

# EFFECTIVENESS AND INNOVATION POTENTIAL IN THE AREA OF ACTIVE LABOUR MARKET POLICIES IN JORDAN

Working paper

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# PREFACE

This report is part of a wider study commissioned by the ETF and led by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini on the topic of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs), labour market transition and skills development in the ETF partner countries, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the ETF has launched several new work strands to seize on the immediate developments and provide targeted advice or the sharing of innovative solutions in response to the impact of the pandemic. One strand covers socio-economic dynamics and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market and policy responses in terms of the crisis, post crisis and recovery phases, with a focus on the role of ALMPs including skills development programmes.

The working assumptions are that (i) the economic downturn and pandemic have induced sectoral changes requiring a change in career paths, reskilling and upskilling for people without jobs or at risk of losing them; and (ii) approaches to active labour market policies and programmes may need adjustments to fit current and foreseeable socio-economic conditions, technological advancement, etc.

In this regard, the following report is dedicated to analysing the pre-conditions and measures to boost the efforts of public employment services and other stakeholders to address the post COVID-19 era in Jordan. The report includes concrete/actionable policy advice and measures to help respective PES and stakeholders prepare for the recovery period with activation and upskilling measures or other types of interventions, well grounded into the country's socio-economic realities and delivery capacities. The conclusions and policy advice can inform the planning of EU and external support and country priorities for building up ALMP delivery and continuous training, in pursuit of a transition agenda towards more agile economies and workforce.

The report was written between December 2020 and March 2021 by Dr Nooh Alshyab with the support of Eamonn Davern.

The ETF's Mounir Baati, Iwona Ganko and Cristina Mereuta reviewed the report and provided comments and suggestions.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Jordan is an upper middle-income country facing significant challenges in reviewing and adapting its employment policies and labour market interventions to address the implications of the COVID-19 crisis. The country is characterised by an exceptionally young population, which presents great opportunities if the necessary structural adjustments and institutional reforms can be implemented. These will need to address a persistent deficit, ongoing public debt, and an increasing level of high unemployment despite ongoing reforms dating back to the 1990s.

Before the pandemic, Jordan experienced a decade of declining real GDP, particularly influenced by increased costs for fuel imports and a growing number of refugees from Syria. A real decline is expected for 2020 whilst remittances from Jordanian citizens working abroad are expected to decline, reducing an important source of foreign currency. The public sector is large; it is the biggest individual employment sector with around 40% of the workforce employed in public administration, defence, and education, while the wholesale/retail/trade (15%) and manufacturing (10%) are the next largest sectors. The large informal economy – estimated at 15% – is a source of major revenue loss.

Jordan is faced with very high unemployment, particularly affecting youth despite relatively high educational attainment, with large gender disparities and very low labour force participation. Skills mismatches and negative attitudes to certain types of employment and occupations are a contributory factor, especially in regard to the high rate of youth unemployment.

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, the government has prioritised stabilising the public budget and expenditure control, whilst some food and fuel subsidies have been increased to cushion the impact on vulnerable citizens.

There is no single overarching structure for organising and coordinating activities to promote employment. Employment policy delivery falls within the scope of the 2011-2020 National Employment Strategy (NES). This document needed an update prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and now requires significant revision. The absence of any formal cross-cutting institutional structure makes it difficult to map the delivery of employment services. Available evidence suggests both significant gaps and some duplication. The lack of service cohesion and the absence of a clear template for the delivery infrastructure further reflect difficulties in assessing the effectiveness of specific interventions and a tendency within government to triangulate disparate data sources when seeking to ascertain results, leading to contradictory interpretations of the impact of programmes.

The delivery of public employment services is the responsibility of the Employment Directorate within the Ministry of Labor. It has wide-ranging responsibilities, including all employment services, intermediation, and licensing of private agencies. Within this structure, PES are not a high priority, with less than 100 staff serving the whole country. These capacity constraints frequently prevent the organisation from even undertaking its legal mandate in respect of providing employment and career guidance, services that are sometimes supplemented by job fairs. Citizens must be registered on a national electronic system to receive services, and limited numbers of jobseekers are placed into work through PES intervention and matching with vacancies placed by employers.

The economic problems that pre-date the Covid pandemic and the lack of any overarching structure to coordinate ALMP design and delivery make reform an increasingly important and urgent priority. This

must start with a comprehensive mapping of existing provision to identify gaps and duplications to establish the scale of reorganisation needed to meet future demands.

Improved governance will make it more likely that deficits in the quality of provision can be addressed and a strategy formulated to engender longer-term improvements replacing the somewhat ad hoc strategy that characterised the response to the pandemic. The Jordanian government's labour market priorities in dealing with the onset of Covid were promoting stability and sustaining employment. Though understandable on their own terms, these priorities have made it difficult to develop policy away from the current position due to the lack of a coordinated future strategy, itself a consequence of the lack of a stable cohesive administrative framework to steer ALMP design and delivery.

The majority of ALMPs are in fact provided by NGOs, with the government also delivering programmes frequently funded through international organisations; these tend to be piecemeal and timebound. Private agencies are primarily involved in placing Jordanian citizens in jobs abroad. TVET provision also falls under the auspices of the Ministry of Labor, with responsibility delegated to a number of agencies oriented towards different sectors and groups of beneficiaries. Notwithstanding recent efforts to enhance engagement with employers, TVET continues to have a generally low reputation and the sector is fragmented.

Jordan does not have a comprehensive social protection system. A variety of bodies deliver residual social assistance and very limited social insurance through a number of programmes that remain organisationally separate from labour market interventions and employment and training support provision. Weak enforcement and compliance in the social security system is reflected in the low coverage, changes were made in 2019 to include more favourable contribution rates to encourage small entities to comply.

A very strict lockdown was introduced in March 2020, closing all non-essential sectors until May, when the economy was reopened. An increase in GDP in the first quarter of 2020 was subsequently reversed to a forecast loss of -5.5% in October 2020 (subsequently revised upwards). This crisis has had a significant impact upon an already uncertain economic position. Debt is expected to exceed 100% of GDP for 2020, further constraining the government's capacity to invest in and deliver much-needed ALMPs. A number of labour market measures were introduced in response to the pandemic. These were focused upon maintaining employment, protecting workers' rights, and alleviating the impact of enterprises ceasing to trade. Funds supported by international organisations have been directed towards funding emergency social assistance programmes, maintaining the education system, assistance for SMEs, and emergency aid for refugees. There has been no appreciable amendment to PES operations as a response to COVID. For safety reasons, all face-to-face services were suspended and only online registration maintained.

Jordan is expected to experience a slow path to post-COVID recovery due to its high levels of debt and unemployment and a continuing need for structural adjustment. The exacerbation of pre-crisis macro-economic difficulties points towards a continuing dependence upon aid, loans, and regional trade with countries unfortunately in similar situations. This points to continuing difficulties, especially for the most vulnerable citizens. Some individual ALMPs do produce promising results, suggesting that more significant progress could be made if such measures were embedded within an overall reform of the institutional framework for delivering employment services. This would have to involve the role of PES being restructured and potentially expanded.

# INTRODUCTION

The following report has been drafted as part of a research project led by Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini for the European Training Foundation (ETF) on the topic of effectiveness and innovation potential in the area of active labour market policies (ALMPs), with a focus on the ETF partner countries. Two forthcoming reports from the same project focus on the effectiveness of ALMPs in crisis contexts and innovations in ALMPs following the COVID-19 crisis, respectively. The final stage of the project involves a series of studies analysing the conditions for post-COVID recovery and the role of ALMPs in three ETF partner countries: Moldova, North Macedonia, and Jordan, the subject of this report.

The body of the report is structured as follows. After outlining the research methodology used to build the analysis, we look at the main contextual factors determining the situation in Jordan. This includes the socio-economic and labour market context pre-COVID, the impact of the 2008 crisis and responses to the crisis, the current state of the public employment services' (PES) institutional setting, and the social protection system.

We then look at how the COVID-19 crisis affected the country and how the institutions responded in terms of policies. This section covers the macro-economic impact of the crisis, changes to the provision of ALMPs in response to the crisis, as well as changes in the PES delivery model and policy priorities. It includes a critical perspective on the readiness of the ALMP system to build towards recovery. The following chapter takes a more forward-looking perspective through a section dedicated to pathways to recovery.

Finally, after synthesising the main findings of the case study, we provide some recommendations for reforms in regard to the ALMP system, both in the specific context of the COVID-19 crisis and the wider state of affairs in the country.

The methodology used for this study combined two main methods of data collection:

1. A desk-based review of Jordanian official documents, strategies, and reports released by the relevant governmental institutions; reports by international organisations and donors; and academic articles and writings on the topic.
2. Semi-structured interviews with key figures (experts and key informants), selected among policymakers, officers at the Ministry of Labor and at national institutions involved in formulating and providing ALMPs, and representatives of international organisations involved to varying degrees in labour market-related interventions in the country.

More specifically, method 1 was very useful in defining the country context, the relevant strategies and policies, and the main lines of intervention. Desk research was also highly useful in understanding the involvement of donors and international organisations, as well as reviewing the evaluation of existing interventions, including the strengths and weaknesses of the Jordanian labour market. Desk research also encompassed a review of existing quantitative and qualitative information on the labour market and on ALMPs. Method 1 was further necessary to issue a list of the most important stakeholders relevant to labour market interventions in the country.

Method 2 has been used to complement method 1 to fill existing gaps in data availability and to triangulate information. Stakeholders' interviews were also helpful for understanding the relative importance of different programmes and projects, as well as benefitting from insider perspectives.

To implement method 2, the author conducted semi-structured interviews with selected key informants working in Jordan. Participants were selected based on the purposeful sampling method (Patton, 2014), which consists of selecting individuals who are especially knowledgeable about the issues analysed.

The sample of experts interviewed included labour market experts and policymakers, officers at the Ministry of Labour and at national institutions involved in formulating and providing ALMPs, and representatives of international organisations.

The interviews were conducted in January 2021. On average, the length of the interviews was between 75 and 90 minutes. A total of six experts were interviewed.

# 1. COUNTRY CONTEXT

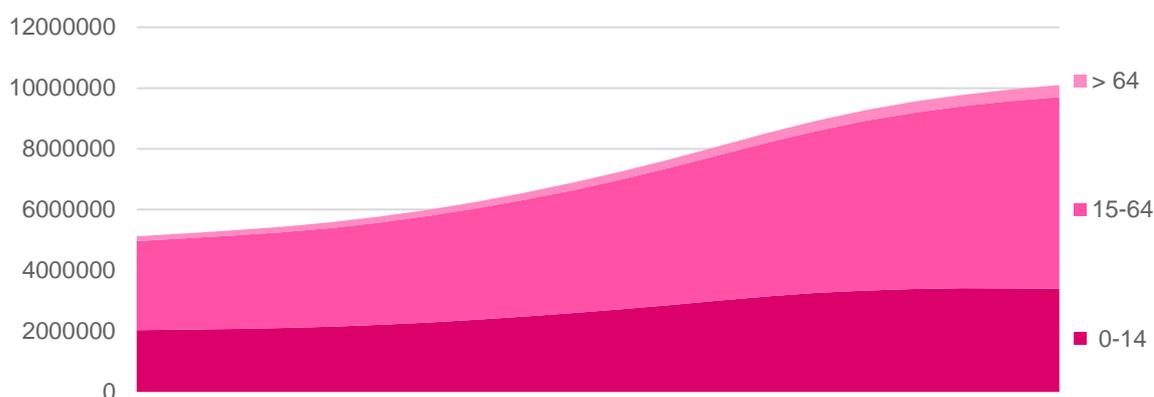
In 2020, GDP was estimated to be around USD 42 billion (IMF data, 2021). In terms of output, Jordan ranks 89<sup>th</sup> worldwide. Jordan is classified as an upper middle-income country. Over the past 10 years, there has been no improvement in the nominal per capita income. Starting during its deep financial crisis of 1989, a comprehensive economic reform programme has been implemented under the umbrella of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The programme aimed at macro-economic stabilisation, private sector development, and integration in the global economy. Despite all the reform efforts and programmes, Jordan still suffers with a chronic budget deficit, sustained level of public debt, and high and rising unemployment.

## 1.1 Socio-economic and labour market context

The population has steadily increased and is estimated to be 10.8 million (as of 2021, DoS)<sup>1</sup>. The population is balanced with regard to gender (49.4% female inhabitants) (World Bank, 2020). Jordan's population is also remarkably young: in 2019, about one-third (33%) of the total population was under the age of 15 (Figure 1). Working age people (15–64 years) accounted for 63%, while only 4% were older than 64 years. According to the Higher Population Council's projections (2009), Jordan will enter the so-called 'Demographic Window of Opportunity' by 2030 – a stage that is reached when the working age population grows significantly more quickly than that of dependents (< 15 or > 64 years). Accounting for such a development and reaping respective the potential welfare implications indicates the need for a strengthened focus on adapting employment policies.

As can be seen in Figure 2, approximately 42% of inhabitants reside in the capital, Amman.

