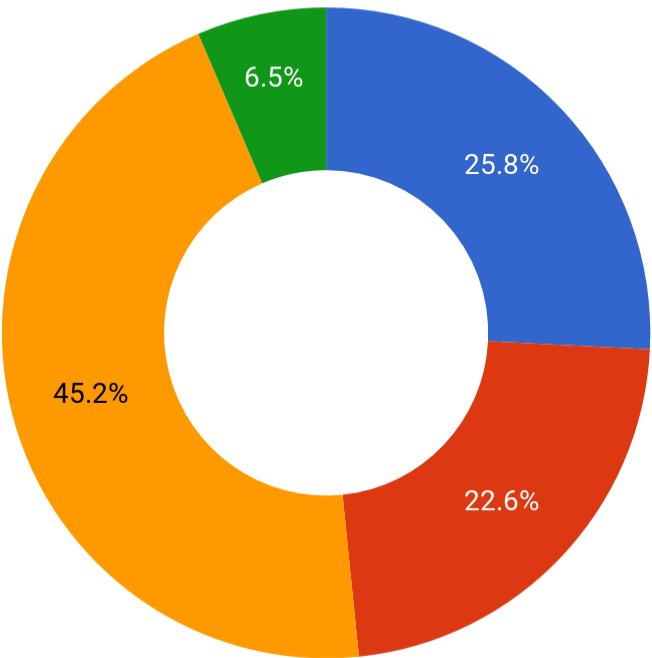


Figure 18 above shows the responses from Irbid and Mafraq youth, with the majority of respondents indicating that they gained a greater grasp of the realities of the labour market. During the debrief, many youth also said they learned about how businesses hire new employees and were now more comfortable approaching businesses owners. Female youth volunteers felt they gained confidence carrying out the market assessment. One Jordanian female said, “What I took away from this experience, is being able to approach various businesses, which I have never went into because I am a girl.” Increased self-confidence was a positive indirect outcome of the survey process, and the team hopes that the exposure to local businesses will encourage youth to continue to network. In Mafraq, 100% of volunteers found value in learning about the reality of the local labour market.

Table 19 below lists the top learnings YLMA volunteers took away as a result of the assessment process. First, volunteers learned about the harsh realities of the job market. Second, youth felt they learned which sectors have the most vacancies, and thus the most employment potential. Third, participants gained insight into why employers hold negative views about youth labourers.

FIGURE 19

Lessons Learned by Youth	Irbid	Mafrq
Interacting with youth in my community	20%	33.3%
Learning more about MEL tools	2.5%	16.6%
Going out to new businesses and learning about sectors in my community	7.5%	16.6%
Getting a better grasp on the reality of the labour market in my community	35%	16.6%
Making new business connections	10%	0%
Adding this volunteer experience to my CV – building my capacity	25%	16.6%

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Apprenticeships

Businesses gave contradictory responses to questions regarding on-the-job training. While many claim to offer such trainings, they still feel youth new hires lack the necessary technical skills for success. Youth, on the other hand, felt that employers did not offer trainings or adequate opportunities for growth. The team will conduct further research in order to understand what type of on-site trainings employers currently provide in order to identify skills mismatches. This process will also help the team identify which firms might be potential hosts for youth apprentices. Currently, youth hold negative views of apprenticeship programs due to the disconnect between apprenticeships and employment, so any new effort would need to clearly communicate program expectations between employers and apprentices. Both employers and youth desire more on-site training for new hires; apprenticeship programs provide a sustainable means of training and retaining new recruits. Innovative salary arrangements, where apprentices receive incremental raises during training and for a probationary period after hiring, could incentivize youth to remain invested in their jobs.

Recommendation #2: Information Sessions for Industrial Cities

Youth surveyed, especially young women, were not interested in manufacturing jobs in industrial cities. Employers should take this into consideration, and look for ways to make these jobs more attractive to new applicants. Youth and parents often lack information about what factory work actually entails. One of the mothers claimed that, “I cannot just send my daughter off to the industrial city, without knowing anything about it.” A family orientation could help breakdown female barriers to labour force participation in these sectors.

Recommendation #3: Specialized VTC Courses

KIIs revealed that current VCT courses taught by both public and private training providers offer a generalized curriculum that leaves youth with little workforce applicable experience. Business owners also highlighted that youth lack a sense of professionalism and a suite of soft skills. In addition to teaching

specialized technical skills, VTC courses should also include lessons on workplace culture and professionalism. VTC courses must match youth with an apprenticeship/ on-job training opportunity in order to create practical applications for classroom learning.

Recommendation #4: Promoting Jobs within the Industrial Cities

According to the Chamber of Industry, there is high demand for Jordanian and Syrian employees within the industrial cities. Aware of the local perceptions of industrial work, cities are working with the Chamber of Industry to improve marketing and recruitment techniques. Industrial cities should be advertising at sector specific job fairs, holding awareness sessions, and working with current employees to target youth recruits. One way to promote recruitment is to ensure all workers register with the Social Security Corporation (SSC). Mandatory social security enrolment insures that workers are compensated in case of injury, illness, retirement, disability and death. Syrian workers and their employers lack knowledge about the social security system, both in terms of registration procedures and employee/employer benefits. Employees need clear information about the benefits of social security coverage and what entitlements they are eligible for. Employers need information about the social security system as a whole. As the system requires workers' contributions for sustainability, employer buy-in is crucial for its longevity. Registering new hires with SSC has the potential to make industrial jobs more attractive.



