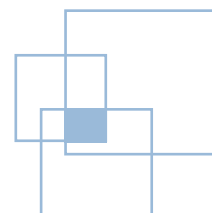


A Nomadic Approach to the Labour Market:

Why Vulnerable Youth
Leave their Jobs
in Jordan



International
Labour Organization,
Amman Office
January 2020

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A Nomadic Approach to the Labour Market:

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Foreword

Despite efforts directed at improving the labour situation and boosting job creation, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan continues to suffer from relatively high levels of unemployment, with staggering rates of joblessness observed among youth. The Government of Jordan (GoJ) has developed a number of strategies to counter this multi-faceted phenomenon, with the intention of harnessing the human resources of the country, such as the National Youth Strategy (NYS, 2019–2025) and the National Strategy for Human Resources Development (NSHRD, 2016–2025).

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been at the forefront of such efforts, through various projects to enhance working conditions within a range of economic sectors in Jordan. This report seeks to understand the reasons behind the high levels of youth unemployment, and the associated phenomena of low job retention and high turnover. More specifically, it aims to offer an updated and localized analysis of these global challenges.

While extensive research has been conducted in Jordan on unemployment among young graduates, this study examines the various parties involved, including companies and organizations, employers, national institutions, and workers. It addresses the question why a seemingly job-thirsty segment of the population is so eager and quick to leave positions they spent so long searching for.

This study underlines the need to take a more comprehensive and in-depth look at the dynamics governing the local labour market, and gives readers the incentive to look beyond the commonly cited reasons for youth unemployment.



Ruba Jaradat,
Assistant Director-General
and Regional Director for Arab States
International Labour Organization.

Acknowledgements

This study is the result of a partnership between the ILO's "Applying the G20 Training Strategy" project and the Business Development Centre's (BDC) "SANAD" programme. The ILO project is in partnership with the Russian Federation and aims – among other things – to strengthen national skills development systems using evidence for strategic policy decisions. The Business Development Centre (BDC), a non-profit organisation in Jordan (est. 2004). As a non-profit organization dedicated to fostering economic development in Jordan through employability training programs, MSMEs—Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises support hand-in-hand with a strong team of experts and pool of trainers. BDC accurately assesses market demands, designs developmental programs based on it, provide linkages that build business opportunities, effectively administrate training programs and deliver customized solutions for development.

This report was produced by Ms Eman Al Araj, ILO Project Coordinator and Ms Miral Bassaid, ILO Consultant, under the technical support and supervision of Mr Patrick Daru, ILO Senior Skills and Employability Specialist for the Arab States.

The research team would like to express their special thanks to Ms Bodoor al Taq and Ms Heba Al Taweel for their ongoing assistance and valuable inputs. Thanks are also due to ILO colleague Ms Meredith Bryne for her valuable comments on the survey validation.

Table of Contents

Foreword	3
Acknowledgements	4
Table of contents	5
List of figures	7
List of abbreviations	8
Executive summary	9
Introductory background	11
Research methodology	15
Objectives of the study	15
Population and sampling	15
Research design	15
Data collection and data analysis procedures	15
Limitations of the study	16
Data analysis and discussion of results	17
Respondents' profiles	17
Employment status	18
Employed respondents	18
Employment basis, sector and industry	18
Size of the company	19
Social security	19
Monthly income	20
Job satisfaction	21
Unemployed respondents	22
Job search length	22
The share of NEET	23
Job search difficulties	24
Wasta	24

Lack of employment opportunities	24
Under-qualification	24
Lack of career guidance services	24
Gender discrimination	25
Other difficulties	25
Job retention	25
Average stay per job position	26
Reasons for low job retention	27
Income (and available alternatives)	27
Occupational safety and health	27
Conflicts	28
Transport (or lack thereof)	28
Lack of career prospects	29
Long and inflexible working hours	29
The lack of social security coverage	29
Personal matters	29
Short-term contracts	30
Wasta and discrimination	30
Lack of commitment	30
Conclusion	32
References	33

List of figures

Figure 1: Jordanians' reasons for leaving jobs (Job Creation Survey, DoS, 2018)	13
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by educational attainment and gender	17
Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by employment status	18
Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by monthly income (JD)	20
Figure 5: Distribution of job satisfaction scores by sector (private and public)	21
Figure 6: Distribution of unemployed respondents by length of job search	23
Figure 7: Distribution of NEET respondents by educational attainment	23
Figure 8: Job search difficulties encountered by unemployed respondents	25
Figure 9: Distribution of respondents by average stay in each job position	26
Figure 10: Main reasons for leaving the job	31

List of abbreviations

BDC	Business Development Centre
DoS	Department of Statistics
ETF	European Training Foundation
GoJ	Government of Jordan
HRD	human resource development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IYF	International Youth Foundation
MoL	Ministry of Labour
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NHRDS	National Human Resource Development Strategy (2016–2025)
NEET	not in employment, education, or training
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
TJT	The Jordan Times (newspaper)
STWT	school-to-work transition
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WB	World Bank

Executive summary

Young people in Jordan face significant vulnerabilities in terms of employment, yet they are much more likely to leave their jobs than their older counterparts. With a youth unemployment rate of around 39 per cent,¹ Jordanian youth are severely impacted by the socio-economic challenges pertaining to joblessness. In addition to the harmful effects on their well-being, unemployment hinders their independence, financial stability and capacity to start a family. Surprisingly, this demographic group displays the lowest levels of job retention, and some of the highest rates of voluntary turnover.² Studies have shown that young Jordanians struggle to remain with an employer for any length of time, with the majority leaving their jobs within six months after commencement.

Turnover has wide-ranging consequences on the labour market, foremost of which is the financial and human cost to organizations and workers. Tackling turnover, especially among youth, is a pressing issue for the Kingdom, and should be addressed by all parties involved – organizations, employers, workers, and national institutions.

This study seeks to examine the factors affecting job retention among vulnerable young Jordanians, and was supported by the Jordanian Business Development Center (BDC). Data were collected by a telephone survey of 380 Jordanian men and women aged between 17 and 28, and included both employed and unemployed who were former graduates of the BDC SANAD programme.

The study finds that:

- **Job search for youth in Jordan is a frustrating long-term process**, often leading to feelings of helplessness and discouragement. Unemployed youth voiced grievances regarding the dominance of *wasta* and favouritism in the local market, with 28 per cent claiming this as the reason for their unemployment. Respondents also pointed to the general lack of job opportunities in a number of geographical areas of the Kingdom, and the discrepancy between their qualifications and the demands of most employers.
- **Long periods of unemployment translate into a rising “not in education, employment, or training” (NEET) rate among Jordanian youth, especially women.** The study found that 72.4 per cent of unemployed respondents were neither in education nor training. This rate is further aggravated by increasing levels of young workers engaged in the informal economy, largely within the private sector.

¹ DoS, Employment & Unemployment Survey, 2018.

² Voluntary turnover occurs when employees choose to terminate a work engagement or contract, as opposed to involuntary turnover, when employers decide to lay off workers.

- **Respondents tended to spend very limited time in the same job.** Nearly half of the sample reported changing jobs at least three or more times throughout their professional careers (with an average job duration of six months). They generally reported a lack of satisfaction with both current and past positions.
- **Numerous factors compelled young workers to leave their positions after working for short durations.** Respondents cited mainly insufficient wages, deficits in overall decent working conditions and environments, conflicts with supervisors or managers, lack of transportation, lack of career growth opportunities, and long and inflexible working hours.
- **Job retention is tied to job satisfaction and other variables, such as social security coverage, income and job stability.** Low job satisfaction was shown to have a paramount impact on the alarmingly high turnover rate prevalent among young Jordanian workers.

Introductory background

Youth unemployment remains a global challenge, but is especially acute in Jordan, with negative consequences for young people. In 2018, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated the global youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) at 13 per cent,³ around three times higher than that for adults (25+) (4.3 per cent).⁴ In Jordan, however, the overall rate of unemployment was estimated at 18.6 per cent, but exceeded 39 per cent for youth⁵ – more than three times the average for low to middle income countries (12.1 per cent).⁶ Moreover, for young women the rate reaches 62.8 per cent – far higher than that of young males (34.4 per cent).⁷ For these youth, unemployment drastically limits their opportunities to grow and thrive independently, and pushes them towards the informal economy with many decent work deficits.

