



## Investing in Human Capital and Youth Civic & Political Participation in Jordan

GenG - New Generation Program

Youth Civic and Political Participation Policy Briefs Series

Policy Brief -2

### Introduction

This policy brief focuses on human capital and how it affects political and civic participation in Jordan among youth, women, and other sectors of society, as well as notions of active citizenship. It also explores the connections between a holistic approach to development - that focuses on human well-being and needs and thus ensures social protection for people and their environments - and political and civic participation. The paper contextualizes and analyzes the challenges and opportunities of human capital in Jordan, as a main factor for an active and well-informed involvement of all citizens.

The brief is an output of the Youth Civic and Political Participation Policy Labs, conducted by the Arab Renaissance and Democracy (ARDD) in partnership with the Center for Strategic Studies at the University of Jordan, as part of the New Generation Program. It highlights the second session of the lab titled Investing in Human Capital to Strengthen Youth Civic and Political Participation, and what twenty political science and law students from the University of Jordan discussed in this regard. Following the labs' work methodology, the session hosted expert economist Dr. Raad Al-Tall, Head of the Department of Business Economics at the University of Jordan. It was moderated by human rights expert Dr. Riyad Sobh.

### Human Capital and Political Participation: A Mutual Relationship

The investment in human capital is a fundamental step in the promotion and support of wider and more diverse and inclusive political and civic participation in Jordan and the rest of the world. In turn, more engagement of the people in collective action and organizational work in the political and civic spheres is crucial to achieving human development and structures of social protection that can ensure the achievement of well-being and the fulfillment of basic needs and aspirations of all members of society.

"Human capital" represents specific resources, such as health, education, employment, and skills that people invest in and accumulate throughout their lives and that enable them as potential productive members of society. Investing in these resources, and in the universal provision of services for all citizens and members of society, enhances the level of people's living conditions and their well-being and helps them develop further their human capital. A virtuous cycle is established between human capital and a system of social protection when people are given the tools and chances to pursue and achieve their aspirations and goals while having their basic needs met. In this sense, investing in human capital proves to be key to ending extreme poverty on one hand, and to creating, on the other, more inclusive societies

in which people practice active citizenship and participation to further develop their communities and themselves. **Ultimately and incrementally, investment in human capital produces both economic and human development, which enables youth to have the right capacities, skills, and psychological motivations for participation in public life.**

Improving the resources of people in terms of education, employment, skills, health, and capacities provides them with the tools for a better life and allows them to develop spaces and opportunities to take up leadership roles to mobilize for and achieve their goals, not only individually but also on the collective level. All of this is part of a development process that addresses human lives and their relationships with their environments and contexts through a holistic lens. Within such a lens, investing in human capital leads to the enhancement and development of people's social capital: their networks, relationships, experiences, and connections among each other and with social and political institutions. Increased social and human capital facilitates collective work and participation. They allow people to acquire and build capacities and resources for themselves on one hand, and to share them, on the other, in the pursuit of common goals. Increased political and civic participation brings about processes of democratic decision-making, which ultimately allow people to reclaim rights, services, and opportunities, and to challenge prevailing power relations from the local to the international level. In this sense, human capital fosters democracy, and democracy fosters human capital.

## “Human Capital” as an Index for Economic Success

In 2018, the World Bank published the **Human Capital Index (HCI)** as a measurement of economic success. The Index ranks countries according to how much is invested in education and health care for young people.

Political and civic participation play a major role in determining the level of these resources, and consequently the measure of human capital. The role of institutions and spaces that build and amplify the resources that constitute human capital is crucial in the process of human development in any society. It is people participating in political and civic life to develop or bring about institutions, organizations, or initiatives that address their needs and aspirations that can build the structures that will guarantee them, in turn, the fulfillment of basic needs and universal services. Political parties, civil society grassroots organizations, schools and higher education, associations, and local initiatives are all crucial in bringing about collective change and in enhancing human capital. Referring to the situation in Jordan.

*“Today, there is no confidence in schools or universities for development and change, especially since the educational curricula rely solely on the rote approach. Today, investment begins through civil society institutions and media entities, motivating youth to participate.”*

**Lab Participant**

## Human Capital and the Social Contract: Building Trust in Government and Politics

The stability of a society and State is widely based on the trust relationship between people and their governments and policymakers. In contexts in which citizens trust their institutions, policymakers and government provide basic needs and guarantee rights to the people. Consequently, both a strong social contract and a solid and reciprocal relationship between the citizens and the state develop. Citizens pay taxes because they trust the State will give back a fair system of social protection and security, and the State can invest the resources collected through taxes to support and fulfill people’s needs and to further their human capital. Being provided with these fundamental needs builds the trust of citizens towards the State. This, in turn, is a fundamental building block of a strong social contract between them and their governments. Taxation in the welfare state has functioned in terms of building mutual accountability and responsibility of institutions and citizens. Therefore, social protection can become a tool not only for ensuring the well-being of citizens but also for their active participation in the development of society. **When trust is built and the social contract is solid, the human capital of citizens grows and they can contribute, in turn, through their skills, knowledge, and resources, to the betterment of their societies.**