During the post-assessment debrief, youth expressed an interest in continuing discussions around assessment learnings and next steps. Mercy Corps seeks to engage these youth volunteers again as other stages of the Accessing Justice and Jobs program rolls out.

Recommendation #5: Addressing Family Barriers

Family attitudes restrict female employment possibilities. Women must find employment in sectors their families deem suitable for women, namely in a “safe, secure location. Girls can only work at well known companies or organizations.” Families typically prefer that their daughters work in an all female or majority female environment, during a morning/afternoon shift, close to home, and with limited external stakeholder interaction. This does not necessarily align with what female youth desire- some of the YLMA volunteers indicated that they would enjoy working at a retail shop, but their family would never allow it. The Accessing Jobs and Justice in Jordan project will take these familial barriers into consideration as it implements future programming, but it will also aim to shift these perspectives through more focus group discussions and information sessions with employers and families.

Recommendation #6: Youth Follow Up

The Accessing Justice and Jobs in Jordan project will engage YLMA youth in future program activities. The youth expressed a deep interest in learning more about the labour market in addition to being updated with any new findings.

Learning



In addition to providing needed information about the labour market, the YLMA gave youth the opportunity to learn about their local employment market, develop qualitative and quantitative skills, and connect with local business owners.

participated in mixed gender groups felt they got opportunity to speak with businesses that they would not have been able to access otherwise. One female participant said that “I enjoyed the experience overall, I think it was nice to go to the places females do not normally go.” Through this process, youth gained direct access to various employers, enhancing their professional connection networks.

YLMA success depends on adequate training and debriefing time for youth surveyors. The two-day training MC held for young volunteers was not sufficient for the group to fully gain an adequate understanding of the labor market assessment and their role in the process. A youth-led and youth driven design was a new experience for many of the volunteers and therefore it took more time for them to become comfortable enough to contribute. We had limited time for tool feedback and questions after the initial presentation. Next time, we suggest eliciting potential business questions from youth before the tools are introduced to encourage more feedback and participation.

Additionally, a simple youth-led business mapping exercise might have enhanced the business selection process and allowed youth to hone in on more strategic sectors. The task would not only have helped youth better understand the scope of the business environment in each location but could also have provided them with a stronger background context for interaction with business owners. Surveying a larger number of area businesses would also have allowed us to be more representative in our sampling.

Tools

The Youth-Led Labour Market Assessment comprises a number of tools. Under ARC implementation, three tools were selected for rollout - business surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. Each of the tools utilized provided a unique stakeholder voice.

Three key areas for learning emerged during the roll out of the YLMA, namely learnings around process, tools and the experience of youth participants. We hope these learnings can contribute to wider community of practice discussions around YLMA adaptation and improvement to yield more comprehensive results in the future.

Process

During the YLMA, the team learned a number of lessons about the importance of preparation, timing, and building a strong foundation from which to launch the assessment. Below we outline key successes and challenges.

Creating mixed youth teams was an effective inclusion tool that contributed to the overall success of the YLMA. Mixed Jordanian and Syrian teams helped break down the barriers that existed between the two groups and allowed the youth to learn about the other community. Additionally, females that

“Being part of the FGD and KII, it tied together the gap that is present in our labor market, during the FGD youth just want to get jobs that are at the top, while at KII’s the managers are very pro youth and want all the best of them but they say that youth don’t understand that being successful is a slow road. Youth just want an easy option.”

— Young Volunteer, Irbid, Jordan

The focus group discussions provided a platform for youth voice around job prospects and youth aspirations. Before conducting their own FGD with other youth peers, volunteers participated in a MC facilitated FGD to experience the process from both points of view. This allowed our volunteers to both participate in and lead the activities, and experience first hand what it means to ask follow-up, probing questions. Despite heartfelt youth efforts, the information garnered from the youth-led FGDs was quite limited. The FGD tools included a number of activities, that while engaging, made the process feel rushed and resulted in one or two word responses from participants. Providing more space and time for open ended conversations would have allowed youth to more actively engage participants and probe deeper for causality behind statements.

In addition to providing more conversation generating questions, youth needed additional training on note taking and asking probing questions. More interactive note taking practices can be provided during the training to ensure that youth are empowered to capture the necessary information and voices the FGDs provide. Alternatively, FGDs could be recorded using a phone or tablet as long as there is adequate time for transcription afterwards.

Youth Experience

The youth survey experience is the hallmark of the Youth-Led Labour Market Assessment and therefore should be considered with as much importance as the data collected. Overall, youth had a very positive experience, but there is still room for building more depth into the experiential process.

Youth must be provided with a strong foundational knowledge of the labour market assessment tools and process in order for YLMA success. Without a strong basic understanding, the participatory approach yields limited results. Youth were initially hesitant to engage with the development of the tools due to unfamiliarity. By extending the training process and building in a business mapping exercise, youth might have more opportunities to conceptualize the process and the market system in their area before going out in survey teams.

The final debriefing session was a highlight for many youth volunteers. The debrief provided a chance for youth to compare their own opinions with the new survey findings, and helped them ground their claims in data. Many youth expressed an interest in further post-data collection follow up to continue to provide feedback and analyse data results. Although the ARC budget and implementation period presented some restrictions in this regard, building in further engagement and activities for youth data dissemination would provide even more youth ownership of the YLMA process.

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About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within. Now, and for the future.



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