Economic inactivity and unemployment widespread among Jordanian youth. Some 29 per cent of youth in Jordan in 2015 were NEET.⁸ Many youth can spend up to 3 years or more looking for a job, one of the longest periods of school-to-work transitions when compared with other MENA countries.⁹

Jordan's high rate of youth unemployment is mostly a demand-side issue. Job opportunities are limited, and employers are reluctant to hire new graduates.¹⁰ The discrepancy between the skills of young graduates and the needs of the economy is often described as the chief reason for high youth unemployment: there is an oversupply of university graduates and an undersupply of skilled technicians and vocational training graduates. This mismatch is further aggravated by the relatively high expectations of college-educated youth who seek a return on the time and costs of higher education. Many young graduates refuse the lower-end opportunities on offer, or leave employment after a short period of time¹¹. The need to match the requirements of the labour market with the outputs of the educational system was spearheaded in the National Strategy for Human Resource Development (NSHRD), launched in 2016.

Labour market segmentation – between nationals and non-nationals – presents another challenge. Migrants and refugee workers provide the labour market with an affordable, flexible and less demanding workforce. Because of their vulnerable status, refugees and migrants are willing to take on long hours of work under difficult conditions for low pay, which, in turn, has an impact on the standard of working conditions for Jordanians, and the acceptability of jobs by Jordanians.¹²

³ ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook, 2018.

⁴ The ILO has redefined the unemployed population in a way to comprise those who have “worked for less than one hour” during a short period but are “desiring and capable of” obtaining employment forthwith.

⁵ DoS, Employment & Unemployment Survey, 2018.

⁶ ILO, ILO STAT Database, 2017.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ ILO, ILO STAT Database, 2015.

⁹ Barcucci and Mryyan, ILO, 2014.

¹⁰ Alrabba, International Journal of Economics and Finance, 2017.

¹¹ Barcucci and Mryyan, ILO, 2014.

¹² Razzaz et al., ILO, 2017

While Jordanians are willing to work in any field, they tend to only do so if working conditions are acceptable to them.¹³ However, job reservation is evolving with the unemployment pressure and Jordanians are now willing to take on jobs they would not have considered some years back.

The elimination of the gender gap in education has led to a greater labour force participation rate among women. Jordan boasts a highly educated female population, with the potential to advance Jordan's economic, social, and political prospects.¹⁴ The 2017 Gender Parity Index (GPI) score for enrolment in tertiary education in Jordan was estimated at 1.145, meaning more women than men were enrolled.¹⁵ However, Jordan has one of the lowest rates of women's economic participation in the world at just 14.6 per cent, compared with the global average of 48.5 per cent, and lower than the Arab states average of 19.0 per cent. While Jordan's overall labour force participation lags far behind that of the rest of the world (39.1 per cent compared to a global average of 62.0 per cent), the situation for women is far more concerning.¹⁶ This situation is attributed to limited job opportunities and flexibility, a lack of workplace safety (including from harassment) and affordable transportation, deficits in pay equity, insufficient childcare and other cultural limitations.¹⁷ Several measures aimed at enhancing the integration of women into the workforce have been introduced over recent years. These include policies to ensure pay equity between men and women, gender-friendly work environments and respect for family-related obligations. These commitments were evident in the amendment of five labour articles in 2019, based on the recommendations of the National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE), which is supported by the ILO and a number of local advocacy groups.¹⁸

Other aspects impact on individual jobseekers but may not affect overall employment levels. The prevalence of favouritism through personal connections or nepotism ("*wasta*") is often mentioned as an impediment for less-connected jobseekers, but it is unclear whether it affects employment at the aggregate level.¹⁹ Also, while the public sector used to be the employer of choice it is no longer employing newcomers beyond replacement levels, as Jordan's public debt is on the rise and its fiscal space continues to tighten.

Prolonged unemployment can have detrimental consequences on the material, emotional, physical and behavioural well-being of young people, and lead to poverty, marginalization, loss of self-confidence, mental health issues, and general social insecurity. Negative outcomes are not restricted to material aspects, as unemployment takes a toll on all aspects of a young person's life, including their perception of employment opportunities.²⁰ In addition, some research

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ UNESCO, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017.

¹⁶ ILO, ILO STAT Database, 2018.

¹⁷ ILO, Promoting Pay Equity in Jordan, 2019

¹⁸ ILO, Re-valuing Women's Employment: Implementing Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value in Jordan, 2016

¹⁹ Alrabba, International Journal of Economics and Finance, 2017.

²⁰ O'Higgins, Institute for the Study of Labour, 2015.

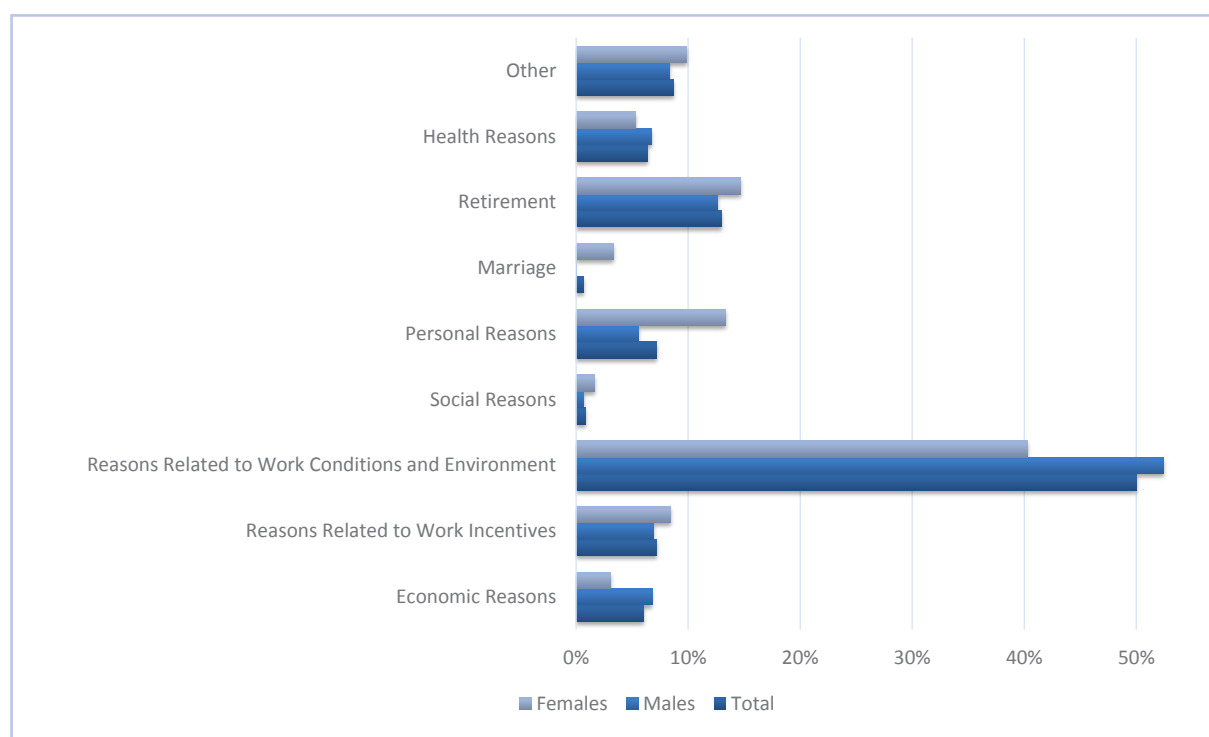
suggests that, without work, young people are more prone to act violently and rebelliously, thus posing a major threat to social stability.²¹

In the forthcoming 25 years, Jordan is expected to experience a demographic transition, such that the proportion of youth will decrease, thus impacting on youth employment levels. The median age is expected to rise from 22.1 years in 2017 to 34.9 years by 2050, and the share of adult unemployment will increase, threatening the financial sustainability of social protection systems.²²

In spite of the current unemployment crisis, many Jordanians drop out of jobs. In 2018, slightly more than 89 per cent of Jordanians who were placed in jobs through ILO Employment Service Centres dropped out within six months (sample size = 520).

Research shows that employees are likely to remain with an organization providing that it offers favourable inducements. This includes a good salary, decent working conditions, and growth opportunities that are perceived to match the worker's contribution and efforts.²³ Reasons most often cited for turnover in Jordan include low salary and benefits, lack of job advancement and career development, and an unsatisfactory work environment and working conditions.²⁴

Figure 1: Jordanians' reasons for leaving jobs (Job Creation Survey, DoS, 2018)



²¹ B. Edwards, Bookings Doha Center, 2018.

²² Statista, Average Age of the Population from 1950 to 2050, 2019

²³ March and Simon, 1958.

²⁴ The International Youth Foundation, Job Retention among Jordanian Youth, 2014.

At the same time, frequent turnover has a detrimental impact on business performance. High employee turnover affects a company's organizational effectiveness, capacity, productivity, sales, service delivery, and profitability. In the US, for example, the Work Institute estimates the cost of losing one US worker alone is \$15,000.²⁵ Replacing workers can be both costly and time-consuming. In addition, turnover generates human and intellectual costs for a firm, as the recruitment of less-experienced employees may lead to breaking the “knowledge continuity chain”, necessary for the growth and sustainability of an organization.²⁶ Finally, high levels of turnover can negatively impact on customers' satisfaction and trust in a company, thus hampering its sales and profitability.²⁷

Leaving a job also greatly affects workers' lives and careers. Job retention is especially challenging for young workers new to the labour market. While the literature has focused on factors that contribute to employee turnover, minimal attention has been paid to the impact on ex-employees. Studies demonstrate the strong emotional and psychological effects of unemployment, ranging from feelings of insecurity, depression, stress, loss of confidence and demotivation.²⁸ The steady income that comes from a regular job allows for continuous social security coverage, health insurance, and many other entitlements, which contribute to emotional and psychological stability.²⁹ In the eventuality of job departure, the loss of these benefits is further aggravated by the loss of social connections tied to the workplace, potentially triggering periods of stress and loneliness.³⁰ In the long run, these issues can hamper the chances for future employment.

Job retention is under-researched in Jordan. Overall, while the international literature on job retention is prolific, studies on Jordan have only focused on the nursing sector.³¹ The emphasis has tended to be placed on resolving issues pertaining to youth unemployment and job creation. However, institutions working in the field of employment have highlighted the very low rates of job retention among young people engaged in their programmes.

²⁵ Mahan et al., 2019

²⁶ According to Beazley, Boenischand and Harden (2002), knowledge continuity management (KCM) is an organizational strategy often implemented to guarantee that no valuable knowledge is lost if an employee leaves a company.

²⁷ Allen, Retaining Talent, 2008.

²⁸ McQuerrey, Smallbusiness, 2019.

²⁹ Arachchillage and Ewumini, 2008.

³⁰ McQuerrey, Smallbusiness, 2019.

³¹ Abualrub, 2010; Mrayyan et al., 2008; Abu Raddaha et al., 2012.

Research methodology

Objectives of the study



This research was a collaboration between the ILO and the BDC. It covered a sample of young Jordanian graduates from the SANAD Programme in order to explore the factors that affect job retention, such as educational attainment, income, social security, intention to stay, and so on. The study did not measure the employment impact of BDC interventions but merely offers insights on matters such as job satisfaction and retention.

Population and sampling



The study sample was drawn from the BDC's electronic database of SANAD programme participants during the academic year 2016–2018. From this database, only subjects between the ages of 15 and 28 years old were selected. Also, participants who were, at the time of the survey administration, (a) self-employed, (b) had no previous working experience (c) Economically inactive, were excluded from the study. From a population of N=7,936 participants of both sexes living in several areas of the kingdom, a representative sample of n=380 was randomly drawn.

Research design



Quantitative data were collected using a multiple option questionnaire based on closed-ended items and administered via telephone. The survey was comprised of three sections: (1) personal information; (2) employment status and job satisfaction; and (3) turnover and job retention. The second part was subdivided on the basis of respondents' employment status. Section A was designed for employed respondents, while Section B was applicable for those who were unemployed.

Data collection and data analysis procedures



The Microsoft Excel database used for data collection was adapted from a design by the BDC. Firstly, mock interviews were used to estimate time and predict potential impediments. Phone call durations ranged between 5 and 7 minutes, depending on respondents' attitude or availability (response rate was estimated at 39 per cent). IBM SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences v.25) was then used to analyse the data using frequency tables, cross tabulations, correlations, and associations.

Limitations of the study



The success of the interviews depended on respondents' accessibility, availability, and willingness to take part in the study. Many participants were either: (a) out of reach; (b) did not answer; (c) had changed their numbers; or (d) had provided phone numbers belonging to another family member (e.g. father, husband, or siblings).

Although the SANAD database included a large number of young participants, the programme was nonetheless intended to target youth in under-privileged areas with limited educational attainment. Thus, youth in this sample may not represent the whole youth population in Jordan.

Additionally, while the research examined the experience of graduates, it did not take into account the perceptions of employers on the subject of retention.

Data analysis and discussion of results

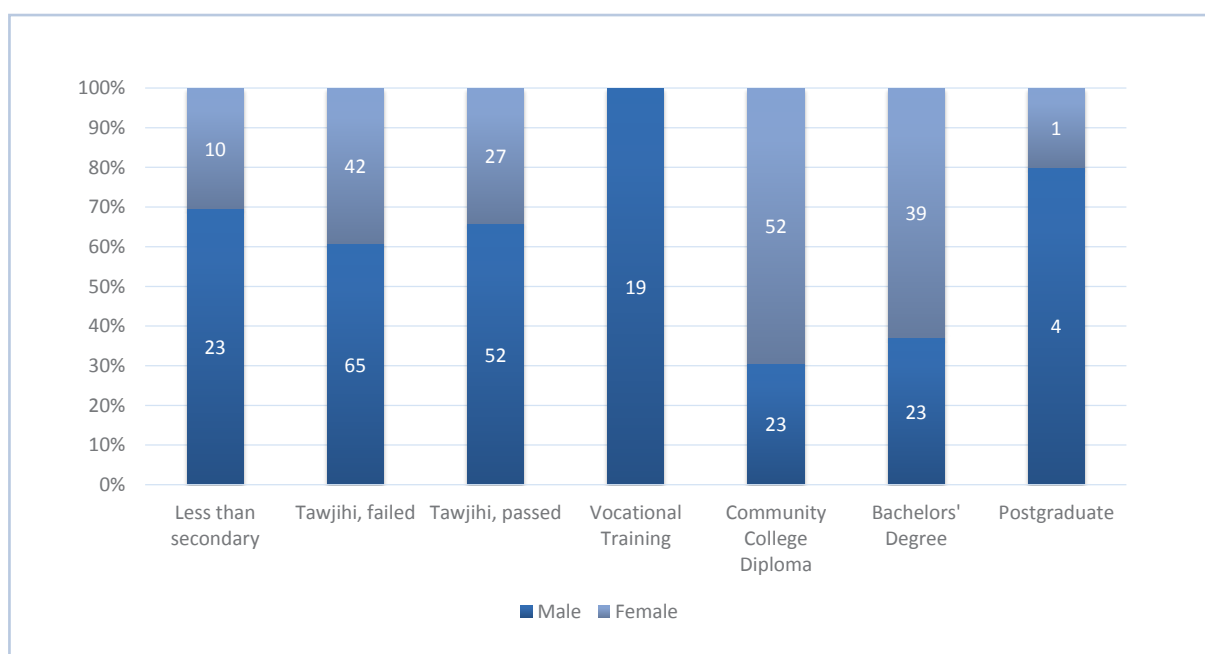
Respondents' profiles

Demographics and employment status were disaggregated in an attempt to better understand the socio-economic and professional attributes of the respondents. Approximately 11 per cent of respondents were between the ages of 17 and 18; 28 per cent were between 19 and 21; 35 per cent were between 22 and 24; and 26 per cent were between 25 and 28.

As for their educational attainments, around 28 per cent of the respondents applied for the Tawjihi exam (Grade 12) but did not pass, while 21 per cent secured a Tawjihi certificate (high school diploma). Almost 20 per cent had a community college diploma and 18 per cent had a bachelor's degree or above. Some 9 per cent did not have a secondary school qualification, while only 5 per cent of the sample held a vocational training degree.

In terms of gender, around 70 per cent of respondents with less than secondary education were men, as were 61 per cent of those who sat for the Tawjihi exams but failed. In addition, around 66 per cent of those whose highest education was a Tawjihi certificate were men, while all those with vocational training degrees were male. Some 69 per cent of those with a community college diploma and 60 per cent of those with a bachelor's degree or above, on the other hand, were female. This suggests that the educational attainment of women in the sample was generally higher than that of men, reflecting the fact that females score higher than males on the tertiary level GPI index.

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by educational attainment and gender

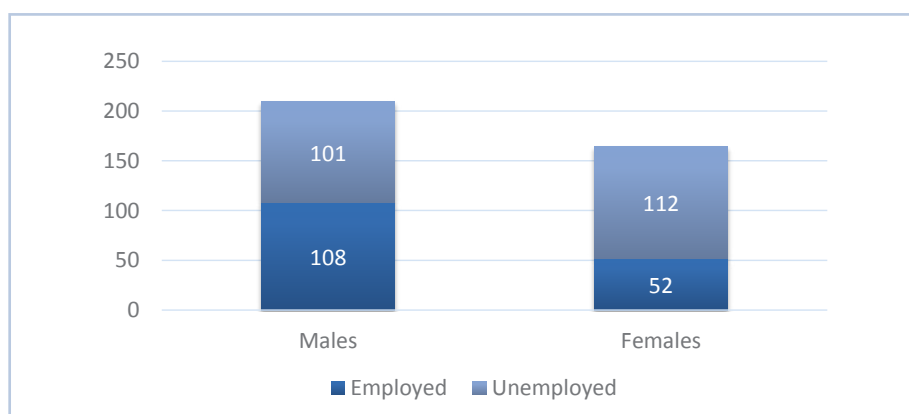


Employment status

It is important to note the extent of frustration voiced by the majority of respondents, who expressed concerns about their economic situation, noting that the state of affairs for themselves and their communities was becoming intolerable and had significantly worsened over the past few years. The majority of respondents emphasized the lack of economic opportunities in their area and highlighted a number of impediments to entering the labour market. On the whole, researchers sensed an overwhelming feeling of marginalization and pessimism among both young women and men during their telephone conversations.

Approximately 44 per cent of respondents were employed, while the remaining 56 per cent were unemployed at the time of data collection and actively looking for a job. Although women in the sample had attained higher levels of education than men, the rate of female employment (68 per cent) was twice that of men (33 per cent).

Figure 3: Distribution of respondents by employment status



Employed respondents

Employment basis, sector and industry

Around 68 per cent of employed respondents were in full-time employment, working between 35 and 45 hours per week. Almost 21 per cent were employed part time, and 11 per cent worked on call (i.e. by the hour or day). Approximately 78 per cent of all those who were employed worked in the private sector, 19 per cent worked in the public sector, and slightly under 3 per cent worked for non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

As for the distribution by industry, 21 per cent of respondents worked in the retail and wholesale sector, 10 per cent worked in tourism and restaurants, and 9 per cent worked in the manufacturing sector.

Size of the company

The survey also looked at the distribution of employed respondents by the size of the companies or entities for which they worked. Around 49 per cent of employed respondents worked for micro companies or entities with less than 10 employees, while 21 per cent and 20 per cent worked for small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), or entities with 10–49 workers and 49–250 workers respectively. Only 10 per cent of respondents in the sample worked for big companies or entities with over 250 workers.

This suggests that the employment of the respondents was concentrated in micro, small, and medium-sized companies or entities. In OECD countries, the total turnover rate in SMEs varies between 60 to 80 per cent depending on the size of the country.³² However, in Jordan, a study by GIZ indicated that turnover was lower in manufacturing companies with less than 10 employees (12 per cent).³³ There is a logical link between turnover and retention, even if it cannot be captured statistically in the absence of a time series. While retention in SMEs is low in the OECD, what makes the case of Jordan exceptional is the fact that this low retention rate is coupled with a high unemployment rate, and a high rate of NEET, suggesting a mismatch between the expectations of jobseekers and the jobs on offer.

Social security

One major finding of this survey is that informality among young Jordanians is exceptionally high. To assess formality, respondents were asked whether they were enrolled in social security at their current job.³⁴ According to Social Security Law No. 1, 2014, all employed persons over the age of 16 must be covered by social security, including part-time, waged, and self-employed workers. This, however, is not the case on the ground. A study by the UNDP, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Cooperation, and the Economic Social Council undertaken in 2012 estimated that 44 per cent of Jordanian workers were in informal employment. In this study, only 41 per cent of employed respondents reported being enrolled in social security: 32 per cent of those in the private sector and 81 per cent of respondents in the public sector.

Disaggregated data also revealed that social security coverage varied across sectors (see figure 4). None of the mechanics were covered by social security, while all of those employed in the army, defence, public security and cleaning and sanitation were covered, as well as 86 per cent of those employed in human, health, and social work. This could be explained by the fact that the vast majority of these workers were public sector employees.

³² OECD, 2017.

³³ Employee Turnover in the Jordanian Manufacturing Sector, 2018

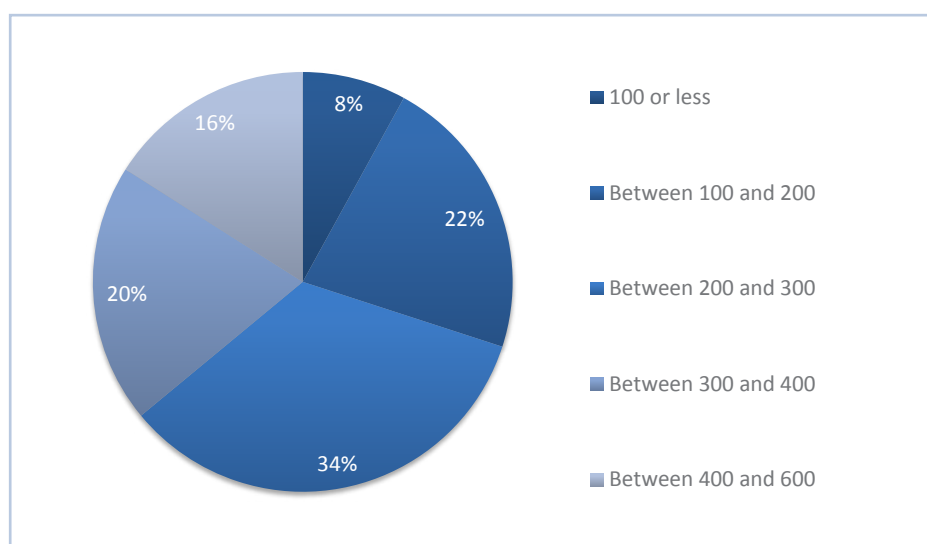
³⁴ Formality is a complex phenomenon as it can include having a contract, social security, paying taxes, being represented by trade unions, etc. This study offers a reduced analysis of formality.

Monthly income

Employed respondents were also asked to provide their monthly income in Jordanian dinars (1 JOD = 1.41 USD). The minimum wage for Jordanian nationals is JD220 per month, and the average wage for those registered at the Social Security Corporation is JD545 per month.³⁵ Wages for employed respondents in the sample ranged from as little as JD50 per month to JD600 per month, depending on the employment basis and the working hours of the respondent.

According to figure 5, around 4 per cent of the part-time and waged/employed respondents stated that they received a monthly income of between JD50 and JD99 per month. About 19 per cent said that their monthly income was between JD100 and JD199 per month; of these respondents more than 97 per cent were part-time or waged workers. Another 37 per cent reported earning between JD200 and JD299 per month; more than two-thirds of these people worked full-time. A further share of 41 per cent reported a monthly income of between JD300 and JD599 per month; 76 per cent of this group worked full time.

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by monthly income (JD)



A recent report by the ILO indicated that 36 per cent of Jordan's labour income goes to the top 10 per cent of workers in the country.³⁶ Based on national DoS data, around 41 per cent of Jordanian youth earned less than JD300 per month in 2018, and only 5 per cent earned above JD500 per month in the same year.³⁷ These salaries seem to be insufficient for the growing needs of Jordanian youth, who are seeking to become self-sufficient and transition towards greater independence. Furthermore, according to the DoS and several other studies,³⁸ there exists in Jordan a wage gender gap in favour of men. In the sample, the average monthly income was JD280 for men and JD247 for women.

³⁵ Social Security Corporation, 2017.

³⁶ ILO, The Global Labour Income Share and Distribution, 2019.

³⁷ DoS, Employment & Unemployment Survey, 2018

³⁸ SIGI, 2018; Farhan, 2016; ILO, 2013; and UNECE, 2012.

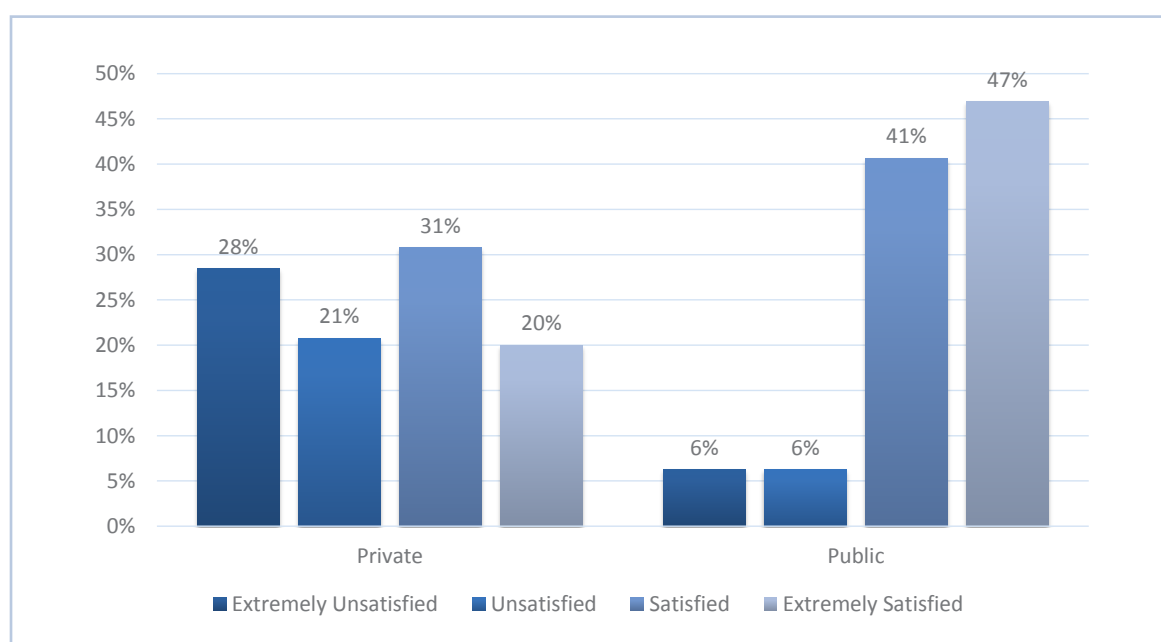
Job satisfaction

A key variable examined in the survey was job satisfaction. Employed respondents were asked to rank their job satisfaction on a Likert scale from 1 (“extremely unsatisfied”) to 4 (“extremely satisfied”). Job satisfaction was then analysed against other independent variables in the survey, including income, social security, and intention to stay.

A share of 42.5 per cent of employed respondents were either “unsatisfied” or “extremely unsatisfied” with their jobs; 57.5 per cent said that they were either “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied”. Women in the sample reported higher satisfaction than their male counterparts, as the percentage of women deeming themselves “satisfied” or “extremely satisfied” was 61.0 per cent, compared with 55.5 per cent of men.

Furthermore, workers in the public sector reported higher job satisfaction than those in the private sector. Some 88 per cent of those working in the public sector reported that they were either “extremely satisfied” or “satisfied” with their jobs, compared to 51 per cent in the private sector. According to the ILO (2017), the justification behind Jordanians’ tendency to favour the public sector is because it offers a significant wage premium (even for less-educated workers), as well as better job security, shorter working hours, social security and health benefits, and a career path.³⁹

Figure 5: Distribution of job satisfaction scores by sector (private and public)



Job satisfaction, however, has been found to be positively associated with other factors, such as employment formality and the provision of social security.⁴⁰ To examine the case in Jordan, the correlation between social security and job satisfaction was tested using a Spearman rank

³⁹ Razzaz et al., ILO, 2017, (p. 36).

⁴⁰ Gunawan, Ilyas and Naninsih, 2018

correlation. The correlation coefficient between social security and job satisfaction was estimated at $r_s = 0.67$ ($p < .01$). This suggests that there is a significant positive correlation between the two variables. In other words, enrolment in social security matters for workers' job satisfaction.

Income is also correlated with job satisfaction, either because workers find receiving a high income motivating, or because they are motivated to do more work in a job they like, earning them higher pay.⁴¹ In the sample here, the correlation between income and job satisfaction was found to be highly positive (Pearson's $r = .708$). This test, however, does not indicate the direction or degree of causality for these two variables.

The final variable tested against job satisfaction was intention to stay. Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between job satisfaction and intention to stay,⁴² while other studies find a strong negative relationship between job satisfaction and intention to leave.⁴³ In the survey, employed respondents were asked if they intended to leave their current jobs (yes or no). Using Spearman's rho, the correlation coefficient between job satisfaction and intention to stay was estimated at $r_s = 0.76$ ($p < .01$). This shows that, in this sample, higher job satisfaction correlates with a positive intention to stay.

Unemployed respondents

Job search length

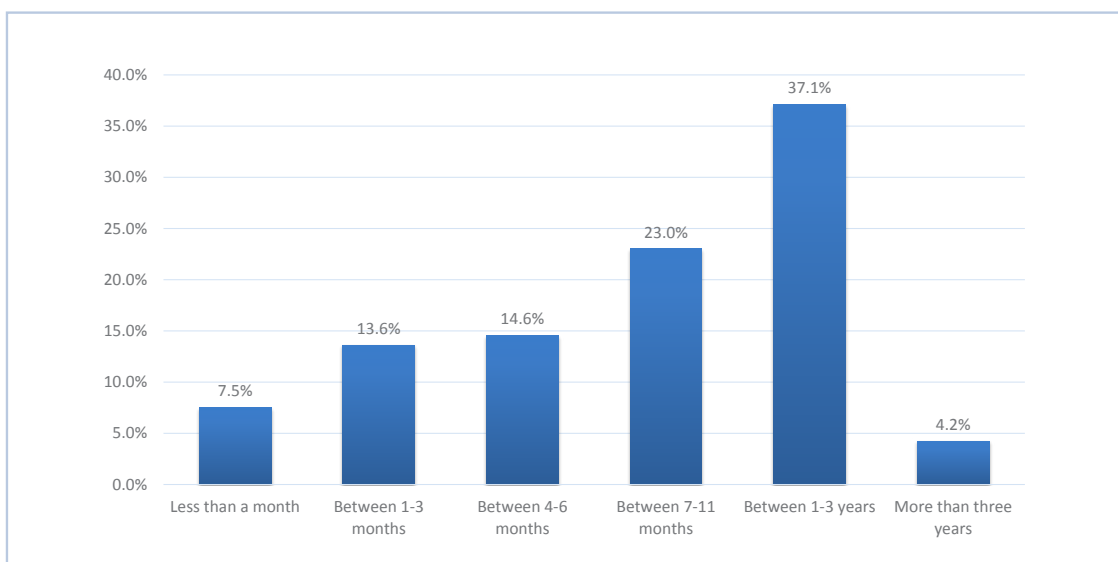
As mentioned above, 56 per cent of respondents were unemployed. According to this subset of respondents, 21 per cent had been searching for a job for three months or less, 15 per cent had been looking for between 4 and 6 months, and 23 per cent had been looking for between 7 and 11 months. Worryingly, 37 per cent of unemployed respondents stated that they had been actively searching for a job for 1–3 years, and around 4 per cent remained unemployed after 3 years. This suggests that finding a job is a long and challenging process for young Jordanians, many of whom may fall into economic inactivity after failing to find a job. At the same time, what a respondent considers to be a “job” may exclude simple livelihood activities that help them survive – highlighting once again the importance of work quality regarding what they consider an adequate job.

⁴¹ Malka and Chatman, 2003; Bakan and Buyukbese, 2013; Malik 2012.

⁴² Price and Mueller, 1981; Landsman, 2001; Yucel, 2012.

⁴³ Randhawa, 2007; Abualrub, Raeda Fawzi, 2010; Jou et al., 2012.

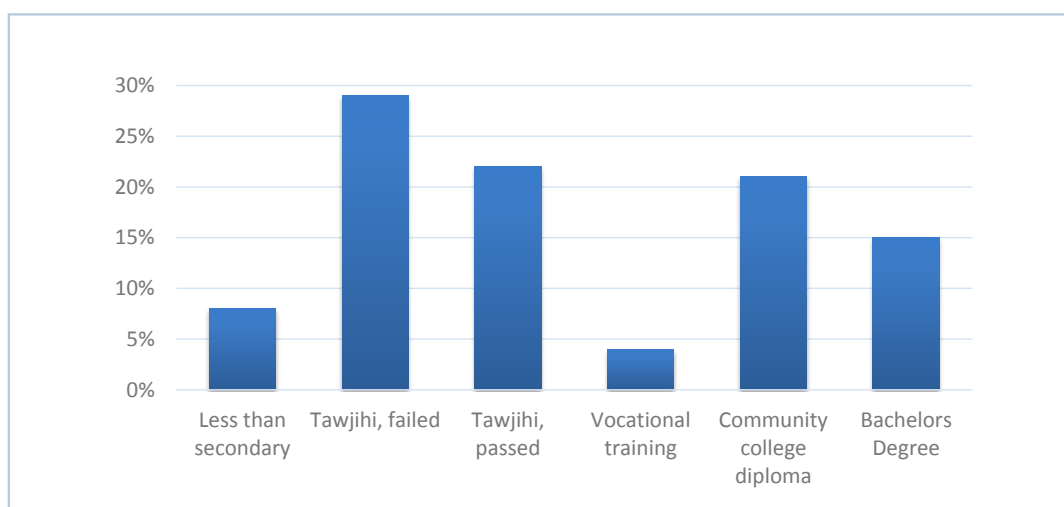
Figure 6: Distribution of unemployed respondents by length of job search



The share of NEET

Furthermore, in order to measure the NEET rate of the sample, unemployed respondents were asked whether they were enrolled in education or training. Out of all unemployed respondents, 28 per cent were enrolled in education or training, 58 per cent of whom were male. Around 25 per cent of this subset were in academic education, and another 25 per cent were taking professional training. Some 15 per cent were taking soft skills training, 12 per cent were pursuing online courses, and 10 per cent were enrolled in vocational training. Only 7 per cent said they were taking IT courses, and 5 per cent stated that they were enrolled in other types of training not specified in the survey. The total NEET rate from the sample was 40 per cent (32 per cent of men and 51 per cent of women). As for their distribution by educational attainment, 29 per cent of NEET respondents had partially completed a Tawjihi certificate, 22 per cent had completed a Tawjihi certificate, 21 per cent a community college diploma, 15 per cent a bachelor's degree or above, and 4 per cent a vocational training certificate (figure 8).

Figure 7: Distribution of NEET respondents by educational attainment



Job search difficulties

The survey revealed that young Jordanians face various challenges during their search for work. Respondents could select up to three categories, which were based on the literature review. These challenges can be summarized under the following categories:

Wasta

Just over 28 per cent of respondents stated that the phenomenon of *wasta* was a barrier to finding a job. Many respondents commented, “If I had a *wasta* (a relative/friend in a powerful position) I would have gotten employed long ago, with a good job position and salary!” A majority of respondents considered *wasta* as “the norm” in Jordan, claiming that having a *wasta* is just as important as other qualities, such as education, experience, or professional attitude to find a job. It is, nonetheless, crucial to also look at the context surrounding this practice in terms of: (a) the oversupply of labourers; (b) the importance of networks for commercial engagement; and (c) a large share of small companies that use *wasta* as a way to prepare the next generation to manage the business.

Lack of employment opportunities

Another 26 per cent of unemployed respondents said that they could not find employment because of the lack of job opportunities in their geographic area. Most of the youth surveyed stressed that the Government is not generating a sufficient number of jobs in the public sector – especially for new graduates. They also pointed out that those few jobs that are created remain centred around certain privileged or industrial areas.

Under-qualification

For 20 per cent of the sample, their lack of qualifications and work experience in comparison to what was required by employers accounted for the unemployment situation they were in. They underscored that “lacking the required skills and qualifications is not something that one can acquire overnight”, and pointed to the need to be properly trained prior to, and on, the job in order to meet the requirements of employers.

Some of these respondents stated that they do not meet the required language skills (English) – either oral or written; others do not have the ICT skills required to navigate the Internet, use a personal computer, or even operate other technological tools and machines. In a study conducted by the ILO in Jordan, 48.7 per cent of young workers were classified as “under-educated” for the work opportunities available, with only 5.4 per cent of working youth deemed to be “over-educated” for their occupations.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Barcucci and Mryyan, ILO, 2014.

Lack of career guidance services

An additional 12 per cent of respondents reported a lack of career guidance as a major challenge to their employment. They highlighted the absence of clear direction in relation to the labour market and processes (i.e. not knowing the appropriate channels and approaches to apply for a job after graduation), or the reasons behind the lengthy school-to-work transition periods.

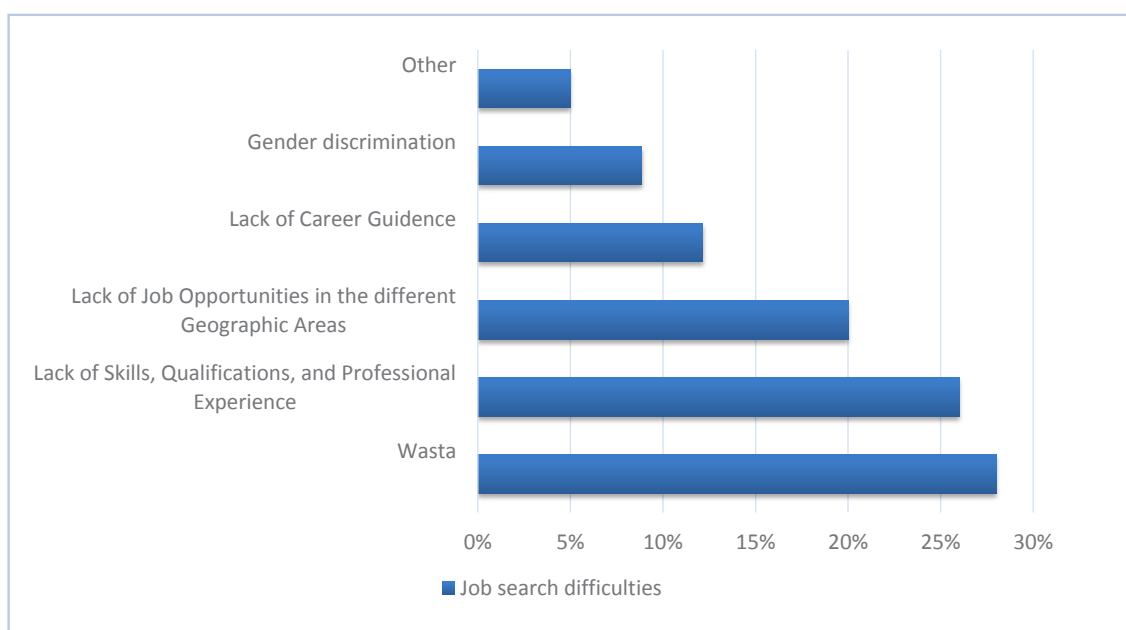
Gender discrimination

Around 9 per cent of respondents listed gender discrimination as a barrier to finding employment. Of those who felt discriminated against based on their sex, 80 per cent were females, most of whom claimed that employers had a biased preference towards males – especially in the private sector.

Other difficulties

Another 5 per cent of respondents listed other reasons, such as failing during job interviews, high competitiveness among those who hold higher academic degrees, or competitiveness with migrant workers, who tend to accept longer working hours and lower salaries.