**Trust is generated with a right understanding of both parties’ needs, responsibilities, and intentions.** It is, therefore, one of the main goals and indicators, at the same time, of a system that caters to its citizens and engages them in decision-making. Participation in civic and political life develops when people feel empowered and safe in engaging in public life to pursue their individual and collective needs and aspirations. In this sense, trust and participation are interrelated and strengthen one another. Trust encourages participation, and participation builds trust through the outcomes expected from institutions, which prove to be accountable.

## Human Capital as an Engine for Political Participation and Civic Engagement

In this context of challenges and efforts to overcome them, the question of political and civic participation proves to be central because it is only through participation in collective processes to ensure better health, education, and opportunities and basic needs that a society can offer its members the chance to be also innovative and creative. In addition, the recognition and fulfillment of the needs of all human beings living in society increases

their abilities to participate in decision-making processes and to choose for themselves and their communities. It also enhances their feelings of belonging and trust in mutual and reciprocal agency between them and governmental and civil society organizations and institutions. **Ultimately, investing in human capital means investing in the development and well-being not only of single individuals but of the whole society.** It has an incremental effect because individuals living better lives have better resources put to use the latter in their daily practices and experiences. In essence, they participate in reproducing a fair system that can further improve.

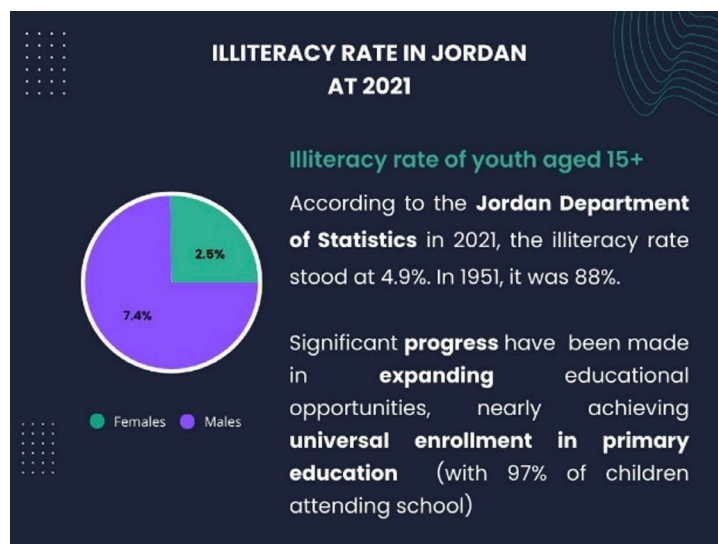
Investing in human capital in Jordan is key in the process of political modernization taking place in the present, as it would mean recognizing that only through the adoption of a holistic approach to well-being, social protection, and human rights can development and change occur and ensure the thriving and stability of Jordan.

## Human Capital in Jordan: Challenges and Obstacles

**According to the World Bank’s 2020 HCI, between 2010 and 2020, the value of the HCI in Jordan decreased from 0.56 to 0.55. Jordan has ranked relatively low in human development indicators in recent years. It was ranked 102<sup>nd</sup> out of 191 countries and 9<sup>th</sup> among Arab countries in the 2021 Human Development Index.**

As of the end of 2022, Jordan’s population reached approximately 11.3 million, with youth (under 30) constituting 63% of the population. Human capital resources in Jordan are a crucial element in ensuring the country’s future economic and geopolitical potential. The National Strategy for Human Resource Development 2016-2025 widely relies on the talents and innovation of the Jordanian people to achieve prosperity, stability, and well-being, given Jordan’s lack of mineral and natural resources. This ten-year strategy aims to enhance human resource development, build the capacities of current and future generations, and equip them with intellectual and technological tools, thus encouraging excellence, creativity, and positive participation across all sectors.