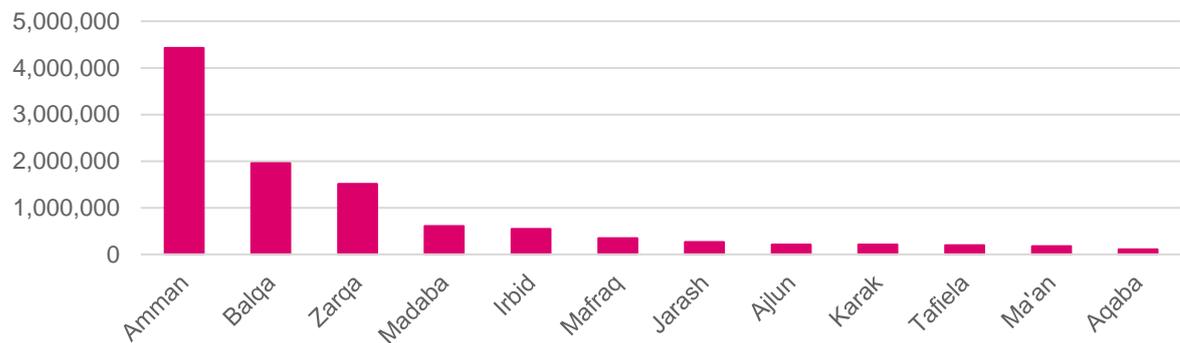
**FIGURE 1: ESTIMATED POPULATION BY MAJOR AGE GROUP, 2019**



Data source: DoS, 2020.

<sup>1</sup> According to the 2016 census, non-Jordanians represent about 30% of the total population. It is also noteworthy that Jordan is host to a large number of refugees. In 2021, the official number of refugees register with the UNHCR is 664 603 (6% of the total population) (UNHCR, 2021).

**FIGURE 2 : ESTIMATED POPULATION BY GOVERNORATE, 2019.**



Data source: DoS, 2020.

Achieving sustainable economic growth has been a central challenge for Jordan. Despite the comprehensive economic reform programme from 1989 and related programmes, Jordan has been able to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Even though the country achieved remarkable economic growth rates at the beginning of the 2000s (surpassing 8%), real GDP growth has been decreasing since 2007, and has not reached 3% since 2010 (Figure 3). The consequences of the Arab Spring, the disruption of the relatively cheap gas imports from Egypt, the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, and the inflow of a large number of refugees have heavily affected the Jordanian economy and further strained the country's limited resources. These shocks had a major impact on economic growth, which fell from an average of 6.5% between 2000-2009 to an average of 2.7% between 2010-2014, and an average of 2.1% between 2016 and 2019. In April 2020, due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, the World Bank estimated a decline in real economic growth of -3.5% for 2020; the figure was revised to -5.5%, as reported in October 2020 (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3 : REAL GDP GROWTH 2000-2022**



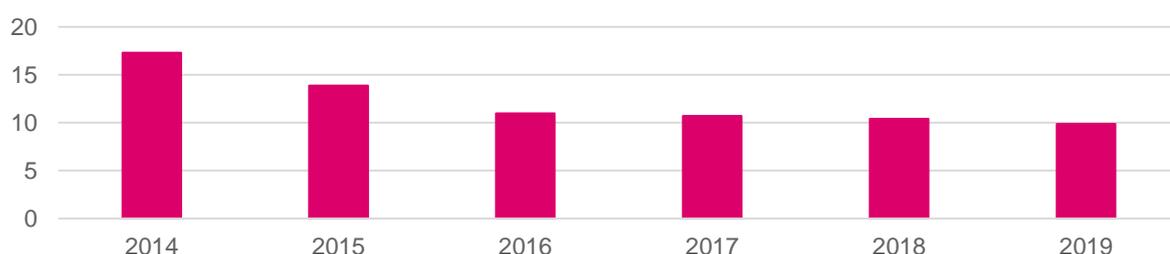
Data source: World Bank (2021); for estimates and forecasts, see World Bank (2020c)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Note: e = estimate; f = forecast.

Migration traditionally plays a crucial role with regard to the Jordanian economy. Emigration, especially to Gulf countries, considerably increased with the oil boom of the early 1970s; since then, the economic situation has led an increasing number of Jordanians to seek work abroad.

Based on estimations by Bel Air, the Jordan Strategy Forum (2018) reports that in 2016, a total of 786 000 Jordanians were living abroad, make up 10.5% of the total population. 80% of Jordanian migrants reside in the Arab Gulf states<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, personal remittances constitute a crucial element of the Jordanian economy: in 2014, they represented about 17% of GDP, decreasing to about 10% in 2019 (Figure 4). Thus, remittances are an important flow of foreign currency, which is essential for a better balance of payments.

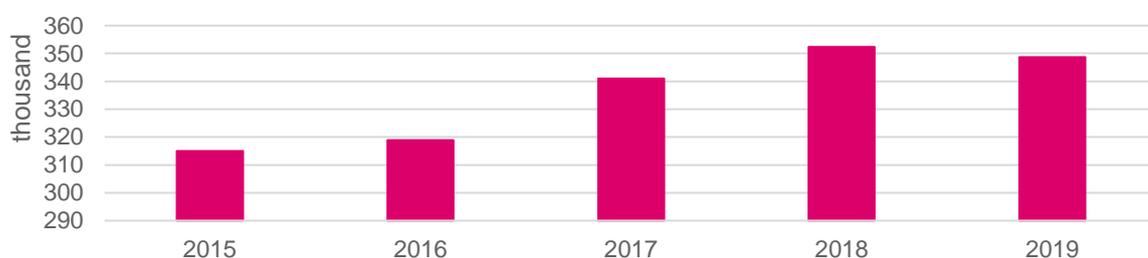
**FIGURE 4 : REMITTANCES RECEIVED (AS % OF GDP), 2014-2019**



Data source: DoS, 2020.

According to figures from the Ministry of Labor, there were around 352 000 foreign nationals holding a work permit in 2018 and 348 736 in 2019, accounting for 25% of Jordan’s workers (Figure 5)<sup>4</sup>.

**FIGURE 5 : REGISTERED FOREIGN WORKERS**



Data source: Ministry of Labor, 2020.

The majority of foreign workers (64.9%) are Arabs, mainly from Egypt (61% of all foreign workers). Young people make up the largest share, with about 69% of foreign workers being in the 25-35 age group over the last 6 years on average. About half of migrant workers (47%) reside in Amman. While labour export predominantly involves high-skilled workers, the majority of labour migrants residing in Jordan are low-skilled and employed in low-wage jobs. They are mostly employed in agriculture (31%), manufacturing (25%) and social personal services (22%) (Ayadi et al., 2018a). Overall, 93% of expatriate workers have secondary school education or below. In 2019, the outflow of remittances represented 1.1% of GDP (CBJ, Annual Report, 2020). However, it must be noted that due to the

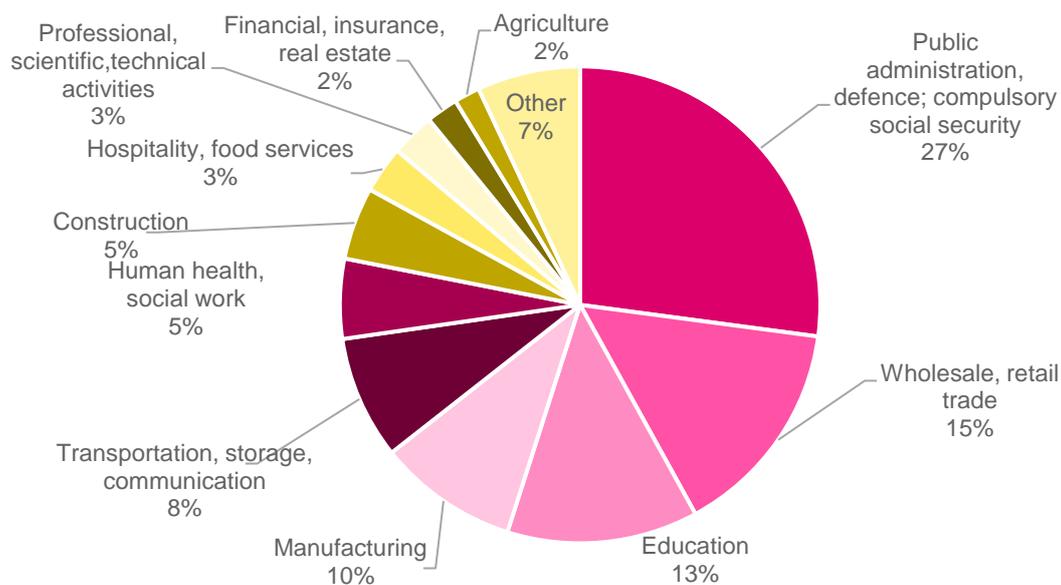
<sup>3</sup> There are no exact figures for the number of Jordanians residing abroad, as there is no unique methodology or approach adopted by official sources. For example, according to the Jordan Households International Migration Survey (DoS, 2014), in 2014, the number of Jordanian migrants residing abroad was estimated at 1 million, thus representing about 11% of the total population.

<sup>4</sup> Unofficial statistics estimate the total number of migrants to be more than 1 million (Namati, 2020).

importance of informal channels, official estimates both of in- and outflows of remittances tend to underestimate the phenomenon.

The percentage distribution of employed workers according to economic activity is shown in Figure 6. The importance of the public sector as an employer is clearly evident, with 27% of individuals employed in public administration and defence, and also indicated by a further 13% working in the field of education and 5% in health. Employees in the wholesale and retail trade made up 15% of the workforce, while manufacturing and transportation (including storage and communication) employ 10% and 8% respectively.

**FIGURE 6 : SHARE OF EMPLOYED BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, 2019**



Source: DoS, 2020.

Relying on the methodology by Medina and Schneider (2018), it can be estimated that in 2015 the informal economy represented about 15% of GDP, implying a loss in tax revenue of JOD 600 million (more than USD 840 million) (IMF, 2018).

A related aspect is that of informal employment, which can be measured as the number of workers without a contract or without social security registration. According to the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Employment and Unemployment Survey 2019, the informal employment accounts for 53% of total employment (compared to 49% in 2018 and 45% in 2017) (ILO Stat, 2021).

The global financial crisis of 2008 severely affected the Jordanian economy and reversed some of the progress seen in economic growth over the 2000s (Figure 3). Although, the scarce global integration of the banking sector (mostly constituted of domestic banks) and the limited size of the financial sectors (Ayadi et al., 2018b) initially protected Jordan from the direct implications of the financial crisis, its effects were soon to come. The increase in international oil prices and the decline in the value of the US dollar, to which the Jordanian dinar has been pegged since 1995, caused a sharp rise in inflation, which increased from 4.7% in 2007 to reach 14% by the end of 2008 (CBJ, Annual Report, 2008).

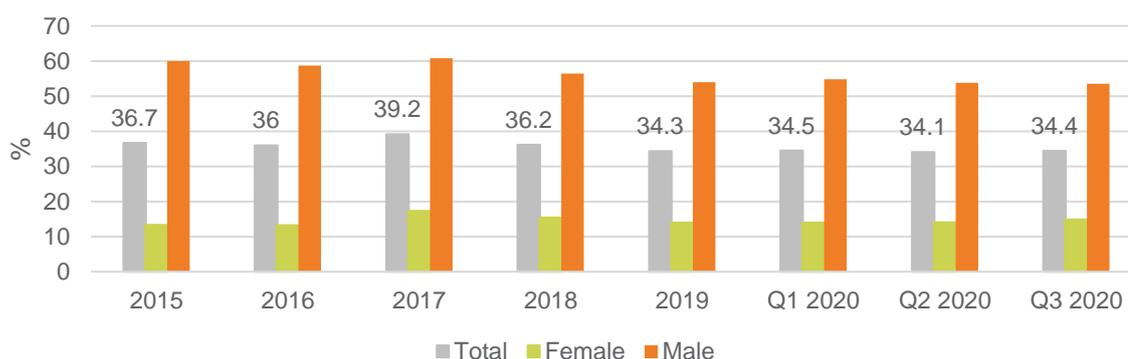
By the end of 2010, the regional instability connected to the Arab Spring was adding to the difficulties created by the global financial crisis (Alshyab & Khasawneh, 2013). Regional instability contributed to lowering tourism, foreign direct investment and remittances, as well as the demand for exports (USAID, 2014). The disruption of gas imports at a favourable price from Egypt, the reduction in exports to Iraq, and the massive inflow of Syrian refugees further aggravated the situation. In 2017, Jordan could be considered the 'largest host of registered refugees in the world (2.8 million refugees registered with UNURWA & UNHCR)' (GoJ, 2017).

The policy response by the authorities aimed at consolidating public revenues and containing expenditure. To mitigate the effect of inflation on vulnerable households, subsidies on bread and gas were raised (CBJ, Annual Report, 2010).