Figure 8: Job search difficulties encountered by unemployed respondents



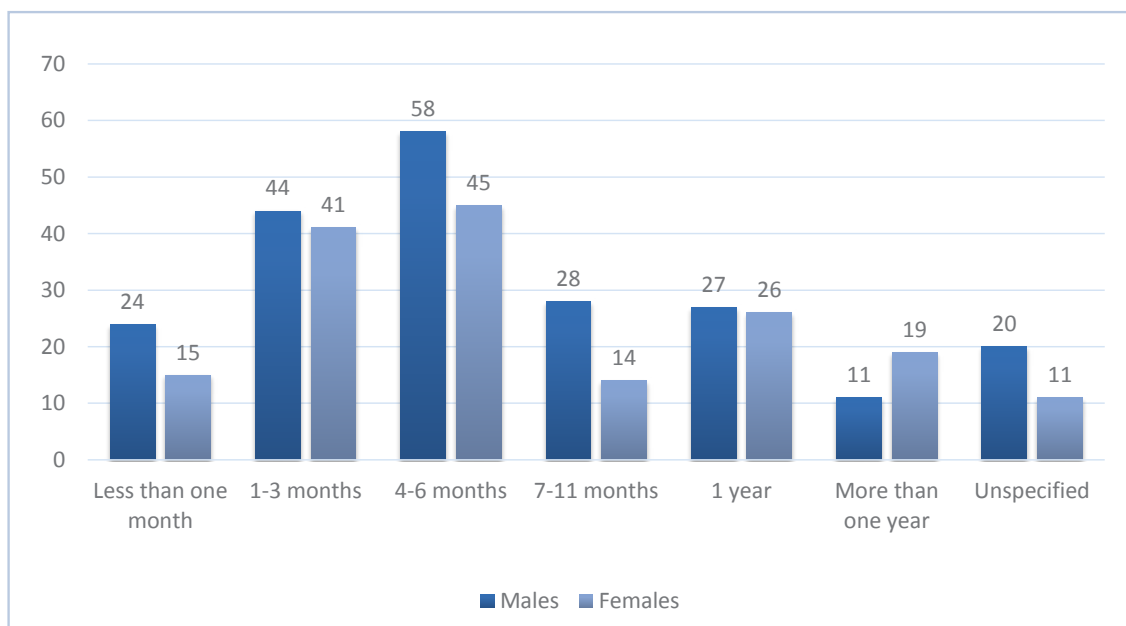
Job retention

As previously discussed, low job retention rates among young workers is a pressing issue in Jordan, with negative impacts on workers and employers alike. In this study, retention and turnover were captured by two variables: the number of times the respondent had changed their job, and the average length of stay per job.

Average stay per job position

Respondents (excluding those who had never changed jobs) were asked about their average stay per position. A total of 59 per cent of respondents said that, on average, they stayed in each job for 6 months or less. Almost one quarter of the respondents stated that they stay between 7 months and 1 year, while only 8 per cent said that they stay for over a year. The largest share of male respondents (30 per cent) reported staying between 4 and 6 months on average. Around 27.5 per cent of females reported staying between 1 and 3 months in each job position.

Figure 9: Distribution of respondents by average stay in each job position



A study by the US Bureau of Labour Statistics (2018) report found that the median tenure for male employees was estimated at 4.3 years while that of women did not exceed 4 years.⁴⁵ In terms of age, the same survey revealed that younger employees between the ages of 25 and 34 had a median tenure of 2.8 years – over three times shorter than that of older workers aged above 55 years, whose average tenure was 10.1 years. Further, 74 per cent of the participants aged between 16 and 19 reported a tenure of less than 12 months with their current employer.

A recent report by Censuswide (2018) showed that 8 out of 10 surveyed Australian employers do not interview candidates with a history of short-term employment (considered to be less than of 7 months average), describing a person belonging to this category as “a nomad lost in the world of employment”.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Covering a sample of 60,000 households aged 16 and over.

⁴⁶ Indeed Blog, 2018.

Reasons for low job retention

In order to gain a better understanding of the main reasons behind low job retention among Jordanian youth, the respondents who indicated having previously changed their jobs were asked to list three main reasons for it. The open-ended responses conveyed by the youth surveyed for this study were categorized into core concepts/themes, as discussed below:

Income (and available alternatives)

Unsurprisingly, almost 13.2 per cent of respondents cited the lack of monetary benefits as the main reason for leaving their jobs. Low wages were deemed unfair compared to the tasks performed or to their educational level. Respondents also emphasised the lack of other financial incentives, such as overtime payment, bonuses (e.g. productivity benefits, commissions or profit-sharing), or other allowances as a prime reason for quitting.

These findings support previous related research whereby a group of young Jordanian graduates cited economic reasons as the most pressing motive for leaving their jobs.⁴⁷ Notwithstanding this, national data gathered by the DoS provide a diametrically opposite picture. Prior to the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2010, the percentage of those who left their jobs for economic reasons was estimated at 17 per cent, compared with 7 per cent in 2018.⁴⁸

However, the same national survey reported that nearly 24 per cent of employed youth claimed wanting new or additional work in the same year. This explains why almost one quarter of employed youth in Jordan are dissatisfied with their salary and are looking to supplement their income through side jobs in order to afford the high cost of living in Jordan.

Further, 6.5 per cent responded that financial support from their families had encouraged them to leave their jobs when encountering dissatisfaction. In Jordan, retention rates among young workers is tightly associated with family income. Previous studies have shown a higher prevalence of youth from relatively higher income families leaving their jobs because of long working hours or issues related to career progress.⁴⁹ Conversely, other studies have argued that youth from low-income families are more inclined to leave their work when wages are insufficient.⁵⁰ The result – low job retention – is ultimately the same, but the reasons behind it are different.

Occupational safety and health

A relatively large share of respondents (12 per cent) indicated unhealthy working conditions or

⁴⁷ Abu Jadayil, 2011; IYF, Job Retention among Young Jordanians, 2014.

⁴⁸ DoS, 2017.

⁴⁹ IYF, Job Retention among Young Jordanians, 2014

⁵⁰ Hayes, 2015.

environment as their main motive for leaving their job, deeming their workplaces “unsuitable” both physically and psychologically. An ILO report has described the Jordanian labour market generally as a challenging environment with poor working conditions, despite the Government’s stated commitment to implement decent work standards across all sectors.⁵¹ Difficult working conditions, such as a lack of adequate equipment or infrastructure, or delays in salary payments, can further aggravate the stresses experienced by workers.⁵²

Conflicts

With heightened levels of stress, miscommunication and tension among colleagues is more frequent, another trigger for young Jordanians deciding to leave their jobs. Several studies have highlighted the correlation between the relationship with managers and employee retention, with many employees reporting that they leave “managers” rather than “companies”.⁵³ A recent study based on nurses’ perceptions of communication with their physician supervisors in Jordan supported this finding, underlining a strong relationship between stressful working conditions, job satisfaction, and the intention to stay or leave a company.⁵⁴

During interviews for the present study, 12 per cent of young respondents pointed to a variety of professional and personal problems that “could not be resolved” as the reason that pushed them to leave their jobs, regardless of their degree of seniority in the organization or company. The prevalence of such internal conflicts can be explained by a general lack of soft (interpersonal communication) skills among workers and managers, which prevents them from engaging in non-conflictual negotiation and communication.

Transport (or lack thereof)

Lack of affordable transport also motivated around 11 per cent of respondents to quit, particularly women, who complained about the high costs and inefficiency of transportation around Jordan. Young Jordanians cannot afford public transport to commute to work. Transportation was also highlighted for its lack of safety and accessibility, especially outside of the capital. In 2014, young Jordanians living in the areas of Al-Mafraq, Sahab, Ruseifeh, and Southern Shouneh reported spending, on average, up to half of their salary and almost two hours per day, on commuting to work.⁵⁵ Public buses and minibuses were also deplored for their poor service due to delays and low standards.⁵⁶

⁵¹ ILO, 2017.

⁵² Abu Jadayil, 2011.

⁵³ Forbes Magazine, 2017.

⁵⁴ Al-Hamdan, Banerjee and Manojlovich, 2018.

⁵⁵ IYF, Job Retention among Young Jordanians, 2014

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Lack of career prospects

Another reason for low job retention, as cited by 9 per cent of respondents, was the lack of career development opportunities. While some respondents claimed that employers did not seem willing to provide promotions and other types of career opportunities for youth, a contradictory study by the IYF found that a lack of personal skills and ambition was rather the second major reason for young Jordanians to leave their jobs.⁵⁷

Long and inflexible working hours

Around 7.3 per cent (of which 70 per cent were females) stated that long and/or inflexible working hours had pushed them to quit. Some of these respondents expressed an inability to work such hours, as well as the exhaustion generated from performing the same tasks for 8 hours straight (e.g. sitting behind a desk or working on a production line). Others stated that they could not handle the overall time spent on long working hours as well as the additional 2 to 3 hours needed to commute to work. Women were especially affected by inflexible working arrangements, citing a clash with family obligations. Many noted that employment prevented them from taking care of their family responsibilities. They stated that they would be able to perform their professional duty to the fullest, provided that they were empowered to choose their own work schedule. The lack of sharing household and parental duties is at the root of this perception.

The lack of social security coverage

Around 6 per cent of respondents cited a lack of social security as a reason to leave their jobs. The lack of social security acts as an incentive to leave because of the incapacity to accumulate benefits. It also deprives young workers from the stability and welfare they would have obtained had they worked in the same organization for a lengthy period.

Personal matters

Around 6 per cent of respondents claimed that their inability to balance work and personal/family life was the reason for departure. In Jordan, it is common for workers to leave their job for personal matters, such as marriage; more than 7 per cent of those who left their jobs in 2017 did so for marital or other personal reasons. While the DoS (2014) reported that only females left their jobs for marriage in 2014, research by RAND (2014) highlighted the rising trend of females' readiness to delay marriage in order to pursue a career. In 2017, the total number of those who left work because of marriage decreased by more than 60 per cent in Jordan from 421 cases in 2014 to 169 in 2017). Around 20 per cent of them were males.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ DoS, 2019.

Short-term contracts

For another 6 per cent of the respondents, they left work because they were only offered a short-term contract, creating insecurity that affected their well-being. Therefore, they sought better opportunities where they would be employed for longer periods. Some respondents claimed that long-term contracts offer benefits beyond a salary. These included sustainable social security coverage, medical insurance for relatives, and a higher credit rating for obtaining finance.

Wasta and discrimination

Nearly 6 per cent of respondents pointed to the prevalence of wasta and favouritism as the main cause for leaving their job. The dominance of wasta in Jordan has been linked with many young people's inability to both secure initial employment or benefit from career advancement.⁵⁹ The frustration stemming from this seemingly unfair situation pushes many young workers to leave work.⁶⁰ According to the German Development Institute (DIE, 2008), a high percentage of youth considered wasta as a clear impediment in the labour market, with many voicing the feeling of being unable to attain certain positions or evolve on the professional ladder because of their lack of personal connections.⁶¹ Hence, for the surveyed respondents, wasta not only impedes them from joining the labour market, but also blocks them from retaining a job and progressing through their career. A few female respondents also reported feeling discriminated against following a pregnancy and/or maternity leave. They cited the practice of being given extra tasks during their pregnancy as a way to compensate for their prospective maternity leave.

Lack of commitment

A share of 5 per cent of respondents indicated a lack of motivation to continue working. Most of them expressed having gradually developed a lack of interest in their position, which led to giving up their jobs. Some of these unmotivated respondents reported having left their previous jobs after feeling “undervalued” or “overlooked” by their managers and colleagues for long periods of time. Other respondents stated that they were “invisible” and that “they brought nothing to the table”. This mindset has proved detrimental to both workers and employers.⁶² Lack of motivation in the workplace begins to show itself through changes in the worker's behaviour (e.g. constant absenteeism or emotional distance from colleagues), and then reductions in their performance and productivity.⁶³ Clear tasks and targets, financial bonuses, team recognition and overall decent work are known to improve commitment.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Ta'Amnha, Sayce and Tregaskis, 2016.

⁶⁰ Loewe, Jonas and Johanna, 2008.

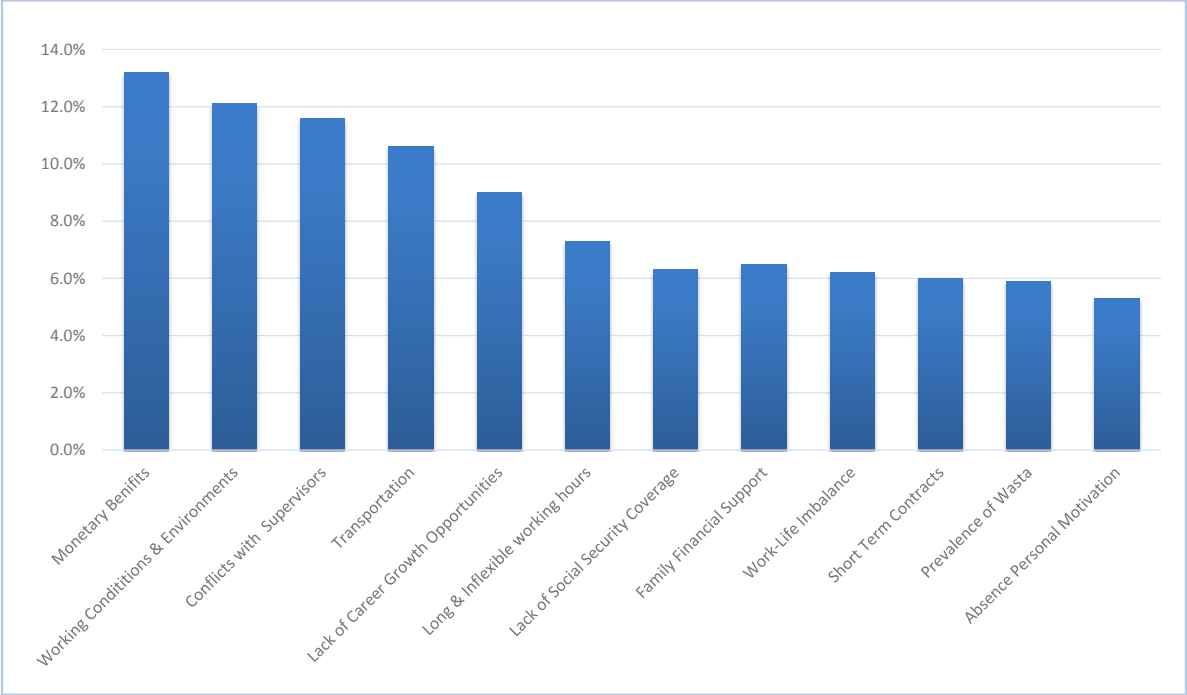
⁶¹ IYF, Job Retention among Young Jordanians, 2014

⁶² Ganta, 2014; MacDonald, Kelly, & Christen, 2019.

⁶³ Pang & Lu, 2018.

⁶⁴ Ormel, et al., 2019; Ferraro, Pais, Moreira & Dos Santos, 2018.

Figure 10: Main reasons for leaving the job



Conclusion

Youth unemployment in Jordan is undeniably high at 39.1 per cent, while over 56 per cent of BDC graduates reported being unemployed at the time of data collection, despite actively searching for a job for over 3 years in some cases. The majority of respondents had changed jobs multiple times since they started working, despite their young age, with an average stay of less than 6 months for almost half of the sample – regardless of their sex or academic achievement.

The telephone questionnaire revealed some insights into the reasons behind this phenomenon. Based on these findings, the present paper makes the following recommendations for future action:

- Ensuring decent work should not be seen as a cost, but rather as an investment in human resource development for companies and organizations. Indeed, decent working conditions will attract more young Jordanians to remain in work, meaning a lower turnover rate, thereby reducing a number of organizational costs.
- A fair income should take into account the cost of living and be regularly reviewed in light of inflation. At the same time, collective bargaining agreements – such as those in the education and garment sectors – should be extended to other sectors and take into account the skills and competencies of workers, with appropriate wage levels.
- Enforcement of the labour code should be strengthened to improve the attractiveness of jobs to Jordanians, thereby increasing employment levels. To this end, proposed reforms of the labour inspection system, with a strategic compliance approach, is welcomed.
- The impact of *wasta* on employment levels remains unclear; in a situation of over-supply of jobseekers equipped with relevant competencies, *wasta* has been used as a discriminating criterion. However, this assumes that employers have a clear understanding of the tasks and competencies required. Yet first-hand evidence from the field has proven otherwise, and many recruitment processes in Jordan are, in fact, entirely informal. In such situations, *wasta* can potentially harm productivity and the capacity of the private sector to generate jobs, especially when used as an alternative recruitment process. This should be tackled as a policy issue by the Government of Jordan.
- HRD management systems need to be strengthened, especially in small companies. Performance management linked to clear career prospects is necessary for retaining workers.
- Evidence from this paper highlights the dire need for young Jordanians to “skill up”, especially in terms of “soft” skills like self-discipline and resilience to work-related stress. However, in a context where compliance with the labour code and decent work principles is low, or at least uncertain, the need for improving skills should be implemented in parallel with improved compliance, and not as an alternative.

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