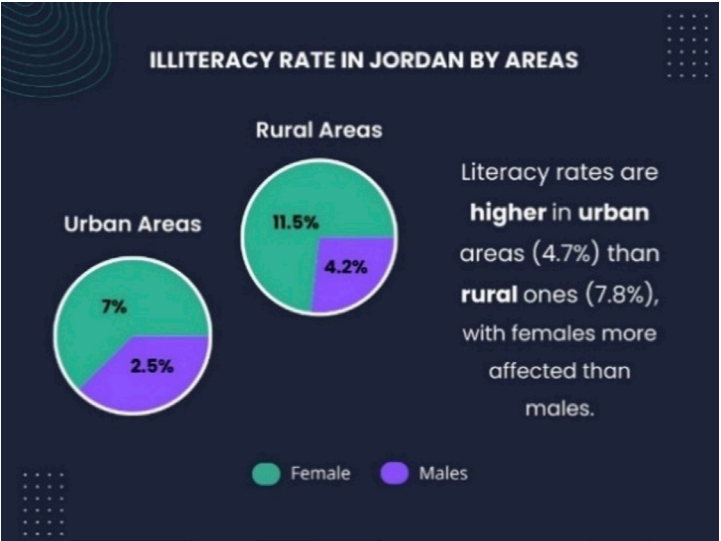
### Education



The Jordanian government allocates approximately 10% of the total annual budget and about 3% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the development of the education sector. Despite the increasing rates of education in Jordan and the broadening of access to education, many reports have highlighted the weaknesses in the educational infrastructure, the poor educational outcomes, and the limited training opportunities for teachers in Jordan. Most recently, the outcome of the PISA international test (which measures the extent to which students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to interact with society in all fields, and therefore the quality of the educational system), has found Jordan’s position – among the 81 participating countries – plummeting down 39 degrees. Furthermore, in 2020 there were approximately 40,000 Jordanian children out of school, mainly



in the middle and upper grades, in addition to more than 72,000 of other nationalities. Quality education is a major factor in determining an individual's potential income, which in turn affects economic growth and employment opportunities.



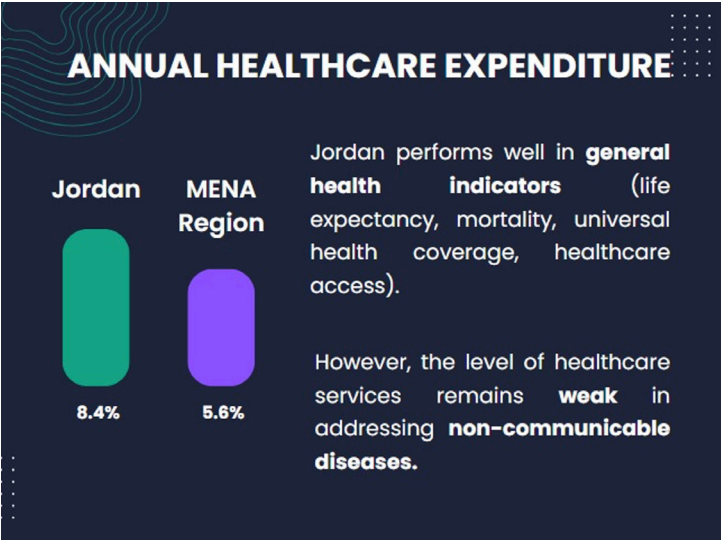
*“Human capital development begins in schools because they are responsible for changing individual awareness through advanced scientific curricula.”*

**Lab Participant**

Another example of the participants’ attention to the question of building high-quality education comes from the interest they manifested in the discipline of Economics which they felt was much more connected to issues in their contexts concerning Political Science. This raises a question on the need for more interdisciplinarity between Political Science and other social sciences at the higher education level, as underlined in the first Policy Lab.

Health

Official figures indicate that approximately 72% of Jordanians of all ages have some form of health insurance (military, civilian, university, or private insurance). The Civil Health Insurance system alone, managed by the Jordanian Ministry of Health, provides healthcare services to approximately 3.5 million people. Healthcare services are also provided to 1.7 million individuals in the military and security forces, in addition to military veterans and their families.



Within such context, child and maternal mortality have reduced and vaccination rates have risen, covering 95% of all children. Maternal and child mortality rates, as well as the rising rates of deaths by non-communicable and chronic diseases, are important indicators as they reflect socio-economic inequities and differences in access to healthcare, quality food, knowledge of care practices, adequate hygiene, and cures. In 2018, the government had already taken steps towards ensuring universal access to healthcare by endorsing a law on the rights of people with disabilities. However, healthcare services are still not equally accessible to all patients across the Kingdom, as most online resources do not provide information related to physical accessibility to the building and very few private practices are equipped with wheelchair-friendly accommodations such as ramps or elevators.

Innovation

Jordan has actively sought to cultivate a dynamic environment for start-ups and innovation hubs to leverage its talented workforce. However, greater efforts are needed to attract and retain both national and regional human capital. Retaining local talent not only makes Jordan more competitive economically but also enhances its role regionally. Global labor market trends are undergoing a significant transformation driven by technological advancements. The digital economy has become a cornerstone worldwide, and modern technology relies heavily on innovative contributions and AI. The government recognized the importance of investing in the latter and produced the Jordan Artificial Intelligence Policy in 2020. Jordan has launched several projects and initiatives to support innovation and back startups and creative projects. Initiatives such as those carried out by the King Hussein Business Park foster a conducive environment for collaboration between academia, research institutions, and businesses.