## 1.2 Labour market information

According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics, in 2019 the labour force was 1 702 187, with 1 377 905 people employed and 324 282 unemployed. The refined economic activity rate (population 15 years and older) in 2019 was 34.4% (54% for males and 14% for females). **Labour force participation** in Jordan is therefore among the lowest in the world, in particular for females. In the third quarter of 2020, the participation rate was 34.4% (53.5% for males; 14.9% for females), compared to 33.6% (53.3% for males; 13.2 % for females) in the third quarter of 2019 (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 7 : REFINED ECONOMIC ACTIVITY RATE BY GENDER, 2015-Q3 2020**

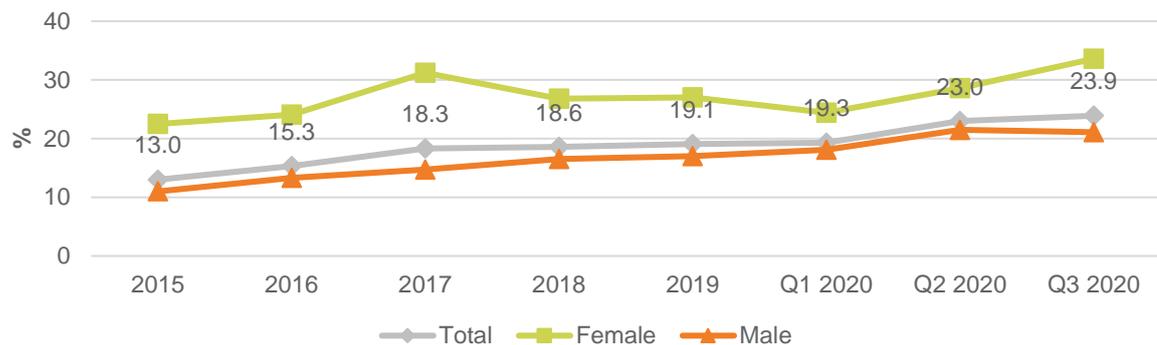


Data source: DoS, 2020.

The gender gap is very pronounced in Jordan and also involves a substantial wage differential (Alshyab, et al., 2018). Accordingly, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020 ranks Jordan 138<sup>th</sup> out of 153 countries for economic participation and opportunity, which is an indicator combining gender differences in economic participation and wage levels (World Economic Forum, 2020).

Unemployment has been one of the most serious challenges, especially for young Jordanians. As depicted in Figure 8, it has continuously risen from 13% in 2015 to 19.1% in 2019. It reached 19.3% in the first quarter of 2020 and a worrying 23.9% in the third quarter (21.2% for males against 33.6% for females). For males, the rate has increased by 4.1% and for females by 6.1% compared to the third quarter of 2019.

**FIGURE 8 : UNEMPLOYMENT RATE, 2015-Q3 2020**

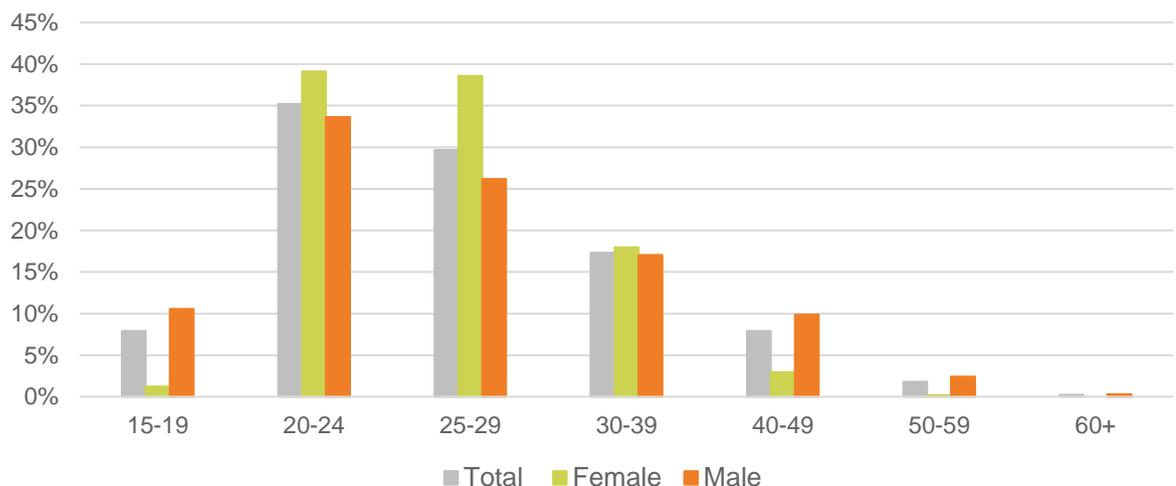


Data source: DoS, 2020.

Figure 9 shows the number of unemployed individuals by age group in 2019.

Young people are most affected by unemployment. About 65% of unemployed individuals are between 20 and 29 years old. This age group accounts for 78% of all female unemployed people and 60% of all male unemployed people.

**FIGURE 9 : DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE BY AGE GROUP, 2019**



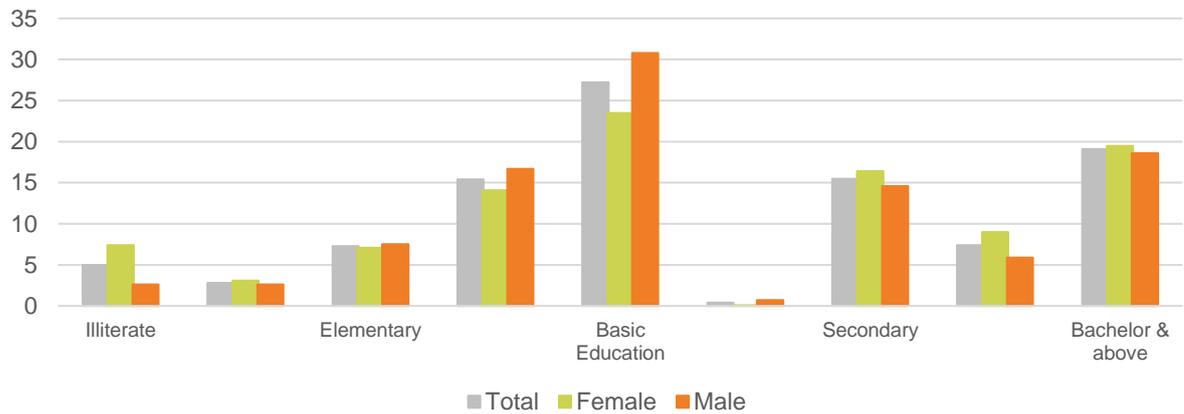
Data source: DoS, 2020.

The share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET rate) dropped slightly, from 38% in 2017 (48% female and 29% male) to 36% in 2019 (44% female and 29%) (ILOSTAT, 2021).

The Jordanian population is characterised by relatively high educational levels. The most recent Employment and Unemployment Survey by the DoS (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2020) estimated that about 42% of Jordanians (aged 15+) held a secondary education degree or above, including 19% with a bachelor's degree or above. Vocational apprenticeships are rare (0.4%) (Figure 10). As we shall see later on, both supply and demand-sided problems contribute to the minimal participation in vocational training schemes. Most importantly, attitudes towards vocational education are very negative in Jordan, with a bias towards higher education irrespective of market demands. Vocational education is associated with low educational achievement, while at the same time, career counselling and guidance are insufficient. The Jordanian education system reinforces this dynamic by channelling low-achievers into

vocational streams. In this context, it must also be mentioned that Jordan lacks a long-standing tradition with regard to apprenticeship schemes in general; instead, the traditional – and still prevalent – method of learning crafts or distinct trades is work-based learning in informal settings (see also UNESCO, 2018).

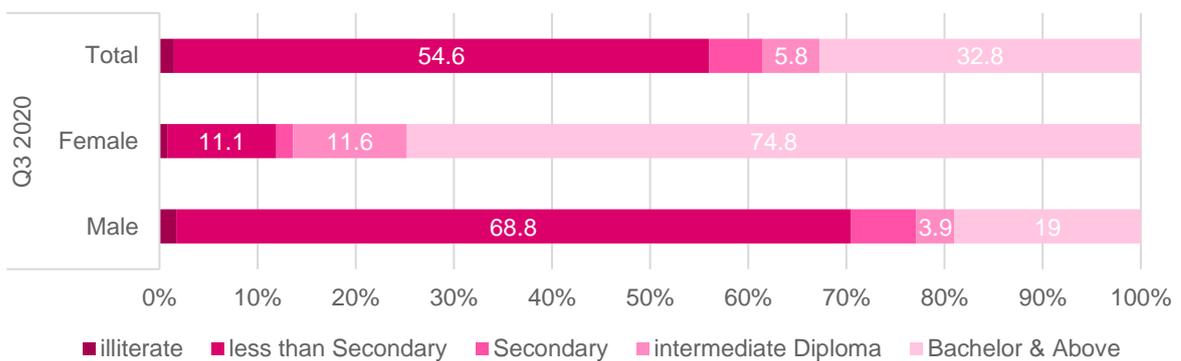
**FIGURE 10 : POPULATION (15+ YEARS) BY EDUCATION AND SEX (PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION), Q3 2020**



Source: DoS, 2020

Figure 11 shows the percentage distribution of unemployment according to educational attainment. Based on the third-quarter 2020 survey by the Department of Statistics, about 33% of unemployed persons hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, while university graduates account for 75% of female unemployed people compared to 19% for men. Unemployment among university graduates is a critical characteristic of the Jordanian labour market, pointing at several factors: a skills mismatch, reluctance to take on work that does not correspond to the educational background, and an aversion to manual jobs, related to what has been called a culture of shame<sup>5</sup>.

**FIGURE 11 : DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE BY SEX AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, Q3 2020**



Source: DoS, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Network for Economic Studies, 2018.

### 1.3 PES institutional setting

The primary responsibility for providing public employment services (PES) and LMPs lies with the Ministry of Labor (MoL). The Ministry is the public body in charge of regulating the labour market in Jordan, inspecting facilities and working conditions, issuing instructions to provide job opportunities, promoting labour education and vocational training, and fostering national and international cooperation (Ministry of Labour, n.d.).

The MoL undertakes several measures related to employment: it promotes events aimed at training and employing jobseekers in private sector companies and institutions and it has a role in promoting support for training and employment projects through the Employment, Training and Vocational and Technical Education Fund (MoL, 2017 Strategic Plan 2017-2020, in Arabic). The MoL has 824 employees, which represents around 0.05% of the Jordanian labour force. The Employment Directorate, as one of the Ministry's 14 directorates, is responsible for all matters related to employment, intermediation tasks and the licensing of private employment agencies. All of the MoL's services are delivered to citizens in the different governorates by the Labour Directorates spread across the country. 88 staff deal directly with employment and employment services in Jordan. Table 1 shows the capacity and regional distribution of PES.

**TABLE 1 : HEADCOUNT AND REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE EMPLOYMENT DIRECTORATE**

Region	No. of offices	No. of employees
North	4	24
Central	8	52
South	4	12
Total	16	88

Data source: MoL.

The Employment Directorate is organised into four departments: (1) employment and career guidance, (2) individuals with disabilities, (3) employment follow-up, and (4) employment and workers abroad.

As presented in the Ministry's Annual Report and confirmed in interviews, the main activities performed in regard to employment and career guidance are employment days and job fairs, workshops and orientation days with civil society organisations, schools and universities, intensive individual orientation sessions, and cooperation with international organisations.

To have access to employment services, jobseekers need to register in the National Electronic Employment System (NEES). According to Ministry data, 40 024 jobseekers registered in 2019 and 62 630 in 2020. A total of 17 817 jobseekers found employment (for one day or more) through the employment services in 2019, while a total of 10 030 did so in 2020. According to information collected via interviews with officials at the Ministry, the placement target is 10 000 per year. In regard to disabled people, in 2019, there were 228 registered jobseekers with disabilities and a further 489 who found jobs. It should be noted here that Jordanian law requires employers to have at least 4% of their headcount consisting of disabled persons (Article 13 of Jordanian Labour Law No. 8 of 1996)

Employment services are targeted at Jordanian jobseekers in the private sector only, while migrants are excluded from the services provided by the Employment and Labour Directorates. Distinct client groups are disabled persons, youth, and in particular young graduates, for whom counselling is mostly done in cooperation with the King Abdallah II Fund. Even though female jobseekers are served by the public employment services, there are no specific activities targeting women, as the MoL has a dedicated department for women.

The PES target employment promotion in the private sector only, reflecting Jordan's longstanding policy priority of steering jobseekers, especially young graduates, towards private sector employment. Due to the prestige of public sector jobs and the respective benefit packages, the public sector represents the employer of first choice for the majority of Jordanian youth. As in many MENA countries, there is a deep-seated belief of entitlement and the expectation that the government has to provide employment opportunities. However, necessary cutbacks over the past decades have led to a decreasing number of available civil service positions. Persisting expectations of public employment increase youth economic inactivity, with many graduates queueing for public sector jobs, while waiting lists for certain positions exceed 10 years (ILO, n.d.). As of January 2021, about 338 000 applicants are on the waiting list. With about 7 000 vacancies per year, the public sector can only absorb about 10% of annual graduates (Ammon News, 2021).

The body responsible for filling public sector positions is the Civil Service Bureau, through which all applications are handled.

It emerged from the stakeholder interviews that even though CV assessment and skills evaluation should be among the PES offering, there is insufficient capacity for this. As a result, in most cases, only registration occurs, with neither individual career guidance nor individual employee follow-up being performed. Intensive individual orientation sessions ought to provide a key instrument with regard to individual career guidance; however, in practice, implementation is difficult due to the lack of space and facilities. According to our interviewees, individual orientation sessions have so far only been conducted on a small scale.

With respect to services provided, it should also be mentioned that interviewees noted that neither any schemes to develop entrepreneurship nor any direct measures in support of human resources development existed. As explained in more detail below, training is provided directly by the Vocational Training Corporation. In regard to the employment services provided to prospective employers, employment days, job fairs, and other events aimed at bringing together employers and jobseekers are organised several times per year.

Interested companies can register on the MoL list and can then announce vacancies while receiving pre-filtered CVs. Information about job openings is, as a rule, collected directly by Employment Directorate staff through company visits. A template for data collection is used for this purpose, to gather information on the qualifications and skills needed, the wage offered, the job description, and the conditions of employment. Applications and vacancies are then put onto the electronic platform Nees.jo. In addition, the Employment Directorate provides information on the labour market and labour market trends, such as demand for certain specialisations.

Conventionally, ALMPs are classified into four main types (see e.g. ETF, 2014; Kluge et al., 2017): employment services, training and skills development, entrepreneurship promotion, and subsidised employment. There are no single umbrella institutions coordinating and supervising ALMPs implemented in Jordan. Therefore, a variety of national and international stakeholders interact and

cooperate on the development and provision of ALMPs and employment programmes on an ad hoc basis. The majority of ALMP interventions are implemented by NGOs as lead agencies, followed by the Jordanian government. Table 2 summarises the main stakeholders involved in the provision and/or funding of ALMPs.

**TABLE 2 : KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN ALMPs**

State players	International organisations and main donors
Ministry of Labor (MoL) Civil Service Bureau (CSB) Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC) (formerly E-TVET) Vocational Training Corporation (VTC) Development and Employment Fund (DEF) National Aid Fund (NAF) National Employment and Training Company (NETC) Social Security Corporation (SSC) King Abdullah II Fund for Development (KAFFD) Ministry of Planning	World Bank International Labour Organization (ILO) European Union (EU) US Agency for International Development (USAID) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)

Employment services for Jordanian nationals in the form of job search assistance, job market information, job counselling, and job search skills, such as CV preparation and job interview techniques, are under the direct responsibility of the MoL and provided by the Employment Directorate. The Civil Service Bureau manages and enhances the capacity of the human resources employed by the public sector.

In addition, about 42 private employment agencies are licensed to provide services. Private employment agencies are mostly concerned with matching and intermediating for Jordanian jobseekers abroad. In 2019, 1 771 job seekers found job opportunities abroad through this intermediation (MoL Annual Report, 2020).

Further initiatives in the field of guidance and counselling have been implemented by different stakeholders for specific groups of beneficiaries. Targeting university students, for example, the King Abdullah II Fund for Development (KAFFD) has partnered with public and private universities to establish 27 career guidance offices. Services offered include career counselling, life skills and technical workshops and training. Internships and volunteer work opportunities are also offered.

The MoL's main tasks are organising and regulating the labour market, designing interventions, and implementing policies. Over the past couple of years, in the frame of the Economic Incentive Bundle programme launched by the government in 2019, the Ministry has been focusing on the following main lines of intervention. The National Empowerment and Employment Framework encompasses a number of programmes targeting different sectors of economic activity, including tourism, agriculture, industry, construction, health, services, information technology and production branches. The framework targeted the creation of 60 000 jobs in 2019-2020, in addition to other initiatives. The programmes consist of training and employment benefits. Also, several initiatives in cooperation with third parties were envisaged according to the framework. However, as expert interviews have confirmed, the exact framework for the programme, the responsibilities in regard to its implementation, and the financial means available are unclear. The same applies to the detailed programme components and third-party contributions.

A further important pillar of the MoL intervention is the National Charter for Employment, based on dialogue and cooperation with the private sector, represented by the chambers of industry and commerce, trade unions and workers' unions, and institutions involved in vocational training. The National Charter was launched in September 2019 to involve the whole sectors (governmental, private, and legislative) in finding common solutions to unemployment. The government promoted it as a great success and achievement (Jordan Times, 2019), but on the ground there was no tangible progress. Perhaps, the repercussions of the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020 and the change of government in October 2020 were among the reasons for that.

The Khedmat Watan (n.d.) programme was launched in 2019. The programme targets young people between 18-27 and provides them with training opportunities in the construction, industry and tourism sector. The programme aims at providing training to 20 000 young Jordanians, to enhance employability and incentivise vocational careers and self-employment. Expert interviews confirmed that the first batch enrolled approximately 2 500 men and women, while the second batch aims to train and employ 6 000 young people. The plan is to expand the target age group to individuals aged 18-30 years.

The Productive Branches initiative is administered in cooperation with the Royal Hashemite Court, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, and the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC). The aim of Productive Branches is to promote the establishment of companies in areas with high unemployment rates and poverty. The financial support provided aims at covering establishment, training, and personnel costs for 1 year.

The vocational education and training sector is 'weak and fragmented' (NES, 2011-2020; Human Resources Development Strategy, 2016) and there is no single umbrella effectively coordinating it. Until 2019, the E-TVET Council was mandated to direct all TVET providers in Jordan. In March 2019, the Council was replaced by the Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission (TVSDC). Its mandate is to accredit and supervise all TVET providers and their programmes, as well as to evaluate and control their performance. Its core functions are administering the TVET Support Fund and its programmes in regard to training and employment promotion, registering qualifications, performing quality assurance of service providers, conducting occupational license tests, licensing vocational and technical training providers, and issuing occupational license accrediting programmes (TVSDCa, n.d.). Its council is headed by the Minister of Labor.

Essential public institutions offering VET are community colleges, secondary vocational education providers, and the 35 Vocational Training Centres run by the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), a semi-autonomous agency under the MoL (VTC, Annual Report, 2020), offering off-job and on-job training, as well as dual studies.

However, there are several further public players involved in the provision of vocational training, such as the Armed Forces, which manage the non-profit National Employment and Training Company (NETC), itself operating 15 training centres. The National Aid Fund (NAF), which aims at supporting poor individuals and families, is also involved in supporting skills development training for young people from disadvantaged families, with the purpose of increasing their chances to find employment. In addition to financing the training fees, the NAF disburses some benefits to disadvantaged individuals in the form of a transportation allowance and covering social security contributions for the first 2 years of employment (National Aid Fund, Annual Report 2019). A large number of international donors and third parties are present, especially in the domain of TVET. In addition, several private training providers are accredited by the TVSDC.

A major programme integrating on-the-job training and subsequent subsidised employment – the ‘Expansion of Training and Employment Programme – was delivered by the MoL between 2009 and 2015, funded by the former E-TVET fund. In total, 4 052 individuals were ultimately provided with jobs (GIZ, 2019a). A similar programme, the Employment Promotion Programme, was launched in 2017 in cooperation between the MoL and GIZ. Programme participants were registered as trainees in different companies. They also received on-the-job training and a financial contribution for transportation, social security contributions and coverage, and half of the minimum wage. In addition, the programme offered to cover part of the wages of programme participants eventually hired. As of 2020, over 3 000 jobseekers have participated in the programme and over 2 000 attained job placements. The programme, which will continue until 2022, has a total budget of EUR 13.3 million (GIZ, 2019).

There is also a high degree of involvement among the international community with respect to cash-for-work programmes targeting both Syrian refugees and vulnerable Jordanians in host communities. Among others, the ‘Employment through Labour Intensive Infrastructure’ project, supported by the German Development Bank and the ILO as part of the Decent Work initiative, with funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, provided over 8 000 individuals with short-term job opportunities between 2016 and 2019, while a further 10 000 opportunities were targeted by the end of 2020 (ILO, 2019).

In this complex panorama, there are also initiatives trying to improve the effectiveness and capacity of the TVET sector as a whole. Notable in this regard is the Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme (SESIP) with the EU (2015-2019), focused on building capacity in E-TVET and targeting all the state stakeholders involved (see also TVSDC, n.d.).

The scene is also fragmented in regard to entrepreneurship support. While the MoL is not directly involved in the providing entrepreneurship support, many state and non-state players provide related services in parallel. In regard to public stakeholders, the Development and Employment Fund is the key institution that provides entrepreneurship support. As enshrined in Article 4 of its Law, it aims at enabling ‘poor, low-income or unemployed individuals, families and groups to work and produce for the purpose of contributing to combating poverty and unemployment’ (ILO, n.d). It thus encourages micro-entrepreneurship, including through skills development, and facilitates access to finance for small projects.

The Ministry of Planning also actively supports labour market-related programmes. A notable example in this regard is IRADA – Enhanced Productivity Centers, which supports the establishment of productivity projects, providing technical training and advisory services. The programme is operated through 22 centres spread across the country.

It is therefore not easy to provide a comprehensive overview of ALMPs in the country, though more on this will be discussed in Section 5.2.

The ILO’s Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (Convention C181) has not yet been ratified by Jordan (ILO, 2020a). The Convention reflects the importance of public-private cooperation and is considered a critical element for the development of an appropriate regulatory framework promoting employment growth, as it ensures the protection of workers employed by private employment agencies and can aid the transition from informal to formal work.

## 1.4 Social protection system

Jordan lacks a comprehensive national policy for social protection. In addition, the law does not specify a single entity to serve as an umbrella organisation for the implementation of the different social protection programmes, which can be broadly categorised as social assistance, social insurance, labour market interventions, the fiscal subsidy system and food security/nutrition programmes.

Over the past few decades, Jordan has made some progress in developing its social protection system. Several amendments to the Social Security Law over the past decade have helped to expand coverage. Social security is obligatory for all working entities. The current Jordanian social protection system encompasses insurance services for old age, disability, sickness, work injury, death, insurance, maternity leave, and unemployment insurance. The Ministry of Labor is mandated to protect workers' rights, while all programmes are administered by the Social Security Corporation. In 2014, Jordan was the first country in the Middle East to ratify the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) (ILO, 2020b).

As confirmed by expert interviews, public employment services are not involved in providing financial support to their clients. Any form of financial support for workers is provided by other institutions such as the Social Support Fund and the Social Security Corporation.

The provision of unemployment insurance is a recent development, introduced as part of the Social Security Reform Law 2010 (SSC, 2010). Benefits can only be received three times during the period of subscription<sup>6</sup>. Unemployment insurance is provided as a defined contribution scheme, i.e. in the form of savings accounts without a redistributive component. Therefore, protection is only available for those who have accumulated sufficient savings. In cases where benefits received exceed lifetime contributions, a pension will ultimately be adjusted. In regard to these design features, the scheme is not considered to be in accordance with international standards.

The Social Security Law (Law 24) was most recently amended in 2019. Significant changes included more favourable contribution rates for newly registered small entities.

In 2015, the number of establishments covered by social security reached 44 169, with about 1.16 million insured persons. The same year, only 10 711 individuals benefitted from unemployment insurance, 80% of whom were male (SSC, 2015). In 2019, about 1.3 million individuals were covered by social security, accounting for about 58% of employment (SSC, n.d; The Jordan Times, 2019a). The low coverage indicates weak enforcement and compliance (ILO, 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> Employers contribute 1% of the monthly payroll and employees 0.5% of their monthly earnings. The receipt of unemployment benefits in the event of involuntary job loss is contingent on a minimum contribution period of 36 months and is limited to a maximum of 3 months if contributions have been made for less than 180 months, or 6 months if contributions has been made for 180 months or more). The amount of the benefits payment is 75% of the covered wage in the first month, 65% in the second, 55% in the third and 45% in the fourth to sixth months). There is a cap of JOD 555 per month. See also SSA (2018).

## 2. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE TO THE COVID CRISIS

To prevent and contain the spread of the pandemic, between March and May 2020, Jordan implemented what has been described as the ‘world’s strictest lockdown’.<sup>7</sup> The clear priority in managing the crisis was to protect lives and avoid the collapse of the health system. By mid-March, the lockdown that started with the education sector, tourist sites, and recreational activities had been extended to all non-essential sectors; the Defence Law had been passed, thereby declaring the state of emergency; and all flights had been suspended. By the end of May, containment measures had been progressively lifted. By the end of September 2020, the surge in COVID-19 cases had induced the government to switch to remote education and to order a weekend and night curfew. All economic activities, with the exception of recreation and sport, were allowed to operate.

### 2.1 The macro-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis

The COVID-19 crisis and the strict lockdown imposed have added to the already challenging economic situation in the country. While GDP increased by 1.3% during the first quarter of 2020 compared to the first quarter 2019, a decline of -3.6% was reported for the second quarter compared to the same quarter of the previous year. The most affected were the hotel and restaurant sector, having experienced a decrease of 13.4%, and the transport, storage and communications sector, with a drop of 9.2%, followed by the social and personal services sector (6.4%), construction (6.3%) and manufacturing (5.3%) (DoS, 2020a). In April 2020, the World Bank estimated a decline in real economic growth of -3.5% for 2020; the figure was revised to -5.5%, as reported in October 2020 (see Figure 5). Uncertainty concerning the ultimate output is reflected by IMF estimates, with a forecasted decline of -3.7% in April 2020, followed by an estimate of -5.5% (as of October 2020, IMF (2020), which was later revised taking into account better-than-anticipated GDP growth in the second quarter (The Jordan Times, 2020).

Jordan has a history of chronic budget deficit. At the beginning of the year, 2020’s budget deficit was estimated to be around JOD 1 billion. By the end of the year, the actual value of the budget deficit was actually almost JOD 2 billion. The 2021’s fiscal deficit is estimated to be circa JOD 2 billion, which represents 21% of total expenditure (28% excluding foreign grants). Interest on public debt is estimated to increase to JOD 1.5 billion in 2021 (15% of total government expenditure). Public debt has reached 99.1% of GDP in 2019 and is projected to increase to 107.1% in 2020 and 108.5% by 2021 (World Bank, 2020a). According to the government budget for 2021, 89% of expenditure is allocated for current expenditure and only 11% for capital expenditure. These figures point to the difficulties faced by the country in rationalising public spending, and therefore mobilising additional sources for labour market-related interventions. The budget for 2021 for the three main governmental stakeholders involved in the provision of ALMPs is presented in Table 3. State finances are clearly constrained.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://mena.fnst.org/content/jordan-crisis-all-chance-everyone>

**TABLE 3 : 2021 BUDGET 2021 OF KEY ALMP PROVIDERS**

Budget for 2021 (JOD millions)	Current expenditure	Capital expenditure	Total
Ministry of Labor	8.1	1.5	9.6
Vocational Training Corporation	11.6	5	16.6
Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission	1.15	8	9.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>20.85</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>35.35</b>

Data source: Official government budget for 2021.

The COVID-19 crisis has further aggravated the difficult situation in regard to unemployment. Unemployment has increased from 19.1% in 2019 to 23.9% in the third quarter of 2020. A survey run by the ILO and UNDP in April 2020 found that 2.5% of the workers sampled had lost their job either temporarily or permanently (Kebede et al., 2020). A UNDP assessment based on an online survey of 12 084 respondents during the lockdown (late April until early May) similarly pointed towards the tremendous impact of government measures on livelihoods. Over 37% of respondents reported a loss of income. The situation has evolved and in June 2020, an IPSOS poll revealed that during the second quarter of 2020, almost 78% of the sample felt less confident about job security, an increase of almost 7% in comparison to the first quarter of the year (IPSOS, 2020). In general, 70% of the employed individuals sampled declared that the pandemic had had an impact on their job, either in terms of salary reduction (45.6% of employees surveyed), temporary lay-off (9%), or unpaid leave (7.2%). Both surveys' results and overall outlooks therefore anticipated the non-encouraging labour market developments of the second and third quarters of 2020.

## 2.2 Changes to the provision of ALMPs in response to the COVID pandemic

Since the introduction of the state of emergency, 24 Defence Orders were promulgated with the aim of mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis. Several of them were dedicated to labour market interventions. Table 4 provides an overview of the Defence Orders related to labour market policies. In general, the different orders aimed at regulating the labour market during the crisis, granting stability to employment in the private sector, protecting workers' rights, and mitigating the consequences of closures. Protective measures included a ban on terminating contracts, a reduction in social security contribution rates, and the introduction of compensatory schemes.

**TABLE 4 : SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

<b>Defence Order Date</b>	<b>Measure</b>
NO. 1 18.3.2020	Option to suspend old-age insurance (for 3 months)
NO. 6 8.4.2020	Ban on terminating employee contracts Permission to: reduce salaries by 50% (if lockdown makes operating impossible, if it is part of the most affected sectors, or if quarantine is enforced); freeze operations and not pay workers' salaries; continue operations and reduce workers' salaries by 30% for 3 months.
NO. 9 16.4.2020	Tadamon 1: if companies had to reduce wages by 50%: unemployment allowance of 50% of salary for 3 months (JOD 165–500.) Tadamon: for unregistered businesses and those whose contributions lasted for less than a year: unemployment allowance of JOD 150 per month for 3 months. Musaned 1: unemployment insurance for insured employees who have stopped working due to COVID-19 in the amount of 50% of their salary for 3 months (JOD 150-350) Musaned 2: SSC members can withdraw a maximum of JOD 450 from their unemployment insurance savings to be received in three monthly payments. Musaned 3: SSC members and voluntary members with income of less than JOD 500 can spend a 5% advance on their insured income, up to a maximum of JOD 450, paid across 3 months.
NO. 14 15.6.2020	Programmes for workers launched: Himayah for the tourism and transportation sector: registered employees receive 50% of their salary in amounts of between JOD 220-400 (expired at the end of 2020). Tamkeen 1: reduction of subscriptions from 21.75% to 13.5% for private sector workers. Tamkeen 2: SSC members in the public and private sector with income of less than JOD 700 can receive a 5% advance payment on their assured income, up to a maximum of JOD 200, to be paid at any one time.
NO. 15 9.8.2020	Provision of instalments, rescheduling of debts and exemptions on late payment interest. Debts due can be paid with a 1% interest rate across 120 monthly instalments. Public sector workers included under Tamkeen 2,
NO. 18 5.10.2020	applicability expanded to broader segments of SSC members and establishments, and duration of the programmes specified by Defence Orders 9, 14, and 15 extended.
NO. 24 15.12.2020	'Estidama' sustainability programme launched, jointly funded by the government and the SSC, aimed at granting stability to employment in the sectors not authorised to operate and hard hit by the crisis. The programme covered 50-75% of wages (with a minimum of JOD 220 per month and a maximum of JOD 500 per month), extending from December 2020 to May 2021. Eligible for Estidama are establishments and workers covered by social security at least since at least December/September 2020.

Source: Defence Orders

According to the SSC annual report, there were 1 345 118 registered workers in 2019. As of January 2021 (current figures as provided on the homepage, SSC (n.d.)) this number has decreased to 1 323 516. Beneficiaries of unemployment insurance totalled 39 911 in 2019 and increased to 275 252 as of January 2021. This points to the increase in the unemployment rate and shows how the crisis severely impacted the country's labour market. According to the newspaper article by Abbassi (4 August 2020), the provision of unemployment benefits is expected to reach more than JOD 80 million in 2020, severely affecting the liquidity position of the SSC. Retroactive registration of companies and workers applying for COVID-related programmes led to the about 14 500 businesses being formalised.

## 2.3 Changes in the PES delivery model

As emerged from the stakeholder interviews and confirmed by desk research, the methods of delivering PES were not significantly adapted or enhanced in response to the pandemic: for safety reasons, no face-to-face interactions took place and the only employment service that could be still provided was online registration. The insufficient IT capacity of the Employment and Labour Directorates was not improved. As further reported in interviews, by the beginning of the pandemic, the Employment Directorate intended to prepare a report on the effect of COVID-19 on employment, with the aim of developing targeted recommendations on how to mitigate respective labour market effects. Neither the Directorate nor the Ministry could release a comprehensive study capturing the implications of the crisis on the labour market situation and possible future scenarios. The Ministry only released a list of hard-hit sectors, based on mandatory closures and prescribed limitations of operations.

Due to COVID-19 and related labour market challenges, the Employment Directorate's target for 2020 was reduced to the intermediation of 7 000 vacancies; nevertheless, 10 300 jobseekers were placed.

Changes in the provision of ALMPs were implemented by the MoL under the framework of the Defence Orders and in cooperation with the international donor community.

## 2.4 Changes to policy priorities

The priorities of the Jordanian government in handling the crisis were to protect public health and mitigate the social and economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis, as expressed by the Defence Orders. Therefore, in regard to the labour market, **focus was placed on promoting stability and sustaining employment**. This was targeted in particular by extending social security coverage and allowing for a reduction in working time and salaries (Table 4). A further priority was to support the most vulnerable segments of society, as well as daily and informal workers, who were particularly affected by the lockdown and the crisis.

In this regard, the National Aid Fund launched Takaful, **a cash transfer programme** to support the most vulnerable families and in particular daily workers in the informal sector. According to the programme's provisions, families in need should receive financial support ranging from JOD 50 to JOD 136, to be provided for 1 to 6 months. For the first phase, the programme target was to reach 200 000 families and the NAF was granted – partly by direct government support, partly by the donation fund Himmat Al Watan (n.d.) – in the amount of JOD 27 million. The second phase of the project target was to support 250 000 families at a total cost of JOD 29 million (The Jordan Times, 2020a). Takaful is considered the most comprehensive social protection programme in Jordan's history.

The priorities of supporting workers and establishments in the hard-hit sectors, as well as daily workers and further disadvantaged groups of society, are also reflected in the programmes launched by international organisations and the donor community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The situation is complex, it is not easy to provide a comprehensive and systematic overview, and it is particularly difficult to disentangle which provisions and aid programmes have immediate implications for ALMPs.

Unfortunately, references to the detailed typology are especially difficult with regard to the expected description of 'changes to policy priorities'. As previously mentioned, the mapping of pre-COVID

ALMPs presents a complex task due to the high involvement of international players. With regard to potentially re(focused) policy priorities, the absence of such recognisable or identifiable policy reorientation, or more fundamentally the absence of a clear policy formulation with regard to ALMPs as a policy response to COVID (both nationally and internationally), indicates a short-sighted focus on an immediate response through social assistance, while clear recovery strategies have not yet been laid out. However, with regard to the international donor community, it must also be considered that – beyond immediate humanitarian assistance – the announcement and roll-out of targeted projects may take more time. In sum, this status quo might explain the limited possibility of referencing our typology. Indeed, national bodies have been occupied with the coordination and implementation of finance mechanisms from both national and international resources, including the enrolment of cash transfer assistance. The focus on national social assistance was not integrated into a comprehensive employment policy response as part of which active labour market policies were addressed and refocused. Thus, the measures taken – insofar as information is publicly available or was revealed by interviewees – can be best considered a **crisis response focused on immediate relief without specific recovery strategies**, without detailing concrete measures of how to activate unemployed people. The international donor community mainly reacted by committing additional funds, while the detailed contribution – especially with regard to the question of how and to what extent specific ALMP measures are affected – is unclear. Responses from both national and international players show fragmented adaptations to existing programmes, while those are mainly targeted towards continuing programmes or supporting existing businesses. As the failure to upgrade the PES already indicates, no special regard has been given to activating policies until now.

The contribution of the World Bank can be summarised as follows. As of September 2020, the World Bank is supporting Jordan through 12 projects, with an active portfolio of USD 2.7 million in concessional financing, loans and grants. COVID-related challenges have been addressed through both ongoing and new projects, including a programme promoting the employment of Jordanians and Syrians (USD 300 million), the Emergency Health Project to support uninsured Jordanians and refugees (USD 50 million), and the Youth, Technology and Job Project supporting digital job opportunities and e-government services. The Bank also provided a top-up of USD 100 million (June 2020) to the Education Reform Support programme (USD 200 million) approved in 2017, to respond to the new education challenges (e.g. providing distance learning solutions and preparing for a safe reopening of schools) and a strengthened post-COVID education system (The World Bank, 2020b)<sup>8</sup>.

As part of the Emergency Cash Transfer COVID-19 Response Project, co-financed by other donors such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and USAID, the World Bank supports the GoJ's cash support programme. It has aimed at providing cash support to about 270 000 poor individuals and families, including temporary transfers to about 190 000 households not covered by NAF assistance, as well as all 55 000 regular recipients in 2020 (25 000 out of 85 000 in 2021) (The World Bank, n.d.). An additional top-up was provided to regular recipients in 2020. While the GoJ allocated financial resources to Takaful in 2020, among others through the World Bank First and Second Equitable Growth and Job Creation Programmatic Development Policy Financing, the project is intended to close the remaining funding gap. To deliver the cash transfer, the project uses the online

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<sup>8</sup> In addition, to particularly address COVID-related challenges, the World Bank committed further \$20 million for the implementation of the COVID-19 Emergency Response Project, which has aimed at limiting the spread of the virus and improving the health system.

Takaful platform, which will be used to expand the National Unified Registry to make it a comprehensive platform for social assistance seekers. In the Midterm Progress Report (July 2020) of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, it was announced that the transformation of the NUR to a single gateway for social assistance programmes would be completed by 2021 (MOPIC, 2020).

As concerns further lenders, in May 2020 the IMF approved the request for emergency financial assistance under the Rapid Financing Instrument. The amount of USD 396 million was estimated to cover a quarter of external financing needs related to the pandemic (IMF, 2021). Upon its 1st review of the USD 1.3 billion Extended Fund Facility, approved in March 2020, about USD 148 million was made immediately available to account for additional spending needs related to the pandemic; concurrently, former fiscal targets were adjusted (IMF, 2020a).

The donor community responded by renewing and reinforcing its financial support. According to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Union committed EUR 250 million in budget support and an additional EUR 60.5 million for Syrian refugees (EBRD, n.d.). UNCHR, USAID, DFID, AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation), Germany and Japan have supported Jordan with USD 100 million in cash grants, as well as medical equipment (EBRD, n.d.). US assistance to the COVID-19 response has totalled almost USD 35.4 million, including about USD 20.8 million in humanitarian assistance to support refugees and members of host communities, as well as USD 13.1 million for emergency food assistance and USD 1.5 million in health assistance (US Department of State, 2020). With regard to support for businesses, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development provided a USD 30 million loan to Cairo Amman Bank under the coronavirus Solidarity Package for lending to businesses (EBRD, 2020).

Support has also been provided to address the immediate challenges posed to the education system. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, UNESCO and GIZ implemented a capacity development programme to improve e-learning at higher education institutions (UNESCO, 2020). The UNDP has also adapted digital initiatives and UNICEF has, for example, equipped young people with internet access and laptops through technical and vocational scholarships (UN Jordan, 2020).

International stakeholders have also maintained their focus on the refugee community, which is excluded from the social protection programme provided by national state players.

Having provided support to about 500 000 of the 655 000 registered refugees, the World Food Programme, UNHCR and UNICEF created a taskforce in response to COVID-19 to include an additional 120 000 refugees in their support programme (The World Bank, 2020). UNDP has provided USD 25.4 million in emergency cash assistance to about 51 000 refugee families (as of December 2020) (UNHCR, 2020).

Protection of workers was also ensured through the ILO's Intensive Investment Programmes, while salaries were disbursed during the lockdown where this led to the suspension of work (ILO, 2020).

The Defence Orders, which reflected the priorities of the Jordanian government in mitigating the impact of the crisis, also envisioned supporting businesses, particularly in hard-hit sectors. In addition to the provisions of the Defence Orders, the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) has launched the Finance Facilitation Programme, encouraging banks to extend JOD 500 million at an interest rate that not exceeding 2% to help firms that have been hurt by the lockdown. A precondition for obtaining the

financial support was a commitment not to reduce the number of hired workers (Central Bank of Jordan, 2020a).

The Jordan Enterprise Development Corporation launched two programmes (JOD 0.68 million) to support local SMEs that were directly affected by the crisis or have been contributing to the response. For instance, the ‘Empowering Entrepreneurship Initiative’, developed by the NGO Enpact and funded by GIZ, launched two programmes in 2020 to help young businesses cope with the impacts of the pandemic, with one of them specifically targeting the tourism sector. Support is provided through mentoring and financial support (Enpact, 2020).

## 2.5 Critical perspective on ALMPs in Jordan

The fragmented nature of the ALMPs landscape and the unavailability of systematic information make it difficult to perform a comprehensive overview of ALMPs in the country. Data is fragmented, too, as each stakeholder summarises information in their own reports. Given the high level of interactions between different stakeholders (primarily the cooperation between state players and multilateral and donor agencies), many interventions and funding lines are counted twice.

In regard to the state players, the limited budget available to finance active labour market policies should be listed among the factors critically impacting their scope and effectiveness. As illustrated in Table 5, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Labor for 2020 was JOD 16 million, while estimations for 2021 are less than JOD 10 million. This is due to the reduction of capital expenditure to JOD 1.52 million. It is therefore clear that the Ministry is in a difficult and constrained financial position. Funds have to be allocated to all aspects connected to labour market supervision, inspection, and regulation, so only a small share is allocated to employment services. This is reflected in only approximately 10% of MoL staff being assigned to the Employment Directorate, which is responsible for the provision of public employment services.

The Vocational Training Corporation has a budget of JOD 16 million, of which less than JOD 5 million is allocated to capital expenditure. Table 5 further reflects the replacement of the E-TVET Fund by the newly established VTSDC in 2020.

**TABLE 5 : CURRENT AND CAPITAL EXPENDITURE FOR SELECTED STATE LABOUR MARKET STAKEHOLDERS**

Institution	2019		Total 2019	2020		Total 2020	2021		Total 2021
	Current	Capital		Current	Est. Capital		Current	Est. Capital	
MoL	7.14	5.31	12.45	7.22	8.80	16.02	8.14	1.52	9.66
VTC	10.29	3.37	13.65	10.51	2.38	12.89	11.60	5.00	16.60
E-TVET Fund	4.09	25.50	29.59	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
VTSDC	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.55	29.00	29.55	0.63	29.00	29.63
<i>Total</i>	<i>21.53</i>	<i>34.18</i>	<i>55.69</i>	<i>18.28</i>	<i>40.18</i>	<i>58.46</i>	<i>20.37</i>	<i>35.52</i>	<i>55.89</i>

Data source: GoJ, official government budget for 2020; data entries in JOD millions.

The information in Table 5 confirms that there are no plans to expand the budget allocated to ALMPs. This confirms information from expert interviews in regard to an intended restructuring of the MoL,

according to which the number of staff assigned to PES is planned to be considerably reduced. The existing labour officers assigned to different directorates will be substituted by one single labour office, in charge of registration, orientation, career guidance, and special counselling for disabled people and other groups.

In regard to PES, Employment Directorate's 88 staff served about 40 000 jobseekers in 2019, rising to almost 70 000 in 2020. Between 2019 and 2020, the number of jobseekers registered for PES increased by almost 74%, clearly pointing to the difficulties faced by the Jordanian labour market in 2020. Conversely, the rate of jobseekers who found employment decreased from 45% to 15% (Table 6).

**TABLE 6 : PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2020**

<b>PES performance indicators for 2020</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Number of people registered for PES*	40 024	69 630
Number of people gaining employment	17 817	10 300
Placement / employment rate	45%	15%

\* in the Nees.jo platform

Source: MoL Annual Report, 2020

The PES are mandated to deal with the three core functions of job search assistance, career guidance, and labour market information. Training and unemployment benefits are not among the duties of the PES in Jordan and their administration is not even under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Labor. Therefore, PES in Jordan are limited to delivering core and non-comprehensive services. In addition, the range of services that PES should deliver is often limited in practice: as confirmed by experts' interviews, some of the mandated PES, such as individual follow-up and intensive individual orientation sessions, are not part of the regular offer.

The PES are administered by a line department of the Ministry of Labor and, as such, have neither independent agency status nor an independent budget. Service delivery is organised via a network of 14 Labour Directorates spread across the country. According to the expert interviews, the resource capacity is therefore insufficient, in terms of resource distribution and accessibility, with inadequate infrastructure in terms of both space and equipment. The low number of staff prevents functionalisation and specialist delivery of specific PES functions.

In regard to training, in 2020 the VTSDC administered 35 training events in different sectors and supported 36 production branch initiatives in industrial sectors. The total number of trainees registered by the VTSDC was more than 23 000 for an overall budget of JOD 30 million. Actual trainees, i.e. trainees who regularly attended programmes, numbered 7 583. In 2020, a total of 6 098 individuals found jobs through VTSDC interventions (Table 7).

Even though the net benefit of training should be evaluated in the long term (Card et al. 2018, Ibararán et al. 2018), the employment rate of trainees is a good indicator of the effectiveness of training interventions. The average employment rate following VTSDC programmes was 48%, while that of the Production Branches initiative was 40% (Table 7). It should be noted, however, that due to the nature of the different interventions, the VTSDC calculates the employment rate for Production Branches based on the number of registered trainees, while the rate for other training types is based on the number of actual trainees.

**TABLE 7 : VTSDC PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2020**

VTSDC performance indicators for 2020	Training	Production Branches initiative*	Total
No. of projects	35	36	71
Budget (JOD)	4 810 899	25 364 867	30 175 766
No. of registered trainees	11 577	11 762	23 339
No. of actual trainees	2 832	4 751	7 583
Programme graduates	1 965		1 965
No. of trainees employed	1 347	4 751	6 098
Employment rate	48%	40%	

\* 6 projects are ongoing and a further 6 are not operating (due to either COVID-19 restrictions or financial issues). Source: VTSDC information, 2020<sup>9</sup>.

A further important stakeholder in the provision of training is the Vocational Training Corporation. As also confirmed by expert interviews, the latest available report refers to 2019. The VTC operates 35 Vocational Training Centres and offers the possibility to train in 348 workshops. The total number of trainees who registered with the VTC in 2019 was approximately 14 000. The employment ratio ranges between 60 and 80% (Table 8).

**TABLE 8 : VTC PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2020**

VTC performance indicators for 2020	2019
Vocational Training Centres	35
Workshops / training facilities	348
Fields of specialisation	100
No. of trainees	14 000
Employment rate	60-80%

Source: VTC, Annual Report, 2019

The NETC, which is owned and operated by the Armed Forces, trained 24 325 individuals, almost 92% of whom were males (Table 9). The disproportion in gender representation is not a reflection of the NETC's target group, but rather of the fact that vocational training is still all too often viewed as an unsuitable choice for females. The typical benefits associated with participating in NETC initiatives are a monthly subsidy of at least JOD 50, plus JOD 25 for transportation, insurance, and a certificate upon completing the programme.

<sup>9</sup> Undisclosed information, not released by the VTSDC, but made available in interviews.

**TABLE 9 : NETC PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2020**

<b>NETC performance indicators for 2020</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Trainees	22 331	1 994	24 325
Graduates employed	17 815	688	18 503
Employment rate	80%	35%	76%

Source: NETC homepage, as of 1.11.2020

In general, training interventions target both male and female Jordanian jobseekers. Most of the programmes have a specific focus on young people, but given the multitude of lines of intervention, it is impossible to review eligibility criteria. A very important consideration, however, is that migrants and refugees are not targeted by ALMPs in the country. As corroborated by desk research and experts' interviews, several NGOs are engaged in providing employment promotion and training for refugees.

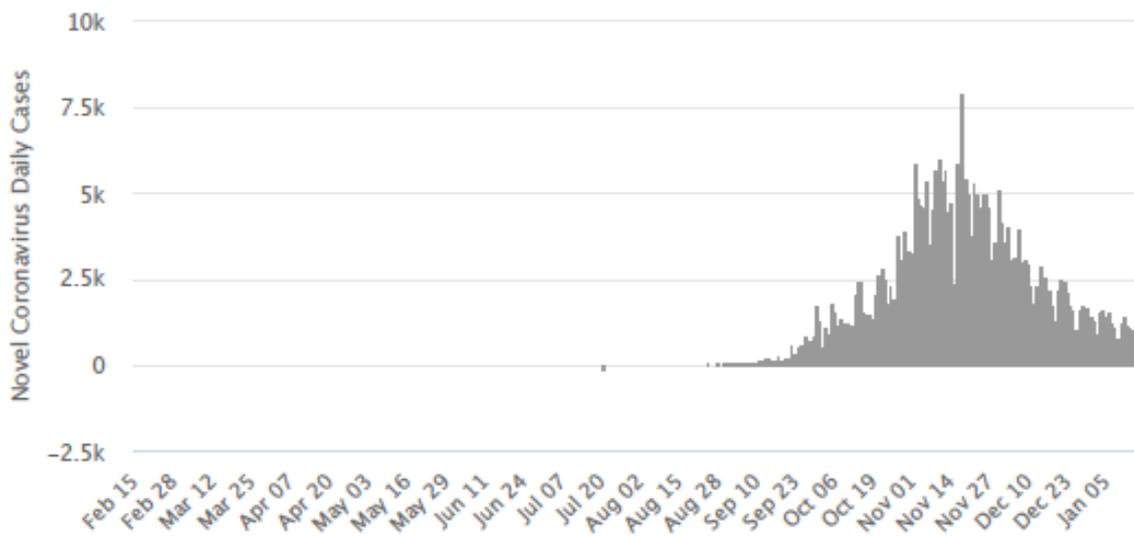
A group that is not directly incorporated into the design of ALMPs is the elderly: the review of official documents and the stakeholders' consultation supports the view that no programmes are in place specifically for older jobseekers and individuals willing to re-integrate in the labour market.

Support for both start-ups and existing establishments is also present in the country. However, as discussed in Section 3.2, the picture is most variable and typically involves non-state players, such as foundations and NGOs, which are very active in the field. The involvement of such a wide variety of stakeholders without any central coordination, however, is reflected all too often in effort being duplicated and/or by different types of potential beneficiaries receiving a varying quality of support. In some cases, there is also a lack of information amongst potential beneficiaries concerning the possible support available to them, so existing initiatives often remain unexploited.

### 3. PATHWAYS TO RECOVERY

The strict lockdown imposed between March and May 2020 enabled Jordan to overcome the first wave of COVID-19 with only a very low number of cases. Cases started to increase in September 2020. The change of government following national elections, which took place in November 2020, coincided with a sustained increase in the number cases, as depicted in Figure 12.

**FIGURE 12 : DAILY NEW COVID-19 CASES IN JORDAN (DATA SOURCE: WORLDOMETERS, 2021)**



Containment measures and restrictions have been gradually relaxed. On 14 January 2021, the complete re-opening of all sectors of economic activities and the progressive lifting of restrictions was announced. Included in the announcement was the progressive reopening of schools (The Jordan Times, 2021).

An important step towards recovery was accomplished by the roll-out of the vaccination programme. The vaccination campaign started on 14 January 2021 with priority given to healthcare workers and the elderly. The first phase aims at vaccinating 68 000 people, with 5 000 individuals per day across 29 vaccination centres. The volume of contracted vaccines is reported to be sufficient for 20% of the population (MENAFN, 2021). According to the vaccination plan, the vaccine is made available free of charge for any individual living in the country. Jordan is one of the first countries to provide vaccinations for refugees (Reliefweb, 2021).

While the government's stringent measures and past response efforts have probably prevented a major health crisis, severe socio-economic effects could not be forestalled, and major challenges lie ahead on the road towards recovery. The pandemic has affected countries around the globe; however, the severity of impact and the pace of recovery vary widely among nations depending on pre-crisis socio-economic and political conditions, as well as the nature of containment measures (Ilan et al., 2020). The impact on Jordan has been particularly severe, amplifying its various pre-existing socio-economic challenges, including stagnant growth and high youth unemployment (Section 3.1). In addition, the post-COVID economy is expected to differ profoundly from pre-crisis normalcy; thus, sustainable recovery will require respective transformations to be anticipated. Up to now, Jordan has

lacked a comprehensive strategy to address the transformation demands linked to recovery, supported by an appropriate budget.

### 3.1 Projections for the post-COVID impact

The pandemic has caused a severe global recession, with global economic growth expected to contract by -4.3% in 2020. While the scenarios for global recovery reflect an 4% increase in growth in 2021, the outlooks for the MENA are less encouraging, with estimated regional growth averaging +2.1%, +1.8% for the oil exporters, and the same for Jordan (Table 10). It should be noted that the growth outlook for the region is highly uncertain and depends, amongst other variables, on the global containment of the virus, the timely rollout of vaccines, the favourability of global financing conditions, the level of business and consumer confidence, and oil prices. The downside scenario projects growth being close to zero (The World Bank, 2021a).

**TABLE 10 : ESTIMATED ECONOMIC GROWTH RATES**

Est. growth rate (%)	2020	2021
World	-4.3%	+4.0%
MENA	-5.0%	+2.1%
MENA oil exporters	-5.7%	+1.8%
Jordan	-3.5%	+1.8%

Source: World Bank, Global Economic Prospects, 2021

With a score of 49 out of 100 (100 = best possible score), Jordan ranks 79<sup>th</sup> among 122 countries (1 = highest recovery) on the Horizon COVID Economic Recovery Index. The index is built upon consideration of a country's absorptive capacity (effect on the economy due to labour market structure, international connectivity, etc.), economic agility (capacity of rebuilding pre-COVID levels), and health resilience (risk of health effects) (Drzeniek et al., 2020; Horizon, n.d.). With low levels of absorption capacity and low resilience, Jordan is among the countries that are likely to be the most affected and to have a protracted path of recovery. High debt, pre-crisis unemployment levels and the distinct structure of the economy are among the factors that translate into weak recovery potential (Middle East Business Intelligence, 2020). Dependence on aid, loans from international institutions, and regional trade with similarly hard-hit countries add to a rather dismal outlook.

Among others, while vaccination programmes are under way globally, the tourism industry – an important growth sector for Jordan – might only gradually recover in face of global travel restrictions and diminished consumer demand. Indeed, the sector is considered to be ‘the last to recover’, according to former Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Majd Sweikeh (Faulkner, 2020). Furthermore, the poor growth prospects in GCC countries and reduced remittances also impact the outlook. In regard to worker remittances, global trends advise that we should expect, as the World Bank predicts, ‘the sharpest decline in recent history, [...] largely due to a fall in the wages and employment of migrant workers, who tend to be more vulnerable to loss of employment and wages during an economic crisis in a host country.’ (World Bank, 22 April 2020). Remittances to the Middle East and North Africa have been projected to decline by 19.6%. Remittances are expected to recover slowly, to about 1.6% in 2021. With about half a million Jordanians working in GCC countries having been affected by the crisis, a high number of expatriates are expected to return to Jordan, further aggravating the high levels of unemployment (UN, 2020).

In the face of chronic and unsustainable debt levels and limited fiscal space, Jordan's capacity to provide stimulus packages in the context of economic recovery is severely limited. The pandemic has been adding further pressure to the country's already strained public finances. In 2018, budget deficit represented 8.5% of total expenditure and 2.4% of GDP. In 2019, the situation was more critical, with government deficit rising to 12% of total expenditure and 3.3% of GDP. The fiscal deficit for 2021 is estimated to represent 21% of total expenditure (28% excluding foreign grants)<sup>10</sup>. Jordan has been heavily aid-dependent, which also affects possible recovery scenarios. In the face of the global downturn, donor countries can be expected to further tighten their budgets, while at the same time, the troubling situation in Jordan's neighbouring countries and their role in regional stability may divert aid in future.

While new loan agreements have helped to finance the immediate response, debt-servicing obligations will further reduce the budget available for necessary sustainable investments. In 2021, interests on debt increased to JOD 1.5 billion, which corresponds to 15% of government expenditure<sup>11</sup>. In particular, external debt may force the government in the long-term to implement austerity measures, which already led to major protests in 2018. In general, increasing economic concerns may heighten the risk of social unrest and threaten stability. While surveys conducted in the early phase of the crisis indicated general acceptance and trust of government measures (The Jordan Times, 2020b), it remains to be seen whether support can be maintained in the longer term.

In light of the multifaceted interdependencies and Jordan's integration into the world economy, Jordan's recovery is also highly linked to the trajectory of advanced economies, thus increasing uncertainty. In general, while the economy is expected to recover gradually in the long term, pre-COVID structural weaknesses can be expected to limit its potential to achieve inclusive growth (The World Bank, 2020a). Attaining sustainable economic development in the long term will – among other factors – depend not only on how Jordan manages to deal with the challenges that emerge from the labour market disruption related to the crisis, but also its capability to turn these into opportunities. The economic situation has escalated the need for equipping, especially young people, with skills aligned with labour market demand. The existing disruption from changes in the labour market accelerated by the advent of COVID-19, however, also requires a rethink as to how those necessary skills should be defined.

As experienced across the world, the pandemic has accelerated several trends pertaining to the future of work and has spurred innovations in the field of education. In particular, it has pushed forward the digital transformation of the labour market and the surge of technology-based solutions such as online work (known as 'telework') and e-commerce. The impact of those changes is not confined to the short-term, i.e. the phases of lockdown. Recovery programmes focusing on sustainability require a long-term perspective, taking into consideration the specific nature of the future economic landscape. Providing the necessary infrastructure and facilitating adaptation through upskilling and reskilling are critical for recovery. Countries with an appropriate IT infrastructure and a high level of digital skills are likely to have considerable advantages in the future (Drzeniek et al., 2020a).

At this juncture, however, it must be noted that the crisis has both revealed and exacerbated inequalities, with the most vulnerable groups being most affected. Among others, school closures and the disruption to education are expected to have long-term effects with regard to educational outcome

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<sup>10</sup> GoJ, Official budget for 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and employment. Due to the digital divide, continuity of learning could not be ensured across all segments of society, which has resulted in learning losses. In addition, the school drop-out rate is expected to rise considerably. The heightened emphasis on digital solutions and skills with respect to work opportunities, as well as the delivery and design of ALMPs, necessitate paying special attention to inclusiveness and not leaving the most vulnerable behind.

With regard to PES structure and work organisation, the crisis has highlighted the **need for agility and the ability to adapt to evolving demands**. Other countries have demonstrated high responsiveness and flexibility to successfully cope with the additional pressure on PES capacity; important services were quickly identified, human resources re-allocated (often even on a daily basis), or new temporary staff hired to scale up service provision (ILO, 2020c). In general, the crisis has told us that PES capacity has to reflect the essential role that PES assumes in times of economic shocks. Furthermore, responsiveness will remain essential in view of the unpredictability of the development of the crisis. This need for responsiveness also entails the ability to quickly identify in-demand jobs and short-term work possibilities, and to communicate them immediately to the broader public. For instance, during the lockdown, job opportunities shifted immediately to certain high-priority fields, and country cases from the developed world show that PES have often managed to integrate them quickly into their matching systems. However, this will require strong relations with the private sector and the ability to reach out to unemployed people. The number of jobseekers registered with PES in Jordan, however, suggests that PES are underutilised. This will severely limit the opportunity of PES to contribute to recovery, to inform and to activate the unemployed. International country cases suggest that strong institutional or functional linkages between social protection and ALMP provision are an essential factor for the extent of outreach. The problem of targeting is generally aggravated in economies with a high share of informal workers such as Jordan. Through its expansion of social protection and the establishment of a temporary worker database, the groundwork has been laid for reaching out to a higher number of potential beneficiaries of ALMPs in future, if appropriately utilised.

The crisis has also revealed the **need for enhancing and refining digitisation** strategies in countries without established e-government solutions. For instance, going beyond the obvious opportunities for PES core activities such as counselling and matching, digitisation must be considered an important feature with regard to the training and upskilling element of ALMPs. Digital learning platforms have not only constituted the only way of accessing training during lockdown, but the crisis has also evidenced their potential as cost-effective and flexible solutions that can be easily scaled up to increase or maintain people's job-readiness<sup>12</sup>. Diversification, appropriate targeting, and communication and marketing will be key. Skills development offers need to be tailored to specific target groups, providing both informal and formal skills training with respective credentialing.

The uncertainty with regard to the post-COVID **economy necessitates closely monitoring developments and skills demands and adapting ALMPs accordingly**. While developing countries like Jordan have long considered it a 'magic bullet' to import VET systems and curricula from developed countries, the idea of TVET as a job engine for resolving high unemployment has often not materialised (with the peculiarities of the Jordanian experience addressed later on). With respect to the demand side, it has often been overlooked that apprenticeship schemes have a long tradition in countries such as Germany or Switzerland for certain occupations, in combination with credible

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2019, South Korea launched an education platform offering jobseekers access to job-relevant open-source content across industries; in response to the pandemic, a virtual classroom was offered to allow training courses to be continued. As another example, France added over 150 distance-learning courses – both free and fee-paying – to its job portal (ILO, 2020c).

accreditations, enjoying a high reputation and presenting a viable employment option for young people. While reforms have been undertaken for decades to adapt the system to employer and trainee demands, the digital transformation and resulting shifts in the labour market may show new promising pathways that must be taken into consideration.

In addition, the **need for reassessing opportunities in future in combination with the pre-existing skills** on which projects can capitalise, and those that are still to be developed, is obvious with regard to the entrepreneurship promotion component of ALMPs. Both digitisation and globalisation have to be taken into account when (re)designing programmes. For example, the crisis has made obvious both the opportunities and problems of home-based businesses. Such solutions have, for example, often been promoted within livelihood and empowerment projects in Jordan targeting women in rural areas. While, for example, half of Jordanian and Syrian women are estimated to possess handicraft skills, they lack the digital and marketing skills to turn their abilities into income-generating businesses by targeting potential buyers online. However, examples of best practices exist, which can guide further innovative solutions in the field of ALMPs. For example, the organisation Diamond Hands created more than 2 000 jobs in 2018 and 2019 by supporting women in developing the skills needed to start their projects from home and creating a special platform for advertising products (Digital Arabia Network, n.d.). The project was won the 2019 Youth Citizen Entrepreneurship Competition in Germany. This initiative serves only as an example – what is needed is a more diversified portfolio of ALMPs that adapts to changing needs and taps into the opportunities presented by digital transformation, with programmes to be tailored to specific beneficiaries.

Providing another example, Jordan has a highly tech-savvy youth, which scores well in terms of entrepreneurial aspirations (Goldin, 2020) Acknowledging this potential, a new Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, was established in 2019 to catalyse digital entrepreneurship (Magnitt, 2019), which could feed into a new orientation of ALMPs in future.

In general, the formulation of employment policies will require agility from policymakers in adapting policies, especially when aiming not only at recovery but also at strengthening resilience.

## 3.2 Main findings

This study has highlighted that Jordan has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and that the government response has essentially aimed at mitigating the adverse effects on the labour market in the short term. The response was limited to granting stability to employment in the private sector, protecting workers' rights, and mitigating the consequences of closures.

In general, this study reveals the lack of a comprehensive approach to ALMPs in Jordan: there are a multitude of lines of intervention and approaches, so efforts and resources are often deployed inefficiently due to a lack of coordination. Rather than a clear focus on a few main lines of intervention, there are a large number of scattered initiatives. As a result, often only core functions are performed, and these have a limited scope. The poor capacity of the main state stakeholders' further limits implementation capacity. This is particularly evident in regard to PES provision, where the limited capacity in terms of both staff and infrastructure greatly limits the provision of certain core functions, such as individual follow up-and counselling. Further to this, in regard to the operational mode of the PES and the ALMP providers, it should be noted that there are substantial gaps in staff expertise: they are unable to specialise in a specific function, and instead need to undertake a variety of duties. Interviews confirmed that there was no a clear division of responsibilities. Also, the infrastructure for implementing ALMPs is often insufficient: the distribution across the country reflects ease of access to

sites; therefore, particularly in rural areas, there is often insufficient space to administer all the core services efficiently. A related important point, which was also mentioned in interviews, is the low level of transparency in regard to operations: under-capacity and unclear division of responsibilities cause processes to be implemented in a non-transparent way.

A further important finding is that there is no single umbrella structure organising and coordinating all interventions in regard to employment promotion. There is also a lack of overall guidance for the sector: the overarching strategy is represented by the National Employment Strategy 2011-2020 (NES 2011-2020), which was released in 2011. Much has changed since then, and Jordan has been facing several challenges that could not be fully predicted at the time when the national strategy was announced, such as the full-fledged outcomes of the Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis. The new National Employment Strategy has been not released yet, and an updated strategy is urgently needed to direct the sector at this challenging moment, and particularly to develop a timely response to the COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, the National Employment Charter did not develop into a genuine participatory dialogue between different stakeholders.

The absence of a central coordination framework is also reflected in the difficulty of mapping the sector: there is a significant overlap in responsibilities and means of intervention between different stakeholders. Clear mapping would be needed to develop a comprehensive overview and evaluation of the ALMPs.

A related consideration is that more streamlined information would be required to define the strengths and weaknesses of both the institutional framework and the broader skills ecosystem. One of the implications of this is the absence of an efficient and comprehensive system for monitoring and evaluation, which would be crucial for a critical assessment of the sector and to make sure that all segments requiring targeting are targeted and served by appropriate interventions. Further, the lack of centralised information means that data is scattered, and triangulation often leads to contradictory indications. The multitude of sources and the difficulties in assigning responsibilities means that some entries are counted twice.

The lack of coordination also means that each stakeholder defines their own individual agenda and there is no long-term implementation of overarching strategies. As signalled in interviews, there is all too often no long-term policy implementation plan and there is a lack of continuity between different governments and senior officials. This can be interpreted as a further sign of weak governance.

A further critical aspect in regard to the success of ALMPs is the level of communication and information provided for target groups: in Jordan there is no 'one-stop shop' where all information is aggregated, and there is no comprehensive listing and overview of existing programmes and eligibility criteria.

A final aspect, which is not new to the authorities and has been already critically highlighted by previous studies (Alcidi & Laurentsyeveva, 2019), is the inadequacy of VET provision: a mere curriculum update and stronger focus on new skills are only part of the solution. The main challenge is that technical and vocational professions are not attractive in Jordan (Bird & Silva, 2020) and are often not seen by young people as desirable career options. As a result, VET is unable to pool ambitious candidates.

The main findings from the study can be thus summarised into five main categories: (1) the weak governance of the sector, (2) the consequent difficulty of mapping it, (3) the uncoordinated provision of

different lines of intervention, (4) the absence of a comprehensive information system for internal purposes and for communicating to beneficiaries and third parties, and (5) the inadequacy of VET and of the professional and vocational sectors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Unemployment is undoubtedly one of the most urgent challenges Jordan has been facing. The young and growing population reinforces the need for a strengthened focus on job creation and adapting employment policies. The main findings based on the review of the evidence presented in this study lead to several policy recommendations, which can be subsumed under two main categories: (1) reforming the ecosystem of ALMPs by streamlining approaches to employment promotion and improving overall governance; and (2) investing in education, especially vocational education and training, to address existing skills mismatches and anticipate possible future trends. Reform efforts under these two categories should be undertaken as a part of a coherent strategic framework aligned with Jordan's overall strategy regarding employment and human resource development.

The inadequacy of Jordan's social protection framework, which is insufficient to cushion social pressure due to unemployment, must also be considered. The financial capability of the state is too limited to support an expansion of social protection coverage and mandate. In view of the limited resources at hand, policymakers need to be creative in envisioning new ways to promote employment and increase the employability of the labour force.

In light of the fragmentation of the sector, the first and perhaps most essential step would be to streamline functions, defining in a clear and unique way the responsibilities and tasks of the different state stakeholders involved in employment promotion and the provision of ALMPs. The most important result would be an improvement in overall coordination and governance. Coordination and governance are crucial success factors for the overall ecosystem of ALMP interventions, as the current weaknesses may lead to duplication and gaps, such as neglecting important objectives and stakeholders. Jordan's ALMP system is characterised by a large number of state stakeholders with partly overlapping mandates.

In addition, a large number of multilateral national and international organisations and NGOs are supporting various ALMP interventions in the country. All of these initiatives should be captured under a unique umbrella. As expressed by some of the selected key informants, international organisations contribute decisively to enriching and supporting ALMPs in the country. However, given the overall weak coordination of the sector, the full potential of donors' interventions is not always exploited, as programmes are not optimised within the overall delivery of ALMPs. A better governance model would enable a more comprehensive and informed debate between donors and national stakeholders. This would also ensure more efficient interventions and be more consistent with the paradigm of the localisation of international support. As a first step, the GoJ, with the help of donors and technical assistance providers, should strive for a comprehensive mapping exercise of ALMPs in the country. A similar recommendation was already made by the ILO in 2014, as part of a preliminary assessment of the Jordan National Employment Strategy 2011-2020; however, this has not yet been undertaken. Developing a comprehensive picture can improve how programmes are targeted to priority groups. In the long term, enhanced cross-sector cooperation and communication should be institutionalised at an early phase of any proposed projects, which would open up opportunities for establishing synergies in light of the scarce capacity with respect to national resources. Cooperation with local NGOs and grassroot organisations could also help to raise awareness about available public programmes and assist in reaching out to people who do not have digital skills – in a time where most services and information channels have moved online due to COVID.

A related recommendation pertains to the need to develop a comprehensive and systematic monitoring and evaluation system for all labour market-related interventions and data. At present, data is highly scattered, and each institution keeps separate and often incomplete records. One of the main difficulties in issuing this report was caused by the triangulation of data: different recording systems in place, different capabilities in this regard, as well as different practices, often leading to inconsistent information provided by different stakeholders. In addition, several state stakeholders do not even have a fully digitised system in which all information is contained.

It is evident that without a comprehensive and centralised information system, no programmes can be accurately monitored or evaluated. This is an essential step to assess the efficacy and efficiency of alternative interventions. Rigorous evaluation and knowledge-sharing across sectors would generate lessons learned that can inform the design of future programmes and policies. In general, a more evidence-based approach to the design and delivery of ALMPs is needed. This should go hand in hand with strengthening financial governance and moves towards a performance-oriented approach to funding ALMPs.

Streamlining information would mostly be needed to define the strengths and weaknesses of both the institutional framework and the skills ecosystem. Such an assessment would be critical to also improving the overall TVET system, which is related to the second main recommendation: – investing into education, especially vocational education and training – to address existing skills mismatches and anticipate possible future trends.

A long-term strategic goal with respect to human resource development should be to remedy the labour market skills mismatch, which is a major cause of youth unemployment. The potential contribution of TVET in addressing problems has been long recognised by the GoJ, as reflected in major strategy papers, including the National Strategy for Human Resource Development 2016-2025. Without profound changes in both the education system and the mindset of young people, the contribution of short-term ALMPs to solving the problem of unemployment in Jordan will be generally limited. For the last 15 years, reform efforts have targeted the weaknesses of the TVET sector, with rather disappointing results. A recurrent theme has been the fragmentation of the sector, weak governance and the problem of quality assurance. The newly created Commission may bring improvements in this field and it is hoped that the crisis – despite the manifold challenges it involves – provides new impetus to implement envisaged reforms as depicted in the aforementioned strategy, instead of the current impasse.

Important interrelated aspects are quality assurance, early career counselling, and strengthening the image and intrinsic relevance of TVET. Most importantly, TVET and targeted employment-focused training programmes need to be re-designed to better align with employers' expectations and labour market demand. The programmes are generally considered outdated and the curricula not relevant to employers. Addressing this issue will firstly require public-private partnerships to be strengthened and employers to be involved in curriculum design. Secondly, it will require an accurate, reliable and comprehensive database to be developed that provides a clear picture of the skills ecosystem on which policymakers can build. Labour market information is collected by several government departments and agencies but not consolidated, with significant fragmentation. It is not clear to what extent the available data can be effectively used for project design. However, up-to-date labour market information is particularly important in the light of COVID-related disruptions and the still uncertain degree to which labour will need to be re-allocated between sectors adjusting to the future economic landscape.

Appropriate relevant information is also highly important as a basis for counselling and should be made available to a wider community in an appropriate client-oriented manner. Information should be delivered through effective channels, including to PES clients but also through outreach to education institutions. The latter should implement early career guidance in their curricula and also involve students' parents. Providing information on sought-after professions in the TVET domain, as opposed to promoting university education paths that do not reduce the risk of unemployment, may also help to gradually improve the image of TVET. TVET in Jordan is stigmatised and held in low regard, being considered a last resort for school drop-outs and academic underachievers. The value of respective professions in terms of employment opportunities and future livelihoods is not acknowledged and university education is sought after despite the limited labour market absorption of graduates. In summary, the interdependency of TVET-related supply and demand-side problems needs to be addressed in an interconnected fashion through programmes designed to be attractive for both employers and trainees, accounting for current trends and anticipating future developments. Promoting TVET as a viable option will both require effective communication strategies to be designed, and need proof that accomplished programmes serve as an employability signal to employers and lead to decent work opportunities.

An additional step, which is necessary for Jordan to revamp and make vocational training and education more attractive, would be a reform of the way in which professions are regulated. In Jordan, the system of professional licensing is not comprehensive. Even for recognised professions, there mandatory professional licensing is often incompletely implemented. The absence of mandatory licensing for a comprehensive spectrum of professions creates a vicious cycle where uncertified professionals are typically low paid, further reducing their incentive to invest in VET and specialise in professional fields. From the consumer's perspective, mandatory licensing would increase the standards of professional services and could translate at a macro-economic level into higher productivity and competitiveness.

Finally, the heightened urgency and importance of employment promotion brought about by the COVID-19 crisis should translate into a rethink of the planned restructuring being currently considered and the possibilities of increasing PES capacity. The manpower and budget of the designated department is not in line with the high priority accorded by the nation's overarching strategy to employment promotion, and capacity constraints severely compromise the breadth and depth of services offered. However, other countries' experiences suggest that, particularly in times of crisis, PES have an essential role in mitigating negative labour market impacts. Also as part of the post-pandemic and recovery, it is recommendable to shift resources from cash-for-work to supported employment programmes. Cash for work measures should be more long term oriented and be coupled with supported employment schemes, according to which companies are obliged to sign a contract with the program beneficiary and keep him/her in employment a certain period of time after the financial support from 'cash-for-work' programme ended.

## CONCLUSIONS

Jordan is facing significant challenges in delivering effective ALMPs, primarily as a consequence of significant economic problems that pre-date the COVID-19 crisis, though the pandemic has clearly exacerbated these and placed even more importance on reform.

The lack of a clear overarching strategy for developing employment policies to support job creation and absorb the very large and growing number of young people coming onto the labour market is a matter requiring urgent attention.

A much greater degree of cohesion in ALMP design would be a prerequisite for more comprehensive and systematic delivery of services to better meet employer demand. As this study illustrates, assessing both the overall impact of expenditure on employment and training programmes and identifying the added value of individual projects and initiatives are compromised by the absence of a single delivery map.

The absence of an overall delivery map further complicates data interpretation where fractured information sources often drive triangulation to produce conflicting analyses of the effectiveness of interventions. This is particularly evidenced in the uncoordinated approach to collecting and analysing labour market information, which inevitably places considerable constraints on the effective design of programmes. In this regard, the first task of a coordinating institution would be to develop a survey of the employment, training and skills infrastructure in Jordan.

The mapping should be used to identify gaps and duplications in provision as a first step in developing a template for reform. If accompanied by the development of a centralised information system, the existing piecemeal approach to ALMP delivery could be evolved into one that facilitates a more structured and targeted system able to address priorities and, through inter-organisational cooperation, optimise the return on investment.

Weak governance and quality of provision must be addressed with TVET, as part of a strategic reorientation towards a more demand-led and employability-focused approach. This can start to build the sector's reputation with both employers and students and make a much greater contribution to the wider ALMP ecosystem. The recently introduced Commission to review TVET should prioritise this.

The current inconsistent approach to the regulation of professions reinforces negative perceptions about some professions. This feeds a vicious circle of low interest from jobseekers in poorly paid occupations. An overhaul of the system introducing far greater consistency is needed.

PES delivery is part of the remit of the Employment Ministry and has low priority, with only a limited mandate that is often only partially met in practice. A thorough rethink of what added value the PES could and should make would form an essential component of a broader review, particularly emphasising PES partnerships with other employment service providers.

Until and unless a robust and cross-cutting institutional framework is introduced, it will remain difficult to draw definitive and robust conclusions on the effectiveness of the current system, and extremely challenging to identify potential improvements.

Perhaps understandably, immediate COVID responses focused upon emergency firefighting. This was apparent in an almost total focus upon employment stability and sustainability with an equally

apparent absence of future strategy and lack of clear direction. As a consequence, there was little evidence of service alterations in response to the crisis, which could be adapted as useful longer-term initiatives for meeting new labour market needs. The response of the PES illustrates this where the COVID response was restricted to the – albeit essential – withdrawal of face-to-face services but with no consideration of approaches to compensate for this lack of delivery capacity.

Individual ALMPs deliver outcomes that suggest promising approaches. They need to be placed in an environment where positive initiatives can be fostered and develop. This will only be achieved through wider institutional reform at strategic level. The latter will need a fresh approach to governance and policy development, including greater attention being paid to recording and evaluation to support the development of an organisational memory so that important information is not lost with changes of government and departures of key officials.

# ANNEXES

## Interviewees

No.	Institution	Position / Department
1	Ministry of Labor	Senior officer – Employment Directorate
2	Ministry of Labor	Director – Policies and International Relations Directorate
3	Ministry of Labor	Senior officer – Employment Directorate
4	Ministry of Labor	Senior advisor – Policies and International Relations Directorate
5	Vocational and Technical Skills Development Commission	Officer at Technical and Vocational Training Funds Unit
6	Vocational and Technical Skills Development Commission	Officer at Technical and Vocational Training Funds Unit
7	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)	Senior officer
8	Jordan Department of Statistics	Senior officer

## ACRONYMS

ALMPs	Active Labour Market Policies
CBJ	Central Bank of Jordan
CSB	Civil Service Bureau
CV	Curriculum vitae
DEF	Development and Employment Fund
DoS	Jordan Department of Statistics
E-TVET	Jordan National Employment-Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoJ	Government of Jordan
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KAJD	King Abdallah II Fund for Development
LMPs	Labor market policies
MENA	Middle East and north Africa
MoL	Jordan Ministry of Labor
NAF	National Aid Fund
NEES	National Electronic Employment System
NES	National Employment Strategy
NETC	National Employment and Training Company
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
PES	Public employment services
SESIP	Skills for Employment and Social Inclusion Programme
SSC	Social Security Corporation
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
TVSDC	Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USAID	United States Agency of International Development
VTC	Vocational Training Corporation
WDIs	World Development Indicators

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