**However, Jordan still ranks relatively low on the Global Innovation Index, standing at position 78 out of 132 countries and 12th in the Middle East in 2022. This indicates a continued weakness in the innovation sector, which negatively impacts human capital and economic development.**

**Youth participating in the Policy Lab has stressed how there is often little support and space for developing and implementing innovative and creative ideas in Jordanian society and universities.** There are some opportunities, but they considered were considered very limited by the participants. Some of the youth focused on the lack of financial support and opportunities, while others stressed the limits of a higher education system that relies on rote learning instead of encouraging youth’s creative ideas.

*“In my opinion, the university environment does not encourage innovation or creativity. This is related to the offered materials, curricula, and disciplines, in addition to the teaching method relying on rote learning. Universities are not research-oriented; instead, they rely more on repetition, departing from research and innovation that contribute to building creativity.”*

**Lab Participant**

*“Collaboration between students and professors should be fostered in addition to promoting opportunities for teamwork and interaction. Additionally, resources and financial support should be provided to students who wish to turn their creative ideas into reality. There should be a culture that encourages risk-taking and that views failure as an opportunity for learning and improvement.”*

**Lab Participant**

The discussion among the youth also focused on the need to raise awareness and open opportunities for youth to achieve innovative projects in the wider Jordanian society. Some called for raising **“awareness of the importance of innovation and its role in social and economic development”** stressing that **“awareness campaigns and workshops for youth and local communities can be organized to explain the concept of innovation and its benefits”**.

## Recommendations

### To the Government:

- Link accountability systems to human capital systems
- Ensure that human capital is one of the main factors of the modernization plan
- Enhance the quality of life, and adopt this goal at the top of the political agenda for any assigned government
- Create an inclusive national environment to foster innovation and creativity and provide financial support for digital projects.

### To the Ministry of Education:

- Invest in enhancing the quality of both universal obligatory education and higher education, and in strategies to increase student enrolment in universities.
- Invest in technological education and infrastructure on all levels.

### To Universities and Schools:

- Ensure more interdisciplinarity between faculties in Jordanian universities to ensure that students are given the chance to engage with topics creatively and critically.
- Improve higher education methodologies to better prepare students for a changing and dynamic world, giving them a deeper understanding of labor market requirements.
- Address the deterioration in results through extracurricular activities.
- Develop mechanisms of accountability to ensure that the funding spent on developing curricula produces positive outcomes.

### To the Ministry of Health:

- Provide universal health care and an inclusive welfare system for all citizens, as well as invest in high-level quality medical services.
- Form partnerships with various civil society institutions to conduct awareness campaigns on various health issues and diseases, their causes, and prevention methods.
- Invest in technologies and medical knowledge that can help enhance Jordanian life expectancy and cure both chronic and life-threatening diseases.

### To Civil Society Organizations:

- Enhance agendas of political and civic participation projects to include human capital issues, address its challenges, and increase opportunities for improvement.
- Encourage the participation of youth in activities that can provide them with new knowledge, experiences, and skills.
- Design projects that prepare and equip youth for work instead of keeping them stuck in the cycle of aid.
- Develop projects that empower youth to participate in decision-making in the political and civic arenas and that increase their trust in government and institutions.

### To Business Owners:

- Ensure resources to enhance the skills and capabilities of the workforce.
- Encourage participation in public life.
- Enhance social responsibility contributions to cover essential basic needs for poor communities.
- Make investments in innovative sectors to provide new employment opportunities for youth.

### To the Youth:

- Organize collectively to ensure that human capital is promoted and enhanced for everyone, and that people are empowered to participate in public life.
- Invest in acquiring skills, capacities, and resources that enhance their human capital and enable their active and effective civic participation.

The Generation G (New Generation) project was launched within ARDD in 2021 with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands to energize and encourage youth leadership in promoting gender justice. The project aims to promote dialogue between youth and policymakers to influence policy relating to justice, particularly youth and women's rights.

Policy Labs are part of ARDD's research methodology, providing a dedicated space for discussing and researching public policy issues to enhance youth capacities and equip them with the necessary skills to engage in public policy-making processes. The labs also facilitate exchanging opinions with experts and researchers specialized in relevant topics, based on background papers prepared to address these issues.

Established in 2018, The Renaissance Strategic Center is an independent think tank based in Jordan that operates within the organizational framework of the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD).