



U.S. Embassy Amman



# Understanding Youth Decision-Making in Jordan

## A Behavioral Analysis

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# List of Acronyms

|              |                                                  |
|--------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CBO</b>   | Community-Based Organization                     |
| <b>CSO</b>   | Civil Society Organization                       |
| <b>DoS</b>   | Department of Statistics                         |
| <b>EMV</b>   | Economic Modernization Vision                    |
| <b>EFA</b>   | Exploratory Factor Analysis                      |
| <b>FGD</b>   | Focus Group Discussion                           |
| <b>GOJ</b>   | Government of Jordan                             |
| <b>IDI</b>   | In-Depth Interview                               |
| <b>KII</b>   | Key Informant Interview                          |
| <b>LOI</b>   | Line of Inquiry                                  |
| <b>MoDEE</b> | Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship |
| <b>MoE</b>   | Ministry of Education                            |
| <b>MoL</b>   | Ministry of Labor                                |
| <b>MoY</b>   | Ministry of Youth                                |
| <b>NEET</b>  | Not in Employment, Education, or Training        |
| <b>NES</b>   | National Education Strategy                      |
| <b>NGO</b>   | Non-Governmental Organization                    |
| <b>NYS</b>   | National Youth Strategy                          |
| <b>OOSY</b>  | Out of School Youth                              |
| <b>PWD</b>   | Persons with Disabilities                        |
| <b>SBC</b>   | Social and Behavior Change                       |
| <b>SEM</b>   | Structural Equation Modeling                     |
| <b>TVET</b>  | Technical and Vocational Education and Training  |
| <b>VTC</b>   | Vocational Training Corporation                  |
| <b>YC</b>    | Youth Center                                     |
| <b>YGA</b>   | Youth Grow Activity                              |

# Executive Summary

## Context

Jordan's youth population represents a critical driver of the country's future economic resilience and social stability. However, young people face a constrained environment shaped by high unemployment, economic uncertainty, and strong social expectations around acceptable life pathways. While youth engagement in education, employment, and civic participation remains a national priority, the

challenge is not a lack of motivation. Rather, young people are actively assessing which opportunities are credible, accessible, and worth pursuing within their context. Understanding how youth make these decisions is essential for designing programs that can effectively support their transitions into productive and meaningful pathways.

## Methodology

This study applied a mixed-methods approach engaging **1,344 youth across Jordan** combining a nationally representative quantitative survey with in-depth qualitative research (including focus groups, workshops, and interviews) to capture both broad patterns and lived experiences. Using a behavioral lens, the research examined how young people interpret signals from their environment and make decisions about education,

work, and participation. This analysis resulted in a segmentation of youth into six distinct groups based on shared decision-making patterns.

By moving beyond demographic characteristics, this approach provides actionable insight into behavior—enabling programs to be tailored to how youth actually assess risk, build trust, and engage with opportunities.

## Key Findings

- **Youth are motivated, but highly selective in a constrained market.** Young people demonstrate ambition and persistence, but engage only when opportunities are clearly linked to real income or employment prospects in Jordan's limited labor market, aligned with their goals, and socially endorsed by family or trusted networks.
- **Perceived risk is heightened by economic pressure and limited safety nets.** Fear of failure is amplified by financial constraints, high unemployment, and the cost of “*wrong*” decisions—leading many youth to avoid unfamiliar pathways (e.g., digital freelancing, entrepreneurship, or non-traditional vocational tracks) that is perceived not ensuring immediate or stable returns.
- **Trust is built through visible, local success.** Youth are more likely to engage in opportunities that show clear, short-term results within their communities—such as peers securing income, freelance work, or employment.
- **Clarity is favored.** With unclear transitions between education, training, and employment in Jordan, youth prioritize opportunities that offer structured, step-by-step pathways linked to recognized certifications and credible job outcomes.
- **Social norms and family expectations strongly shape decisions.** Choices around education and work are heavily influenced by family preferences, perceptions of respectable professions, and socially accepted pathways—often favoring stability, public sector employment, or known career tracks.

# Youth Segments and Programmatic Implications

- **Stability-Seeking Youth:** Prefer safe, predictable pathways that minimize social and financial risk. They turn to their social circles when making decisions.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver soft skills development (confidence, stress management, readiness) through small-group, low-visibility sessions in accessible local centers, with transport support and flexible timing to reduce risk and barriers.
- **Community-Guided Youth:** Base decisions on what they have seen work for people around them, with a focus on short-term, immediate outcomes.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver apprenticeships with peer-to-peer learning that visibly link skills to local income opportunities, activated through trusted community networks.
- **Clarity-Seeking Youth:** Actively seek structure and imagine their lives as a sequence of steps towards long-term goals. Their sense of self-discipline motivates them to engage when pathways show logical progression.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver career planning and pathway navigation support using clear, step-by-step roadmaps linked to certification and employment through accredited providers.
- **Self-Driven Youth:** Accept uncertainty and constraints as a part of life, staying confident in their ability to independently make the right decisions based on information available to them and their own hopes for the future.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver multi-path exposure to internships, apprenticeships, and volunteer opportunities through flexible, modular programs that enable exploration and informed choice.
- **Value-Driven Youth:** Make choices based on purpose, ethics, and alignment with personal values. They engage deeply when opportunities feel meaningful and disengage from those that feel hollow.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver social entrepreneurship and volunteering pathways that clearly connect participation to community impact and meaningful contribution.
- **Systems-Guided Youth:** Live in constant contradiction between desperation for long-term stability for themselves and their families, and a feeling of inability to plan beyond the immediate-term when life around them seems to change constantly.
  - ▶ **Recommendation:** Deliver career counselling and accredited vocational training through recognized institutions, with strong signaling of certification, job security, and family endorsement.

# Introduction

## Background

Jordan is a young country, demographically and socially. Nearly 28% of its population is between 15 and 29,<sup>i</sup> representing more than three million youth whose choices will shape the country's economic, civic, and social future. Youth in Jordan are entering adulthood at a time when pathways into education, work, and participation look increasingly diverse. Instead of following a single linear route, youth grow and move between learning, employment, caregiving, and community roles in ways that reflect changing social and economic conditions. These shifts mean that youth have a wider set of choices and transitions than previous generations, each shaped by their own circumstances, resources, and expectations.

Many youth complete school and university but struggle to turn their qualifications into meaningful work. One in four youth aged 15–24 is not in employment, education, or training, and young women are overrepresented within this group.<sup>ii</sup> Unemployment remains above 30%,<sup>iii</sup> especially for rural youth and recent graduates. While these challenges are often framed as structural, youth outcomes are also shaped by behavioral and

contextual factors, which influence how much effort youth invest in themselves and what they expect from the future.

Jordan's national policies, the Economic Modernization Vision, Education Strategic Plan, and National Youth Strategy consistently place youth at the center of the country's economic and social ambitions. These frameworks call for stronger skills, wider access to opportunity, and more meaningful forms of participation. At the same time, the range of programs and initiatives supporting youth has expanded, creating a rich but varied landscape of services across learning, wellbeing, and engagement. These efforts shape the environment in which youth make decisions and grow into adulthood.

For this reason, understanding how youth interpret opportunities, weigh risks, and navigate their environments is essential. This report draws on national behavioral research to bring youth perspectives to the center of analysis, providing insight into how decisions are formed, not only the constraints youth face.

## Why This Study Matters

Youth in Jordan navigate transitions characterized by uncertainty, diverse pathways, and varying levels of institutional support, and this makes understanding their perceptions, expectations, and decision-making processes essential for designing policies and programs that resonate with their lived realities. While youth demonstrate adaptability and aspiration, it remains unclear how environmental signals shape perceptions of which pathways are credible, worthwhile, or possible. These signals influence core behavioral mechanisms, such as motivation, risk avoidance, and expectation-setting, which shape how youth choose between options. Therefore, what matters is not only what opportunities exist, but how youth perceive them.

This study is timely. Economic pressures, rising living costs, and fluctuating trust in institutions intersect with regional instability, while national strategies position youth as central to Jordan's economic

and civic future. These conditions underscore why a behavioral perspective is useful for interpreting youth experiences. This report examines how assets, opportunities, and incentives shape the ways youth navigate education, work, and participation.

The key premise of this study is that even among youth who share similar backgrounds and demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, or place of residence, behavior can differ widely based on the relationships and lived experiences that shape how they interpret opportunities and constraints. Recognizing this diversity is essential for understanding youth beyond surface-level categories and for avoiding assumptions that demographic similarity translates into uniform needs or responses. When behavioral differences are explicitly examined and understood, programs can move from broad targeting toward more precise, behavior-informed interventions, allowing

resources to be allocated more effectively and deliver interventions that resonate with youth's everyday decisions and priorities. In Jordan, this perspective is increasingly important as national strategies emphasize youth participation, economic competitiveness, and skills development, yet little is

known about how youth themselves perceive these commitments or how their day-to-day experiences influence decision-making across education, work, and community life. This study aims to fill that gap by generating a clearer behavioral understanding of youth motivations, perceptions, and choices.

## Research Objectives

This analysis aims to generate a deeper understanding of how youth in Jordan make choices that shape their **engagement in education and training** and their **transition into gainful employment**, and how these choices are influenced by the systems and environments around them. Rather than treating participation and employment as fixed outcomes, the study examines how youth interpret available opportunities, assess feasibility and risk, and decide where to invest effort, persist, adapt, or change direction over time. By analyzing these decision-making processes, the study explains observed patterns of engagement and disengagement and identifies how systems either reinforce or undermine sustained youth participation in education and employment pathways. Specifically:

### Behavior 1: Youth participate in education and training

This refers to whether and how youth enroll in, continue with, pause, switch, or disengage from education and skills-building pathways. The analysis explores how youth decisions to participate or withdraw are shaped by perceptions of feasibility, expected payoff, relevance to future goals, and the credibility of education and training systems over time.

### Behavior 2: Youth seek gainful employment

This behavior refers to whether and how youth seek, enter, remain in, or exit employment pathways that are perceived as either secure, dignified, or capable of supporting growth or stability. Gainful employment is understood broadly, beyond immediate income generation, to include work that could offer continuity, progression, or long-term viability. The analysis examines how youth decisions to pursue or avoid specific employment pathways are influenced by labor market signals, social expectations, economic pressure, and trust in systems.

Across the report, references to youth decision-making refer specifically to the decisions youth make toward participating in education and training and toward seeking and sustaining gainful employment. Decision-making is treated as the behavioral mechanism through which these two outcomes are realized, shaped, delayed, or abandoned over time. Rather than analyzing participation and employment as fixed outcomes, the study examines how youth continuously evaluate opportunities, reassess feasibility and risk, and adjust their level of effort in response to changing personal circumstances and system-level signals. The objectives are therefore structured to unpack the key decision points and behavioral determinants that influence whether youth persist in, disengage from, or reorient their education and employment pathways:

1. Identify the key decision points that shape youth participation in education and training and their pursuit of gainful employment, including decisions to enroll, persist, switch pathways, delay, or disengage over time.
2. Examine how youth assess feasibility, risk, and expected returns when deciding whether to invest effort in education/training or employment pathways, including the influence of social norms, perceived access, and anticipated trade-offs.
3. Explore how systems and environments shape youth engagement in education and gainful employment, including how education systems, labor markets, economic conditions, and broader social pressures expand or constrain agency and affect sustained participation in pathways perceived as stable and meaningful.

## Analytical Outputs

In addition to the core behavioral analysis, the study generates a set of analytical outputs designed to translate insight into practical use. These outputs support youth-centered program design, segmentation, and ongoing application of the findings:

1. Translate behavioral determinants into clear implications for programming, showing how youth motivations, perceptions, and decision-making processes can inform more relevant, inclusive, and effective interventions.
2. Develop distinct youth personas that capture how different groups interpret opportunities, perceive constraints, and pursue their goals, enabling accurate segmentation and youth-centered programs.
3. Identify practical tools, indicators, and analytical frameworks that help position youth within segments and support ongoing classification within youth development systems.

## Navigating the Report

The report is designed to move from evidence to interpretation and then to action. It begins with the methodology, which outlines the research approach and the behavioral and PYD framework guiding the analysis. The findings are presented across the four PYD domains; Assets, Agency, Contribution, and Enabling Environment, using evidence-based patterns, insights, and behavioral interpretations. A cross-domain analysis highlights behavioral themes that cut across youth experiences, followed by implications for programming to inform more responsive and effective youth-focused initiatives in Jordan. The report concludes with a behavioral segmentation that outlines youth personas and decision-making tendencies.

# Methodology

## Analytical & Design Framework

The study is grounded in a behavioral perspective that examines how youth interpret opportunities, weigh risks, and make decisions within the social, economic, and institutional conditions that shape their daily lives. The study uses the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, a holistic approach that emphasizes youth strengths, assets, and capabilities rather than only addressing their constraint or risks.

PYD is centered around the idea that youth can thrive and contribute positively to their communities when they have access to opportunities and supportive environments, and when youth-relevant system actors recognize and engage their potential. Moreover, this framework highlights the importance of positive relationships, meaningful participation, and fostering a sense of agency, belonging, and competence. **The PYD framework is structured around four key domains:**

- **Assets:** Resources, skills, and support systems that youth can build on and actively engage with to develop their full potential.
- **Agency:** The ability of youth to make decisions, influence their own lives, and act on their goals.
- **Contribution:** Youth are encouraged and able to contribute to their communities.
- **Enabling Environment:** Policies, systems, and cultural norms that promote youth development.

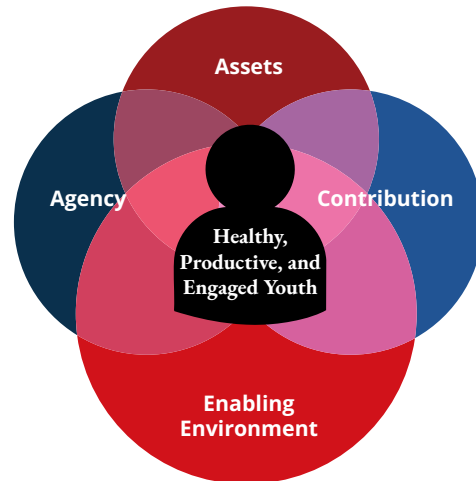


Figure 1: Positive Youth Development (PYD)

The PYD framework aligns seamlessly with this study's focus as it provides a structured lens for examining how youth develop their capabilities and participate in society, allowing the research to go beyond traditional research that assesses youth needs and constraints to highlight how the enabling environment, resources, and youth agency shape perceptions and behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the PYD framework informed the design of the mixed-methods research approach, ensuring that each phase of data collection, desk review, qualitative exploration, national survey, and segmentation, generated insight not just into what youth do, but why they do it, and what this means for programming.

## A Mixed Methods Approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach grounded in behavioral science to address a core limitation of single-method youth research: the inability to explain not only what choices youth make, but why they make them under conditions of uncertainty and constraint. Understanding youth decision-making required capturing both observable patterns at scale and the underlying

perceptions, motivations, and trade-offs shaping those patterns. The design therefore integrated four complementary components: desk research, qualitative exploration, a national survey, and behavioral segmentation, each selected to answer a distinct behavioral question and intentionally sequenced to build on one another.

<sup>1</sup> Annex (1) shows extended definitions of the PYD domains, their subdomains, and the behavioral lines of inquiry that informed tool development and analysis.

## 1. Desk Review & Systems Mapping

- Desk review of 30 research, evaluation, and program reports.
- Mapping of youth-relevant national strategies, including EMV, NYS, and NES.
- Targeted scan of youth-focused initiatives, and programs over the past 18 months.
- Five interviews with youth-focused practitioners and experts to contextualize policy and program dynamics.

## 2. Qualitative Exploration

- Twelve focus group discussions across all governorates to explore youth behaviors, perceptions, and shared experiences.
- Six in-depth interviews with young persons with disabilities to examine differentiated barriers and needs.

## 3. Quantitative Measurement

- 1,120 structured surveys to quantify attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions across the youth population.

## 4. Behavioral Segmentation

- Six semi-structured workshops based on the identified youth segmented to examine specific drivers and patterns.
- Six in-depth interviews with youth representing segment profiles to validate and refine behavioral insights.

## Desk Review and Systems Mapping

The first evidence source of this study was a review that drew on over 30 recent reports, policy documents, program evaluations, and strategic frameworks produced by government entities, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners. Sources were selected based on recency (2017-2025), institutional credibility (e.g., UN agencies, ministries, INGOs), and relevance to at least one of the PYD domains. This mapping clarifies the institutional and systems landscape surrounding youth, including national priorities, service delivery structures, and the range of opportunities adults intend for youth to access, setting a foundation for deeper behavioral insights. The sources included the National Youth Strategy, National Education Strategy, the Economic Modernization Vision, and recent government initiatives, providing a top-level view of how youth issues are framed and where investments are being made.

To complement this, five Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with youth-focused practitioners and experts were conducted to surface implementation

realities, emerging gaps, and areas where current programming does not align with youth behavior or expectations. This phase provided the systems-level reference points needed to design the qualitative and quantitative tools: identifying which institutions and programs define the opportunity landscape, and where deeper behavioral insight was required.

## Qualitative Exploration

To understand how youth interpret their environments and make decisions in daily life, the study conducted 12 focus group discussions, engaging 96 youth across all governorates, representing diverse profiles and lived realities. These discussions explored the motivations, emotional drivers, perceived barriers, and social norms that shape behavior across education, work, and community engagement. They also examined how youth evaluate the credibility of opportunities, manage trade-offs, and make sense of uncertainty. In parallel, six in-depth interviews were conducted with young persons with disabilities to capture differentiated behavioral experiences, particularly around accessibility, support networks, and institutional trust.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Annex (2) shows full sampling frames and disaggregated distributions.

This qualitative phase generated the behavioral hypotheses that guided the design of the national survey and the variables used in the segmentation model. It identified the patterns, mental models, and decision logics that required quantitative testing, and clarified the specific areas where behavioral variation between youth groups was expected. These insights ensured that the subsequent phases measured not only what youth do, but why they do it, and what it means for decision-making at the program design level.

## Quantitative Measurement

A nationally representative survey was administered to 1,120 youth aged 15-29 across the North, Center, and South regions. The sample was proportionally allocated by region, gender, and age group to reflect the distribution of the youth population in Jordan. The survey was designed to measure youth attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions through indicators aligned with the PYD framework. This structure allowed the quantitative analysis to map behavioral patterns across the four PYD domains, and to support a coherent, framework-driven interpretation of youth experiences.<sup>3</sup>

## Behavioral Segmentation Workshops

Following the survey analysis, six semi-structured workshops were held with 42 youth representing the behavioral clusters identified in the segmentation model.<sup>4</sup> The sessions were designed to validate the quantitative clustering and to explore how youth within each segment understand their decisions, priorities, and interpretations of opportunity. These discussions helped clarify the motivations, perceived constraints, and coping strategies that characterize each behavioral profile. All workshops were facilitated by youth practitioners experienced in the thematic areas explored, ensuring an environment where participants felt understood and supported. The facilitators' hands on thematic expertise helped ground discussions in real-life practice and strengthened the interpretation of behavioral patterns. These workshops were not treated as an independent analytical dataset, but as a participatory validation and interpretation step to sense-check and refine the behavioural meaning of the quantitative segments.



To deepen this insight, six complementary in-depth interviews were conducted with youth who embodied specific segment characteristics. These interviews provided richer narratives around

confidence, planning, social expectations, and trust, helping identify the mechanisms that distinguish segments and the conditions that enable or limit behavior across groups.

<sup>3</sup> Annex (2) shows full sampling frames and disaggregated distributions.

<sup>4</sup> Annex (2) shows full sampling frames and disaggregated distributions.

# Analytical Techniques

The data analysis drew on qualitative and quantitative techniques, interpreted through a behavioral lens to build a coherent and multi-layered interpretation of youth experiences in Jordan. Rather than one stream driving the others, each dataset was used to interpret and contextualize the others, allowing behavioral patterns identified in one phase to be examined, compared, or clarified through another. This iterative triangulation supported a more complete understanding of how youth think, decide, and act across different environments.

## Qualitative Data Analysis & Thematic Coding

This analytical process was applied across all qualitative data sources, including focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and segmentation workshops. The qualitative data was analyzed using a structured, multi-step process designed to surface behavioral patterns across youth experiences while maintaining consistency with the PYD framework. The analysis focused on understanding how youth interpret opportunities, form expectations, and navigate pressures across different contexts. This process included:

- **Developing the Coding Framework:** A coding structure grounded in the PYD domains, and the behavioral lines of inquiry was developed to organize word for word transcripts, ensuring alignment between the analytical framework and the qualitative data.
- **Theme Generation and Pattern Identification:** Transcripts were coded using MAXQDA to identify recurring ideas related to perceptions, motivations, constraints, norms, and decision-making logics. Emphasis was placed on how youth explain their choices, evaluate opportunity credibility, and navigate perceived risks and trade-offs.
- **Cross-Case Comparison:** Coded data was compared across gender, region, age group, and disability status to surface variations in experiences, interpretations, and behavioral tendencies. These comparative insights informed which areas required quantitative testing.
- **Triangulation and Interpretation:** Themes were synthesized to identify behavioral hypotheses and clarify where youth narratives converged or diverged. These insights guided

the design of the survey constructs and the variables used in the segmentation model.

## Quantitative Data Analysis & Exploratory Factor Analysis

The quantitative dataset, populated through survey responses, was analyzed through two complementary streams: (1) PYD-aligned descriptive analysis to understand behavioral patterns across youth, and (2) behavioral segmentation analysis to identify distinct clusters of youth based on attitudes, motivations, and perceptions. Both streams supported triangulation with qualitative insights and provided the statistical structure needed for persona development. This process included:

### PYD-Aligned Descriptive Analysis

- **Constructing PYD indicators:** Survey items aligned with each PYD domain were grouped to measure key behavioral dimensions such as confidence, perceived relevance of education, motivation, future planning, community participation, and trust.
- **Running descriptive and disaggregated analysis:** All indicators were analyzed at the total population level and disaggregated by gender, age group, region, disability status, and education enrollment to identify meaningful behavioral variation.
- **Testing statistical differences:** Significant subgroup differences were assessed using z-tests at the 5% level, highlighting where perceptions or behaviors diverged across youth groups.

This provided a behavioral map of how assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment differ across the youth population and helped identify which patterns required deeper interpretation through segmentation.

### Behavioral Segmentation Analysis

To identify behaviorally distinct groups of youth rather than relying on demographic categories alone, a multi-step segmentation procedure was carried out. The process combined factor analysis with hierarchical and k-means clustering to classify youth into meaningful behavioral profiles. The analysis followed a four-step process:

- **Variable Selection & Preparation:** Attitudinal and behavioral items were selected based on the qualitative phase and the PYD framework. Items with flat-lining or insufficient variation were removed to avoid noise. Variables were kept only if they captured meaningful behavioral differences.
- **Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA):** This statistical technique was used to group related survey items into broader behavioral dimensions which reduced the number of variables and ensured that the segmentation was based on meaningful patterns rather than isolated questions.
- **Hierarchical Clustering:** An initial clustering method was applied to the behavioral dimensions to identify how many distinct youth groups naturally appeared in the data. This step highlighted where differences between groups were strongest.
- **K-Means Clustering:** A second clustering method was then used to refine and validate the group allocations. Each respondent was assigned to the segment they most closely resembled based on their behavioral patterns.

This two-stage clustering procedure ensured that the final segments were statistically robust, behaviorally meaningful, and distinct enough to support persona development for targeted program design. Segmentation was therefore used not only to classify youth statistically, but to support behavioural interpretation of how different groups assess opportunity, risk, and agency.

## Triangulation and Meaning Making

Triangulation was a core analytical strategy used to ensure that insights reflected not only what youth reported, but how patterns held across qualitative, quantitative, and systems-level evidence. The

process focused on building a coherent behavioral interpretation rather than treating each dataset in isolation. This process included:

- **Cross-referencing qualitative narratives with survey patterns:** Insights from the qualitative phase shaped the survey design, while survey findings confirmed, qualified, or challenged early behavioral interpretations. This allowed the study to distinguish common behaviors from subgroup-specific patterns.
- **Using qualitative data to interpret statistical results:** Youth narratives were revisited to understand why certain attitudes clustered together, how youth assessed trade-offs, and what emotional or structural drivers shaped the choices revealed in the quantitative data.
- **Validating behavioral tendencies through segmentation workshops:** Behavioral patterns identified in the survey were taken back to the youth through semi-structured workshops, where participants contextualized, refined, or corrected the tendencies associated with their segments.
- **Sense-checking findings with youth specialists:** A final validation workshop with 12 practitioners from government and NGOs was used to test the plausibility, relevance, and practical implications of emerging insights. This ensured alignment with real program delivery contexts.

This process ensured that meaning making and interpretation were iterative rather than sequential. Each dataset was used to interpret the others, producing insights that were behaviorally grounded, empirically validated, and contextually credible. This approach strengthened the reliability of the findings and ensured that the behavioral insight emerging from the study was both analytically rigorous and programmatically actionable.

## Research Limitations

- **Insights on youth with disabilities:** Youth with disabilities were intentionally targeted to ensure their perspectives were reflected in the analysis. While the subgroup population size limits statistical comparability with larger groups, the findings provide meaningful behavioral indications that enrich the overall interpretation
- **Segmentation workshops were conducted in one governorate:** To balance analytical depth, accessibility, and safeguarding considerations, workshops were localized to a single governorate selected based on the concentration of key youth segments identified in the quantitative analysis. The workshops served as interpretive spaces for refining segments, not representative samples

of each segment. Their insights help explain behavioral patterns but may not fully capture how those patterns manifest across regions or among different demographic groups.

- **Focused on youth between 15-29:** This age group was selected due to ethical and developmental considerations requiring separate tools, ethical protocols, and analysis frameworks; therefore, the findings reflect this group experiences and can't be extended beyond it.
- **Reliance on self-reported data:** Interviews, discussions, and surveys depended on the youth's willingness to disclose sensitive experiences and on their ability to recall behaviors accurately. Topics such as family

conflict, financial hardship, stress, or civic participation may be underreported, potentially introducing bias into certain behavioral indicators.

- **Limited measurement of structural determinants:** The survey was intentionally developed to measure youth behavior in alignment with the PYD framework; it did not directly measure structural variables such as household economic conditions, school quality, or local service availability. Therefore, the study explains how and why youth behave in certain ways but cannot statistically model the broader structural factors that shape behavioral outcomes.

## Ethical Considerations

This study was designed and implemented in full compliance with national ethical requirements and international standards for research involving youth. Prior to data collection, approval for the data collection activities was formally obtained from the Jordanian Department of Statistics (DoS), in accordance with their procedures for research involving human subjects.

- **Informed Consent and Age Procedures:** All participants were informed of the study's purpose, their rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Youth aged 18–29 provided direct consent. For participants aged 15–17, assent was obtained alongside parental or guardian consent, with language and examples adapted to ensure comprehension.
- **Safeguarding and Participant Wellbeing:** Safeguarding principles guided all stages of data collection. Facilitators were trained to identify distress, pause or discontinue sessions when needed, and ensure discussions remained within safe, non-sensitive boundaries. Sessions were conducted in private, neutral locations, and no personally identifying data was collected beyond what was operationally required.
- **Engaging Youth with Disabilities:** A rights-based, participant-led approach shaped engagement with youth with disabilities. Recruitment, consent, and interview procedures were adapted to accessibility needs, with interviews held in comfortable and accessible locations. Data collectors used disability-inclusive facilitation techniques, including

adjusting pacing, verifying comfort, and offering communication support. Caregivers were allowed to remain present only when necessary to support participation, following mitigation measures to minimize influence and uphold privacy. Youth with disabilities represented 12.6% of the quantitative sample, an intentional level of inclusion that enabled meaningful behavioral analysis and stronger disaggregation across the study.

# Study Population Profile

A total of 1,344 young people across Jordan contributed to this study, reflecting a wide range of backgrounds, life circumstances, and opportunity environments. The study population included youth from the three regions of Jordan (North, Center, South), urban and rural areas, and different educational, gender, and disability groups, ensuring that the behavioral patterns identified capture the diversity of youth pathways across the country. Across the full sample:

- **Gender:** 671 young men and 673 young women
- **Region:** 370 from the North, 377 from the Center, and 373 from the South
- **Age:** 451 aged 15-19, 404 aged 20-24, and 265 aged 25-29
- **Residence:** 560 from urban areas and 560 from rural areas
- **Education pathways:** 445 enrolled in formal education and 675 not enrolled
- **Disability:** 146 young people with disabilities and 1,198 without disabilities

In addition to the national survey, young people participated in discussions, workshops, and interviews to enable deeper behavioral interpretation. This included 96 youth in focus group discussions, 36 in behavioral segmentation workshops, and 18 in in-depth interviews (including 6 with young persons with disabilities). These engagements ensured strong representation of different behavioral profiles, levels of access, and everyday constraints.

The study population reflects the breadth of youth experiences in Jordan, from students navigating structured systems, to young people out of school forging their own paths, to youth with disabilities negotiating inaccessible environments, to those living in both well-resourced and underserved areas. This diversity is central to interpreting how young people think, plan, and act within the opportunities available to them.

# Key Findings

The key findings presented in this chapter are organized according to the PYD framework, which provides a structured lens for understanding how youth's assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment to interact to shape their life

pathways. This chapter brings together quantitative results from the survey, with the lived experiences and perspectives shared by youth in focus group discussions or in-depth interviews.

## Assets

This domain explores the foundational resources, skills, and support systems that youth require to reach their full potential and to participate meaningfully in education, training, and employment pathways. In this study, “*assets*” include tangible factors like education, skill development, and access to opportunities, and emotional resilience, access to accurate information, and supportive social connections. The focus will be on understanding how the resources and perceived needs of youth shape decisions to invest in, continue, or withdraw from education, training, or early employment pathways.

### Education

Education is a central asset shaping how youth understand the possibilities of their futures. Its influence extends beyond academic content to what it represents, from credibility and mobility to a pathway toward security. Across the study, youth evaluate education through behavioral filters such as whether it feels relevant, whether effort seems worthwhile, whether expectations are clear, and

how the people around them talk about the system. These interpretations shape how youth invest effort, cope with pressure, or adjust their plans. Viewing education through this behavioral lens clarifies the mechanisms behind youth motivation, frustration, and continuation.

### Perceived Relevance and Value

Youth see education as a core asset that shapes their future possibilities, and interpret its value through a combination of expectations, social meaning, and perceived return on investment. Youth consistently link education to economic security and social recognition. Around 8 in 10 youth consider earning a higher income a very or extremely important reason to pursue education (78%), or with gaining useful life skills (76%), and 7 in 10 viewing it as a way to gain respect or improve social standing (72%), connecting it to finding a good job (70%), or seeing it as a way to contribute to their community (69%). These motivations show that youth treat education as both an economic investment and a social indicator that affirms their place within society.

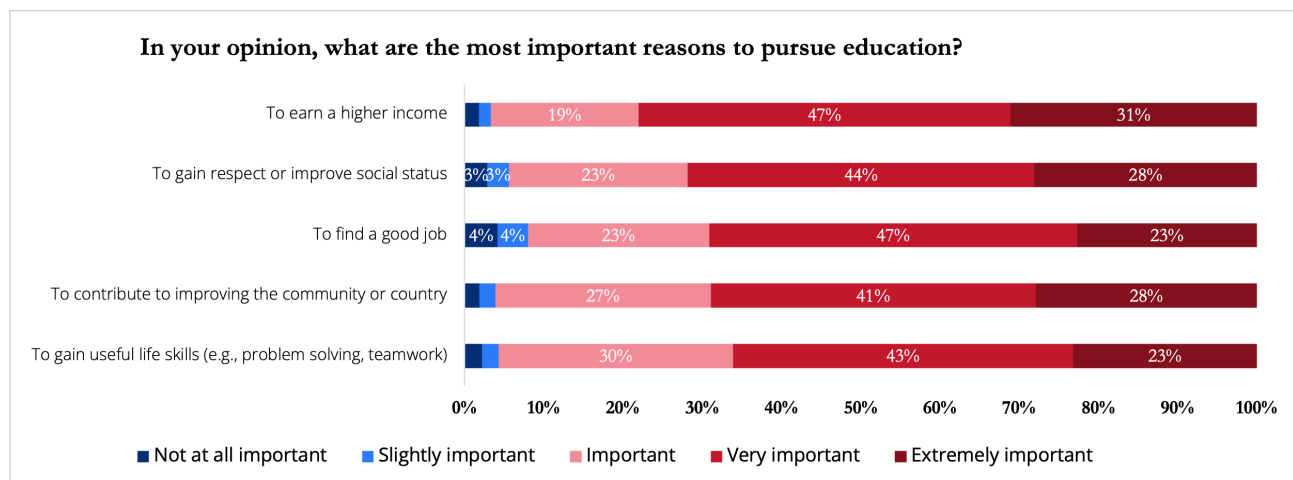


Figure 2: Motivating factors to pursuit of education (n=1120)

High school certificate (Tawjihi) stands out as a strong example of how the symbolic value of education shapes youth behavior. 77% of youth consider completing Tawjihi very or extremely important, describing it as a marker of legitimacy, decisive step toward adulthood, and a milestone that determines who “qualifies” for higher education or for better work. A male participant in Amman mentioned

*“Here [in Jordan], if you don’t finish Tawjihi, people think you’re a complete failure.”* This shows that education is seen as a basic marker of success or respect, where many youth feel pressure to enroll to avoid being judged or seen as failing. This adds a social pressure that becomes part of how they decide whether to persist, how hard to try, and whether to remain engaged in education.

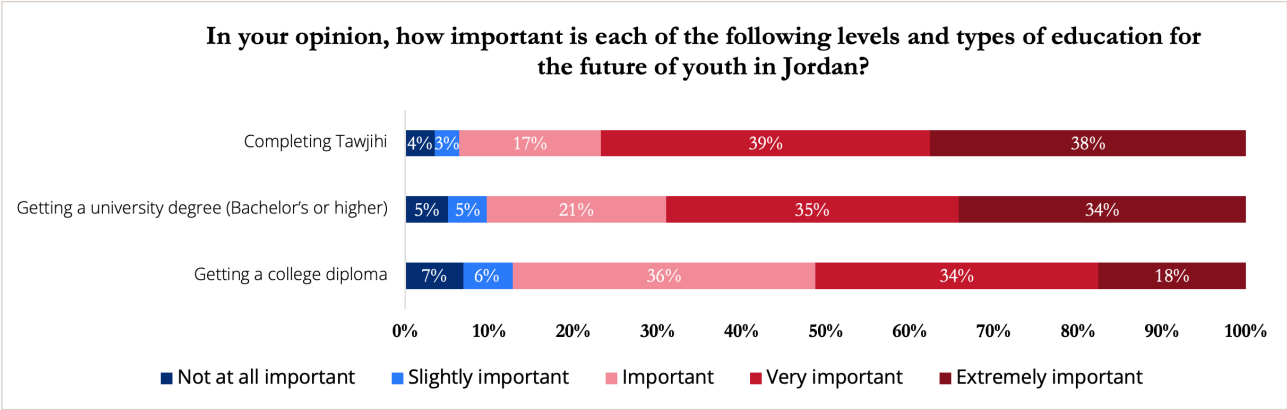


Figure 3: Perceived importance of education types and levels (n=1120)

University degrees also carry symbolic value. Youth interpret higher education as a prerequisite for professional stability and as evidence of self-worth, even when they are uncertain about employment prospects. A female from Zarqa noted, *“My salary would be higher and my working hours fewer, because the higher your academic degree, the fewer working hours you have.”* Another young woman in Karak described university as central to her aspirations of being self-dependent *“The dream of any average girl is to enter university... become*

*financially independent... support herself, become self-sufficient.”* These beliefs shape what youth expect from school and university, the goals they set for themselves, and the choices they make about continuing, changing direction, or investing more effort. In practice, youth are more likely to stay enrolled, push through academic pressure, or reconsider their study plans based on how strongly they believe a degree will secure stability and social recognition.



At the same time, some youth question whether educational returns are equally accessible, particularly when they do not see education translating into practical readiness for life after graduation. Some of the experiences shared that youth sometimes believe education only pays off if their family has money or connections. For them, getting a degree is not enough on its own, and what your family can support still affects the opportunities you can realistically reach. This uncertainty is reinforced by perceptions that universities focus more on academic content than on preparing students for real-world and labor market challenges. A young man from Tafila noted, *“I feel that universities really need to work more on focusing on the student to prepare them for life after graduation.”* A young man in Madaba added, *“Even if you study at university, most people have degrees but work in jobs unrelated to their field.”* These perceptions affect how youth judge fairness, evaluate effort, and decide which pathways feel worthwhile. When youth feel the system rewards money, connections, or credentials without practical preparation or sustained effort, they may start doubting whether their investment will pay off, which directly shapes decisions to continue investing in education or to disengage and pursue alternative pathways.

Despite these doubts, many youth still recognize education as meaningful for personal growth and

skills development beyond formal academics. Survey findings show that almost half of respondents (46%) feel very or extremely prepared in soft skills such as communication and teamwork, even as fewer (37%) feel similarly prepared in technical or academic skills. Youth describe school and university as spaces where they gain confidence, social awareness, sense of belonging and exposure to different perspectives, even when academic content feels less useful. A participant from Karak put it, *“The school prepares you for many things in life... at least it gives you the foundation to build on.”* And a young man from Irbid added, *“You learn how to talk to people... you get different opinions and perspectives.”* A male participant with a disability in Amman shared, *“The most important thing I learned at university wasn’t English... I learned to understand society.”*

As youth gain exposure to work and adult responsibilities, they reassess the value of different aspects of their education: soft skills are often seen as enablers for confidence and adaptability, while gaps in technical or job-relevant skills shape how prepared they feel to transition into employment or further training. Behaviorally, this reflects how confidence, identity formation, and social connection act as powerful motivators that sustain engagement in education, even when the practical returns of learning are perceived as uncertain or delayed.

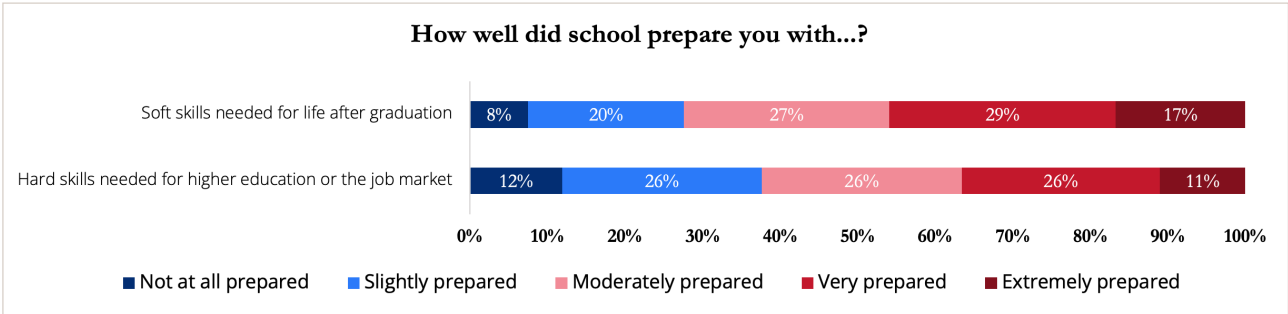


Figure 4: Perceived role of school education on youth skill-building (n=1120)

### Frustrations and Disillusionments

Youth aspirations for education are strong, and daily experiences shape how predictable and practically relevant schooling feels to them. Youth frustrations are shaped by how they interpret the signals they receive in classrooms, whether learning feels relevant, whether effort is rewarded fairly, or whether teachers and institutions treat them with respect. When these signals do not align with their expectations, youth begin to question the value of staying engaged, which shapes their motivation and confidence.

### Perceived Inequities Between Public and Private Education

Youth spoke about perceived differences in teaching quality, resources, and exposure across school types. These reflections were often based on what they observed in their communities or heard from peers, rather than direct personal experience. For some, this reinforced a sense of unfairness shaped by family income through differential access to school quality and learning environments, rather than individual effort. As a female participant from Tafila explained, *“Schools only use a lecture-based*

*method; no interactive teaching... Sadly, this also depends on financial status; private schools can give things public schools can't.*" These perceptions influence how youth judge their own chances, especially when opportunities appear tied to the type of school they can access rather than the effort they put in.

### Teacher Quality and Trust-Breaking Experiences

Many youth described teachers as unmotivated, absent, or underqualified. A young woman from Zarqa stated, *"we don't have qualified teachers."* Other youth shared examples where teachers neglected lessons entirely. For example, a male participant in Irbid shared *"There was a math teacher who never taught a lesson, he just sat on his phone"*. When youth see teachers disengaged, they interpret this as a signal about how much the system itself values learning. This weakens expectations that effort will be recognized or lead to meaningful returns, leading youth to question whether investing in school is worthwhile.

Teaching quality influence how youth assess the credibility of the education system. For some, declining quality weakens trust and shifts their focus toward short-term or informal alternatives rather than sustained educational pathways. Others maintain persistence and self-motivation despite these conditions, relying on personal discipline, online resources, or peer support to stay on track. This pattern illustrates that youth calibrate their effort based on perceived system credibility; when confidence in the system erodes, effort is redirected toward options seen as more reliable or immediately rewarding.

Additionally, youth frustrations intensified when they felt targeted or unfairly treated. A young woman from Zarqa *"I've personally heard it with my own ears in the teachers' lounge: 'I'm going to make her fail for you'"* while another shared that her GPA dropped from 91 to 78 after a disagreement with a teacher. Such experiences shifted how youth interpreted schooling, with some coming to view it as a liability rather than a pathway that enables progress. This erosion of perceived fairness and control, increased the likelihood of disengagement, absenteeism, or dropping out. When authority figures act fairly and advocate for youth, they restore trust in the system and reinforce the belief that effort will be rewarded; several youth described moments where principals, counsellors, or individual teachers stepped in to defend them, advocate for them, or restore their confidence, which re-established schooling as a credible and worthwhile pathway, a young woman from Balqa shared *"The principal wanted to come*

*talk to my parents to convince them that I should continue my education"*.

### Participation and Continuation

Youth's decisions to stay in or leave education reflect how they interpret effort, opportunity, pressure, and fairness, not only their academic ability. Although almost 9 in 10 youth (87.6%) aspire to study beyond a bachelor's level, their actual continuation depends on whether education feels like a worthwhile and credible pathway in their real lives.

For many young men, leaving school early is framed as a rational economic decision, not one of disengagement. They described education as a long journey with uncertain returns, while work offered perceived immediate stability. As one young man explained, *"You finish high school, then go to university for four years... After that you won't find jobs."* Another added, *"I left school to work... degrees don't really lead to jobs."* These beliefs show how youth weigh effort against reward, and when the path between education and employment seems unreliable, short-term income becomes a safer choice. This shows that youth are not giving up, rather they are responding to perceived risk, and that young men could respond to uncertainty by maximizing control, so when education feels like a high-effort, low-certainty investment, they choose work because it offers clearer and more immediate payoff signals. These calculations are particularly salient for young men, whose social roles and expectations often intensify pressure to prioritize immediate income.

Some youth leave because they feel pushed out rather than pulled away. Repeated clashes with teachers, punitive disciplinary systems, or lack of psychosocial support often led to expulsions that become final. *"I kept skipping until they kicked me out"* said one young man. Another shared, *"I got into a fight and got completely expelled... My father told me I'm never going back to school again"*. These moments reveal behavioral patterns linked to identity and belonging, so when school feels like a place where one is unwelcome or constantly at risk of punishment, staying becomes emotionally costly, and leaving becomes a rational decision. Unlike youth who disengage because they perceive low returns and actively redirect toward alternative learning options, these exits are shaped by exclusion and loss of institutional support. These exits are rarely accompanied by structured guidance or alternative pathways, and behaviorally that means that once youth are pushed out of formal schooling, the chances of them re-engaging in alternative forms of learning become significantly lower.

Other youth reported to disengage because the fit between their abilities, interests, and the education system feels too rigid. Youth have described academic tracks that felt misaligned or overwhelming. *“It [school] was too much pressure,”* a young man in Karak said, while a young woman in Balqa explained *“I felt like I wasn’t really suited to the specialty I was in, my abilities weren’t at that level. So, I decided to leave school.”* These choices reflect that when youth don’t feel capable within the track they are placed into, they often feel the need to protect themselves from anticipated failure by withdrawing to avoid loss, shame, and further pressure.

Gender norms also shape continuation. Young men and women described how school decisions were influenced, or determined, by family expectations around marriage and domestic roles for females and economic support for males. A young woman in Balqa shared *“I stopped going to school because I wanted to get married, nothing else.”* Another added, *“Honestly, school was really nice. I liked going, but the family didn’t encourage me.”* This could show that girls interpret schooling as something that depends on family permission rather than their

own choice, and so their motivation could become fragile. On the other hand, young men described a parallel pressure to leave school to contribute economically. Therefore, community expectations shape how youth judge whether continuing in education feels possible or worthwhile, which makes their continuation less about ability or aspiration, and more about whether the environment signals that staying in school is valued and possible.

Structural challenges also limit participation. The cost of education, tuition, tutoring, materials, creates barriers long before academic ability becomes the issue. *“Some people can’t study at all because the costs are too high,”* said one young woman in Karak. A female student in Zarqa added, *“They [university professors] assume we all go to private tutoring centers... but some can’t afford it.”* When education carries hidden or rising costs, youth start questioning whether it feels logically worth it in the short term. High costs shift decisions from *“do I want to continue?”* to *“can I realistically afford to continue?”*, pushing many, especially lower-income youth, to disengage from education or training, even when they are motivated or capable.

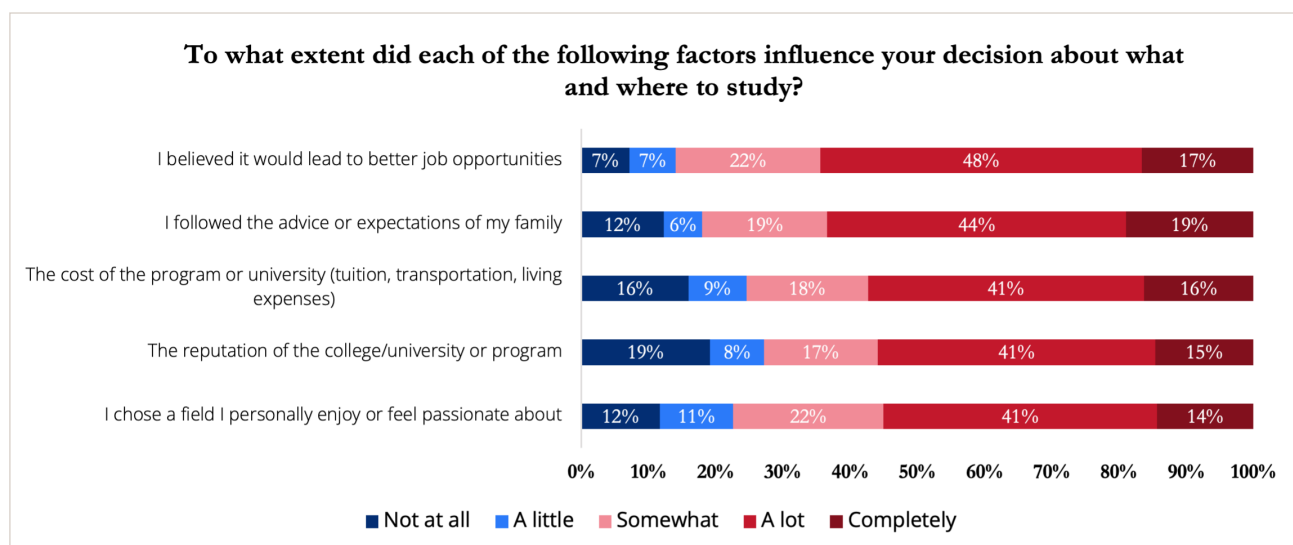


Figure 5: Influencing factors on academic choices (n=1120)

When youth feel backed by their families, emotionally or financially, they are more confident in their ability to continue. Many youth stay in school when they feel supported, describing family support as one of the strongest drivers of continuation. A young woman in Karak shared, *“It’s impossible to reach all this without my family.”* This support lowers the perceived risk of continuing education and increases the expected payoff of effort, shaping youth decisions about whether to persist or disengage. As a result, school

feels less overwhelming and youth are more likely to view their effort as leading to real possibility rather than uncertainty.

Taken together, the survey data helps explain how these factors operate in youth decision-making when continuation feels uncertain. Factors like the possibility of better job opportunities (65%), family expectations (63%), or a school’s reputation (56%) act as signals that education is still a worthwhile

investment. When these cues feel strong and credible, youth become more willing to keep going, even when the path feels difficult. Therefore, continuation depends less on abstract motivation and more on whether the environment provides enough reassurance that effort will translate into real opportunity, directly shaping how youth assess risk, persistence, and the value of staying in education.

### Education: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth stay engaged in education when it feels useful, not just obligatory.** When teaching is practical and clearly linked to real opportunities and future employment pathways, effort feels worthwhile, and when it isn't, motivation drops.
- **Family support is the strongest driver of continuation.** Encouragement and reassurance give youth confidence that staying in school is possible and valued, especially when they face pressure or uncertainty about future employment prospects.
- **Fair and respectful treatment shapes how youth behave in school.** Supportive teachers strengthen trust and persistence, while neglect or bias signals that effort will not be rewarded, making disengagement a rational response.
- **Perception of cost influences decisions before ability does.** When youth cannot afford tutoring, materials, or fees, they reassess whether education is realistically within reach, even if they want to continue.
- **Social expectations shape whether continued participation in education feels acceptable or worthwhile.** For both young women and young men, community norms shape whether continuing education seems feasible, though the content of those expectations differs, often marriage or domestic roles for young women, and income generation or work responsibilities for young men.

## Skills Development

Skills are a practical and psychological asset that shape how youth engage with opportunities. Youth assess skills not only as competencies, but as indicators of credibility, confidence, and readiness for the future. Their engagement with skill-building is guided by behavioral interpretations, such as whether a skill feels useful, whether training feels trustworthy, whether learning environments feel safe, and whether the effort required aligns with expected returns. These perceptions influence how youth prioritize certain skills, how they navigate barriers to training, and how they position themselves in competitive labor markets.

### Skills for Future Success

For youth in Jordan, skills as the foundation for independence and stability, shaped by practical, emotional, and social consideration. The survey shows that self-confidence (85%), planning (75%), and financial management (69%) are the top skills youth consider essential for their future. Each of these skills serves a distinct behavioral function where self-confidence anchors perceived agency, planning enables anticipation and control in uncertain contexts, and financial management mitigates economic vulnerability. These preferences reflect how youth prioritize capabilities that reduce perceived risk, increase autonomy, and help them cope with pressure in environments they experience as unstable.



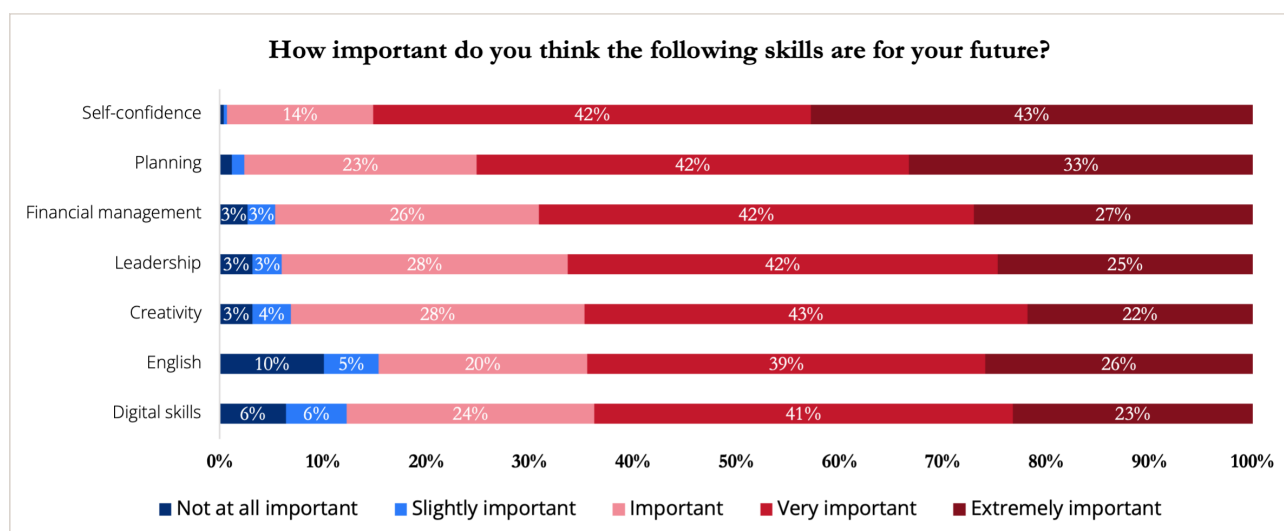


Figure 6: Perceptions of skill importance for the future (n=1120)

Across discussions, youth described leadership, decision-making, English proficiency, problem-solving, financial literacy, and stress-management as core to building a stable life. These skills are understood not just as professional requirements but as tools that help them “*stand on their own two feet*,” as youth in Karak put it. This shows how strongly youth link skills to identity and self-reliance, not only employability. The most important skills that stood out across youth groups are:

- **Financial literacy:** Youth explained that budgeting and managing expenses are essential to sustaining any job or business idea. Youth tend to prioritize financial skills because they reduce risk and increase a sense of control. Budgeting feels like protection against failure in an unpredictable economy, shaping decisions to pursue work or business options that feel financially manageable rather than risky or uncertain.
- **English proficiency:** This skill is widely seen as a basic gateway to opportunity, signaling that youth are highly aware of labor-market expectations and the barriers that their ability to move across education, employment, and opportunity spaces. For some youth, this includes geographic mobility, while for others it reflects access to higher-quality jobs, professional environments, or advancement within Jordan. Youth invest in it because they believe it expands mobility and reduces barriers that feel outside their control.

- **Psychological and cognitive skills such as critical thinking, emotional regulation, resilience:** Youth reported these skills as essential for coping with stress and setbacks. These reflections reveal that youth expect an unpredictable future and believe that managing pressure is as important as technical ability, as these skills help their resilience and adapt when things do not go as planned. Youth tend to prioritize these skills because they support persistence, helping them continue rather than disengage when environments feel unstable.

Although many youth report confidence in certain abilities, they also recognize where they need to grow. 56.8% of surveyed youth feel very or extremely confident in their job-market skills, with men reporting higher confidence than women. Qualitative data confirms this pattern, as youth describe having built a strong foundation, while describing learning as an ongoing process. As a young woman in Jerash explained, “*Each year I discover that life still teaches me more and that there are always new things I can learn.*” This shows that learning for the youth is framed as a pathway for growth rather than a response to deficiency, motivating youth to participate and invest in training and skills-building. The emerging patterns show that youth prioritize skills that buffer uncertainty and strengthen their sense of agency. In deciding which skills to invest in, youth weigh how attainable a skill feels and whether it is perceived as directly linked to stability or future opportunity. When skills feel attainable and directly linked to stability, youth pursue them, and when they feel too distant or abstract, youth delay investment.

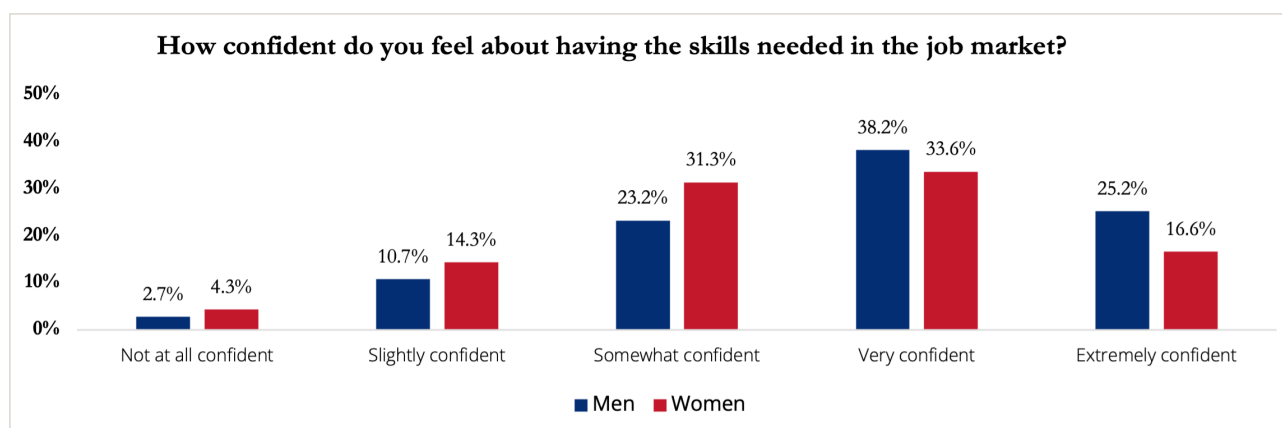


Figure 7: Level of confidence in skills required for job market (n=1120)

## Enablers of Skills Building

Youth have reported having some access to opportunities that build new skills. 45.4% of the surveyed youth report that accessing skill-building options is easy or very easy, while 24.6% feel it would be difficult. Gender differences highlight how opportunity is not evenly felt; men perceive access as very easy, suggesting unequal exposure to networks, mobility, or confidence in navigating opportunities.

When youth evaluate access, they are effectively judging whether an opportunity is feasible for them personally, considering their resources, constraints, and confidence. This matters because youth act on the opportunities they believe are available to them, not the ones that exist on paper. So perceived access, rather than actual availability, becomes the key driver of whether youth invest time, effort, and resources in building new skills.

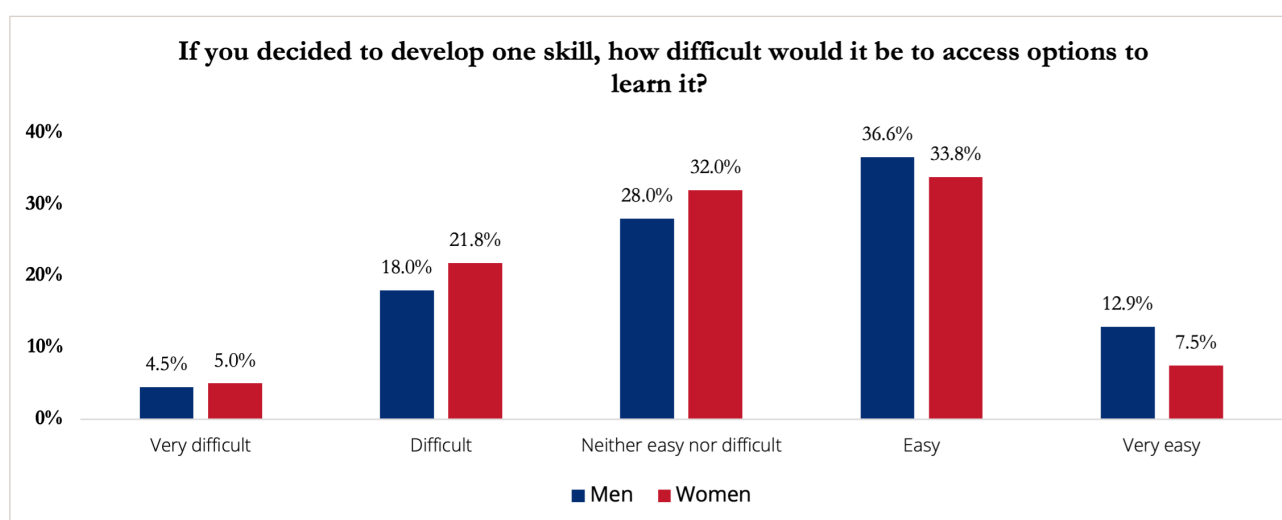


Figure 8: Perceived accessibility of skill-building resources (n=1120)

Across the data, youth describe skill-building as something they must take ownership of, suggesting a perceived gap between what education provides and what they feel is required to act independently. They repeatedly frame learning as self-directed practice, driven by repetition, trial-and-error, and independent effort, especially when institutional support is limited. This indicates a broader pattern in which youth do not rely on structured skills-building opportunities but actively create their own learning pathways. As one young woman in Zarqa put it, *“The professors give us the basics, but we need to strengthen*

*ourselves on our own”*. Behaviorally, this reflects adaptive effort rather than disengagement: youth maintain momentum toward income generation by supplementing education where they perceive it falls short.

Learning through observation and connection is another strong enabler. Youth highly value learning from experienced people such as family, mentors, or peers, as these sources feel practical and trustworthy. A young man in Amman explained, *“Ask someone experienced... they’ll give you advice you can*

use,” while another from Jerash shared, *“I learn something from everyone.”* When youth copy the tips or methods of experienced or skilled people, it reduces the stress of figuring things out alone, help them avoid mistakes, and makes their goals feel more achievable. Watching how others succeed or struggle, youth can avoid some trial-and-error risks and feel more confident choosing strategies that actually work.

Self-study also plays a central role as an enabler of skills building. Youth used self-learning as a methodology to fill in gaps between what they need and what they received. Some youth described using online tutorials, personal projects, or extra practice to strengthen knowledge and skills weaknesses, to build on the foundational knowledge received from formal education. A young woman in Zarqa mentioned, *“I study Artificial Intelligence Engineering, and I want to work on improving my programming skills because I feel like they’re a bit weak”*.

Together, these enablers show that youth are most motivated when skill-building feels within their control, supported by trusted people, and relevant to their real goals related to education completion and future employment. Where these conditions exist, youth persist in skills development and training pathways, even when formal structures fall short.

## Barriers & Realities

Despite youth Learning motivation, they face practical and emotional barriers that shape how they approach skill-building. These barriers do not signal a lack of ambition; they do, however, reflect the environments youth must navigate, and the trade-offs they make to stay afloat. These barriers are most strongly articulated by youth who feel underprepared or only partially prepared to meet labor market expectations, particularly those who lack access to structured guidance, practice environments, or financial resources.

Many youth describe feeling underprepared because formal education gives them only the basics, leaving the real learning to individual effort. This gap affects their confidence, when youth believe they must figure everything out alone, skills that require guidance, like technical mastery or professional communication, feel harder to pursue. As one young woman in Zarqa said, *“the professors give us the basics, but we need to strengthen ourselves on our own.”* This suggests that young people are being pushed toward self-driven, trial-and-error learning, a pathway that is far more demanding for

those with fewer resources, lower confidence, or limited access to feedback.

Time, cost, and competing responsibilities also limit youth's ability to invest in building their skills. youth report the need to balance school, household duties, or work, and feel pressure to prioritize immediate needs over long-term development. These pressures lead many youth to rely on low-cost, low-risk learning methods, like YouTube, peers, or informal practice, even when they recognize that these approaches may not provide enough depth or structure. As a result, youth are not disengaging from skill development, but making calculated choices based on what feels manageable, prioritizing options that minimize risk even if they offer lower returns.

Some youth also report lacking exposure to real practice environments such as internships, mentorship, hands-on training, which makes specialized skills feel out of reach. Without chances to apply what they learn and get feedback; youth tend to question whether they are good enough to pursue certain careers. A male participant in Karak mentioned *“When you leave school, you’re surprised that you don’t know how to work, how to start a project, or even some life matters like laws, regulations, and legislation.”* Behaviorally, the absence of real-world experience and feedback makes it harder for youth to judge whether effort will lead to progress, reducing perceived feasibility and leading them to opt out of pathways that feel uncertain or unfamiliar.

However, skill-building opportunities are not experienced equally. Young women describe restrictions related to safety, mobility, or family expectations, youth in rural areas cite limited centers or training opportunities. A female respondent in Jerash explained *“They [learning centers] are not available in our area... You’re forced to go to Amman or Irbid, which are far. So, I’d end up wasting a whole day just for one learning session.”* Youth from lower-income families also highlight cost, for example, a young woman from Balqa shared *“this is the biggest issue: money. I might not have the money to buy a course. I might not have credit to recharge my phone for internet access.”* These realities shape not only what skills youth value, but which opportunities they feel able to act on. As a result, participation in skills-building and training is driven by perceived access rather than formal availability, and youth select pathways that feel viable within their environment rather than those that require resources they do not have.

Despite all this, youth consistently express a strong desire to grow, and they continue to build skills through whatever channels are available. Their persistence reflects ambition and proactive agency rather than deficit. The barriers to skill development identify opportunities to improve the environment to better match the youth's existing drive. A young man from Amman shared *"There's also willpower. If you don't want it, you won't do it"*. When opportunities are limited and external support is weak, youth rely on internal motivation to keep learning, using determination as the main driver of progress. However, while determination sustains effort, motivation alone cannot close the structural gaps; skill-building is most effective when personal drive is supported by accessible learning environments, clear guidance, and practical support, allowing effort to translate into progress rather than frustration. Behaviorally, this alignment increases the likelihood that youth continue to invest time and energy in skills development they believe will support education completion and entry into gainful employment, rather than delaying or abandoning pathways that feel too difficult to pursue alone.

### Youth-Valued vs Employer-Valued Skills

Youth show a strong awareness of both the skills they value for their own growth and the skills employers look for in the labor market. For most youth, the most important skills are those that help them become independent with strong capabilities are leadership, financial literacy, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and self-management. These are seen as life skills, not just job requirements, and many describe them as the foundation for managing responsibilities and handling the realities of adulthood.

Additionally, youth recognize that employers often prioritize other skills, such as the need for certificates, technical training, and accredited experience. These skills, as per the youth, considered proof of competences for the employers, adding weight in hiring than personal motivation or informal learning paths. A young man in Tafila explained, *"Why should we hire him? His certificate is only from [a short course] ... His certificate isn't accredited."* This creates a sense among the youth that employers favor what can be verified on paper rather than the broader skillset that youth work hard to build. As a result, youth describe using recognised employability signals such as accredited certificates or formal credentials as a key criterion when judging whether a skill-building opportunity is worth the time and effort required. When this link is unclear, youth question the return on investment, even if they value the skills themselves.

Youth also observe that employers value behavioral traits that signal reliability and readiness, which are typically assessed through interviews, probation periods or workplace performance rather than certificates. Handling stress, staying calm under pressure, and showing professionalism are seen as essential, as a participant in Irbid stated, *"First of all, they want someone who can handle pressure, whether it's pressure from management or from the job itself."* English proficiency and leadership also emerge as employer priorities that youth perceive as necessary to secure employment, reinforcing alignment driven by labor market expectations rather than personal preference.

However, youth also reported that some employer preferences are unrelated to actual capability. Appearance was mentioned as a strong factor that can overshadow skills, especially for young women. As one woman in Karak put it, *"When you apply for a job, they always focus on appearance... I feel like appearance is prioritized."* Others pointed to the role of personal connections *"wasta"*, describing hiring decisions as influenced by who one knows rather than what one can do. For example, one female participant in Jerash explained *"And maybe [employers] think something else... I like that the person is one of my relatives. Why? Because I might guarantee that there's no betrayal..."* These perceptions shape how youth interpret fairness in the labor market and influence the strategies they adopt when searching for opportunities.

These perceptions shape youth judgement about the level of skills needed for employability. When employers favor certificates and visible signals of competence, youth may undervalue their informal strengths or delay applying until they feel they meet every requirement. When social networks *"Wasta"* or appearance seem to matter, youth may focus energy on signaling rather than skill-building or withdraw from employment or learning opportunities they perceive as biased. This pattern suggests that the gap is less about ability and more about how different actors define and signal 'skills'. Youth focus on life skills that help them grow and become independent, while employers look for certificates or proof of skills. These different expectations shape how youth decide which skills to pursue, which jobs to apply for, and how ready they feel to enter or remain in the labor market.

## Skills Development: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth prioritize skill-building when they perceive clear relevance to real-life demands and future pathways.** Youth are more likely to exert effort toward skills that clearly support independence, daily problem-solving, or near-term education and employment goals. When usefulness is obvious, effort feels worthwhile; however, limited access, time, and resources mean that many youth rely on low-cost or informal learning strategies rather than sustained or structured investment.
- **Self-driven learning is a core behavioral strategy.** Youth rely heavily on trial-and-error, repetition, online resources, and learning from peers or experienced individuals believing that these approaches provide control and reduce the pressure to depend on formal systems **when institutional training does not adequately support progression toward employment.** This mix of autonomy and social learning helps them keep improving even when opportunities are limited.
- **Barriers shape interpretation, not motivation.** Costs, lack of practice spaces, and inconsistent teaching do not reduce youth ambition, rather, they influence which skills youth choose to invest in and how they participate in training pathways
- . When the environment does not provide consistent or expected support, youth shift towards informal learning, incremental self-improvement, or skills they can practice independently.
- **Youth and employers use different cues to define important skills, driving mismatched expectations.** Youth focus on broad life skills such as leadership, resilience, problem-solving, because these shape identity, maturity, and independence. At the same time, youth recognize that employers prioritize proof (certificates, experience), so youth adjust behavior by over-investing in credentials or delaying applications for gainful employment.

## Social and Emotional Resilience

Social and emotional resilience acts as an enabling asset that shapes how youth manage uncertainty, pressure, and daily decision-making. Resilience is interpreted behaviorally through a person's sense of emotional safety, perceived control of their life, the coping strategies they use, and the support they receive from their peers, families, and wider community networks. Youth use their social and emotional wellbeing when evaluating risks, handling academic or economic stress, or deciding whether to persist with challenging pathways. Understanding resilience through this lens helps explain the behavioral patterns behind avoidance, perseverance, optimism, and withdrawal.

### Setbacks and Emotional Pressure

Youth mention facing emotional setbacks that often come from circumstances far beyond their control. Personal loss and health challenges are among the most destabilizing for youth. These moments disrupt concentration, drain motivation, and reshape how youth see their future. A young man in Irbid explained, *“About three months ago, my uncle passed away... This affected me in my studies and so on.”* For many, grief or illness does not just pause progress, it weakens their sense of stability across school, home, and daily life.

Academic pressure adds another layer. High-stakes exams, heavy workloads, and the fear of disappointing family members create intense emotional strain that youth often carry silently. Several described ‘shutting down’ emotionally when stress builds which leads them to lose momentum even when they want to keep going, to think clearly, stay focused, or bounce back from difficulties. When they're emotionally overloaded, even simple tasks feel heavier, and long-term plans become harder to manage. Therefore, stress does not reduce youth aspiration, it disrupts follow-through, making youth more likely to pause or disengage when effort no longer feels manageable.

Family dynamics also considered a powerful way that shapes youth emotional wellbeing. Family support provide stability, but small moments of criticism, conflict, or discouraging comments, even if unintentional, can have lasting emotional effects, and make everyday challenges feel heavier. A young woman in Karak put it simply *“Whether it's a parent, a sister, or brother, some family members can break you, even with just a word. Maybe they don't mean it, but that one word still affects you deeply.”* This shows that emotional reassurance is an important influence on youth motivation, helping sustain

effort under stress. When lacking, it increases the likelihood of self-doubt, disengagement, or avoiding situations where failure feels costly.

Changes in environment and social context can be equally disruptive, where some youth reported moving to a new school, adapting to unfamiliar norms, or experiencing bullying often triggers a decline in wellbeing. One young man in Karak described how transferring to a new school left him feeling out of place: *“The first day at [a new] school was really tough, the environment was different, the people were different, the whole society changed. I started to decline little by little... If you’re not comfortable in a place, you’ll never thrive.”* These experiences highlight how sensitive youth are to belonging and how quickly emotional discomfort can affect engagement. When youth feel out of place or unwelcome, their focus shifts from learning or participating to simply coping, which makes withdrawal, such as skipping school, avoiding group discussions, or disengaging, a natural and rational response rather than a lack of motivation.

Overall, setbacks do not come from one source. Youth accumulate across personal, family, academic, and social domains, and this layering of pressure reveals that resilience is not just an individual trait, it is affected by the stability of the surrounding environment. When setbacks feel overwhelming and

support is inconsistent, youth shift their attention toward short-term coping and away from long-term planning. When stress accumulates, focus narrows, problem-solving capacity weakens, and youth become more likely to withdraw, hesitate, or pause decision, not because ambition disappears, but because emotional regulation becomes the priority.

## Coping Mechanisms and Enablers of Resilience

Youth have remarkable resilience, drawing on a wide mix of internal strength, faith, relationships, and everyday habits to manage emotional pressure. Many describe that their ability to bounce back begins with a deliberate mental shift, or a conscious decision to regain control of their emotions. A young man in Jerash explained, *“I just reflected on myself and figured out how to move forward in life.”* This reflects a strong sense of agency, where even when external circumstances are difficult, youth believe they can influence how they respond. When something upsetting happens, most youth turn first to strategies that help them regain emotional stability (figure 9). This confirms a pattern that resilience is not a single behavior, rather a blend of spiritual grounding, emotional connection, and practical distraction that helps youth settle their feelings before taking their next step.

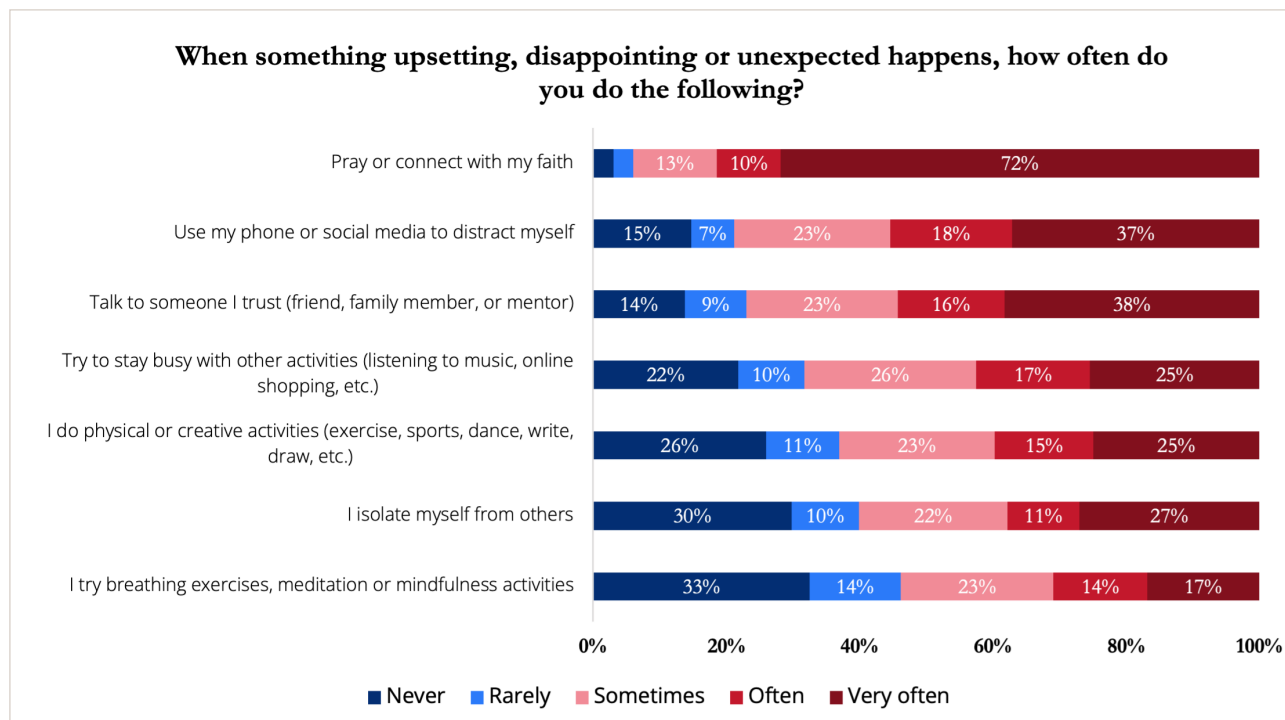


Figure 9: Coping mechanisms in response to negative experiences (n=1120)

Faith emerges as a powerful mechanism that several youth described as a source of comfort and perspective during difficult moments. For example, a young man in Karak mentioned *“Nothing comforts you more than reading the Quran,”*. For others, connection with trusted people, talking to friends, siblings, or caregivers’ helps them feel supported, understood, and less alone in their struggles. These relational dynamics give youth emotional safety nets, or signals that they are not facing challenges alone, they are supported and understood, which decreases their stress and increases their ability and motivation to act, and re-focus.

Alongside these relational enablers, many youth turn to small routines and personal rituals to cope, such as going out with friends, exercising, writing, cooking, or simply keeping themselves busy. These activities help release tension and restore a sense of normalcy, a young woman in Karak shared, *“I go into the kitchen and make myself a dessert or something... just so I can cry, to release the energy inside me.”* Such examples highlight adaptive behavior where youth actively create emotional breathing space when life becomes overwhelming.

### Barriers to Emotional Wellbeing

Not all youth receive the same supportive environment to enhance their emotional wellbeing. Several participants described how hard it is to find someone who will listen with attention and patience, a young man in Amman put it, *“It’s hard to find someone who really gives you attention.”* Another added, *“because everyone is going through something... you might not feel comfortable opening up to just anyone.”* These experiences highlight a tension where youth rely on social connection to recover, but the support might be inconsistent. When trusted relationships feel unavailable, youth withdraw, keep problems to themselves, and lose access to the coping tools that would usually help them stabilize. In the absence of trusted support, youth tend to compensate by relying on solitary coping strategies that could include emotional suppression, self-reliance, distraction, or withdrawing from demanding activities, which may help them get through the moment but do not fully replace the stabilizing role of social connection.

Family environments also play a major role. Unsupportive or critical households weaken resilience, making negative emotions harder to manage. A young woman in Karak shared, *“not all families are supportive or give their children trust or encouragement.”* When encouragement or trust is missing, youth lose emotional anchors that help

them feel safe and validated during stress, making challenges feel more isolating, setbacks harder to recover from, and motivation to persist in school, work, or personal goals more likely to decline. Therefore, the absence of reliable emotional support raises the perceived cost of continued engagement, making youth more likely to disengage, delay decisions, or avoid situations that require sustained effort or vulnerability.

### Social and Emotional Resilience: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth cope best when they have someone who listens.** When real support is missing, even small problems feel heavier, making it harder for them to stay focused, motivated, or emotionally steady.
- **Feeling judged or unsupported increases withdrawal from education and employment pathways.** When youth don’t feel safe to talk, they withdraw, which limits the coping strategies they rely on most, connection, talking, and being understood.
- **Negative or discouraging environments weaken the resilience needed to sustain education and employment engagement.** Without encouragement from family or trusted people, challenges feel more personal and more overwhelming, making it harder for youth to bounce back or keep pushing toward their goals.

### Digital Access and Literacy

Digital access and literacy are assets that shape how youth seek information, build skills, and connect with opportunities. Youth interpret digital environments behaviorally, such as whether online spaces feel safe, whether information feels trustworthy, whether tools feel usable, and whether digital participation helps them achieve their goals. These interpretations shape how confidently youth navigate online platforms, engage in learning, or leverage digital tools for work and social connection. This lens clarifies why digital engagement varies widely, and how access, trust, and perceived relevance drive meaningful use. These findings draw primarily on qualitative evidence and reflect youth experiences of digital use under varying access conditions, rather than uniform levels of device ownership or digital capacity.

## Access and Use of Tools

Digital access is now a basic part of how youth move through daily life. Phones, apps, and social media are used constantly to communicate, learn, and stay informed about education- and work-related tasks. These tools are seen as fast, familiar, and always available, making them feel essential rather than optional, even when access varies in quality, affordability, or reliability. A young man in Irbid put it, *“Without technology, we can’t really live, honestly.”* Being online signals that you are informed, relevant, and part of the world. Youth described the digital tools as lowering the effort needed to access information and support, making daily life feel easier and more manageable, and positioning these tools as a first point of reference for communication, information-seeking, and problem-solving. Therefore, youth tend to invest their attention and effort in digital channels, influencing how they participate in education, training and employment-related decision-making.

### Digital Access and Literacy: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Where access allows, digital tools can make learning feel lower-effort and lower-risk**, enabling youth to explore interests, practice skills, and seek information without waiting for formal programs.
- **Online spaces strengthen belonging**, giving youth emotional support, peer connection, and reassurance **helping youth stay motivated and engaged when navigating academic or employment-related challenges**.
- **Digital access expands participation in education and employment opportunities, particularly for youth with disabilities**, who use assistive tools to participate in ways that traditional systems do not allow.

## Emerging Behavioral Patterns for Assets

- **Youth stay in education, training, and skills development when learning feels relevant to real life and future pathways.** Youth consistently judge the value of education and skills by how they can see the link to future opportunities, independence, or everyday

problem-solving. When teaching is practical or skills feel useful, effort rises because the benefit is immediate and easy to imagine. When relevance is unclear, motivation drops, not because youth lack ambition, but because the payoff feels uncertain. This relevance-driven logic shapes decisions about decisions about persistence, skill-building, and whether continued participation in education and training feels worth sustained effort.

- **Supportive relationships act as decision anchors for youth.** Because many are still forming confidence and testing their abilities, encouragement from trusted people shapes whether they attempt new challenges, stick with difficult pathways, or pull back. For youth, support does not just feel good, it directly influences how risky or achievable a choice seems. These relational cues strongly influence whether youth stay engaged, disengage, or redirect effort toward alternative pathways.
- **Youth turn to self-directed learning as an adaptive response, not a full replacement for formal support.** When teaching or guidance feels uneven, youth supplement, not abandon, traditional pathways by practicing skills independently, seeking online explanations, and learning through trial-and-error. These strategies give them enough control to keep progressing within education and training pathways, even when systems fall short. This behavior reflects resilience rather than disengagement as youth adapt by filling gaps, pacing themselves, and experimenting in ways that feel safer and more manageable than relying solely on institutions
- **Youth respond to emotional pressure, loss, academic stress, and family dynamics by adopting different coping strategies that shape their ability to stay focused, plan ahead, and recover from setbacks.** Many cope effectively by grounding themselves in faith, talking to trusted people, or using small routines to regain emotional control. When these support systems are absent, even minor challenges can drain motivation or break momentum. This shows that resilience is not a fixed internal trait, but a capacity that is built, reinforced, or weakened by relationships and surrounding conditions. When youth feel emotionally and socially supported, their resilience allows them to absorb stress, adapt, and continue pursuing goals. When that support is fragile or absent, resilience is harder to sustain, leading youth to conserve energy, reduce risk, or step back from longer-term plans.

- **Social expectations and fairness influence how youth navigate choices.** Signals from family, teachers, or the community help youth decide what feels allowed, possible, or worth the effort. For many girls, gendered norms around marriage or reputation shape whether continuing education feels acceptable. In contexts where youth perceive treatment as unfair, like biased grading or appearance-based hiring, these signals could suggest that effort may not be rewarded, making withdrawal from education or employment pathways a rational response. These cues quietly steer behavior by shaping what youth see as realistic. When signals feel encouraging, youth invest more effort; when they feel discouraging or unfair, youth choose alternatives that seem more achievable, even if they still hold bigger aspirations
- **Digital tools expand youth agency and opportunity, especially when offline options feel limited.** Online spaces give youth a low-pressure way to learn, explore new skills, connect with others, and access opportunities they may not find offline. The ability to practice privately, search for information quickly, or join supportive communities reduces uncertainty and boosts confidence. Because youth clearly recognize this value, they are more likely to take positive action, such as seeking training, building skills, and engaging with new opportunities when digital pathways are visible and easy to use. This reliance on digital pathways also shapes employment choices, as youth are more likely to pursue careers, sectors, or opportunities they can research, prepare for, and access online, while deprioritizing options that require offline networks, gatekeepers, or informal access.

## Agency

This domain explores youth's perceived ability to shape their own lives and futures as it relates to their participation in education and training and their pursuit of gainful employment. It includes how youth understand their own self-efficacy, motivation, and capacity to make decisions about where to direct effort, take risks, or change direction. The study will explore both internal confidence and the external conditions that either enable or constrain their agency, recognizing that agency is often developed in interaction with systems and social expectations.

### Self-Efficacy

Youth agency begins with self-efficacy; the belief that one's actions can shape desired outcomes. This section explores how youth in Jordan perceive their ability to make decisions about their lives, express their opinions, and influence their futures. Findings reveal where and when youth feel a sense of control and what constrains it, highlighting both internal and external factors that enable or limit agency. The Across qualitative and quantitative findings youth report the type of feedback, recognition, and encouragement that strengthen confidence and motivate action.

### Sense of Control Over Life and Future

Youth consistently described confidence as a core driver of agency, and a sense that they can act, assert themselves, and influence outcomes in their lives. Confidence was framed not only as a personal trait, but as a social necessity, enabling youth to navigate judgement, signal competence, and maintain dignity

within their communities. A young man from Jerash explained, *"If your personality is strong, you'll assert yourself whether they like it or not. You have to prove yourself. You need to be firm in the way you speak, clear and proper. You need to know the social norms of the community you live in because every word is counted against you. Be a man, not a little kid."* This reflects the idea that confidence can manifest as situational self-efficacy, where youth who feel confident believe they can read their environment, respond appropriately, and withstand social evaluation when navigating education, training, or employment contexts.

For many young women, confidence also functions as a form of protection in public spaces or workplaces, strengthening their ability to resist pressure and stay grounded in their self-worth. A female participant from Tafila shared, *"If a person's self-confidence is low, a person can be destroyed. If the person is not confident and doesn't know their worth, they will be affected by every word."* In behavioral terms, low self-efficacy increases vulnerability to external influence, while higher self-efficacy acts as a buffer against social stressors and constraining norms.

These perceptions translate directly into decision-making patterns. Youth associate low confidence with avoidance behaviors, second-guessing, withdrawing, or selecting safer, lower-risk paths such as delaying enrollment, avoiding applications, or disengaging from demanding pathways to minimize

exposure to judgment. Conversely, when youth feel confident, they demonstrate greater risk tolerance, take initiative, and are more willing to pursue opportunities that involve uncertainty or potential failure. A young woman in Tafila explained *“If a girl really lacks confidence, she might be influenced, feel the problem is with her, and be damaged by societal talk, which could ruin her future and the children she raises.”* In this sense, confidence operates as a behavioral mechanism that shapes how youth assess risk, exercise agency, and engage with opportunity, particularly in environments characterized by social judgment and limited tolerance for error.

Quantitative findings mirror this conditional sense of control. Youth report the highest confidence in goals driven by personal effort, such as living a healthy life (86%) or gaining respect from others (90%). Confidence remains strong but slightly lower for goals that require some external support, such as

becoming financially independent (78%) or helping their community (65%). However, when success depends heavily on broader systems, confidence declines where 6 in 10 youth feel confident they can complete their education, or secure stable job, and just over half (55%) feel confident about starting a business. A young woman in Zarqa said: *“I majored in International Relations... jobs in ministries or embassies require a lot of connections.”*, highlighting that beyond one’s own efforts to work towards gainful employment, youth’s lived experience has defined systemic processes beyond their direct control as limitations. Behaviorally, this pattern shows that youth place greater trust in their own efforts than in institutions. Motivation remains strong when outcomes feel within their control, and weaker when their perceptions of education or employment pathways seem unpredictable, unstable, or unfair.

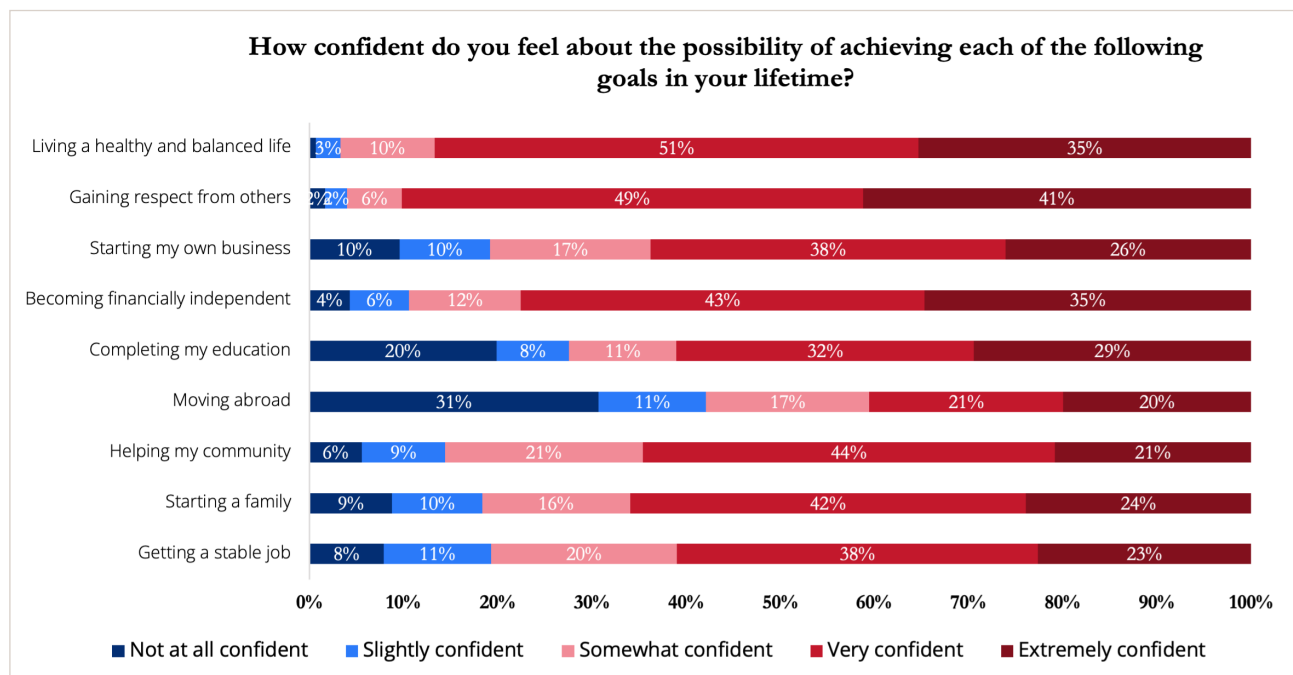


Figure 10: Level of confidence in ability to achieve goals within lifetime (n=1120)

Furthermore, the data illustrates a tension between confidence and context. While most youth express strong confidence in their ability to make their own decisions, with 90.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement ‘I am confident in my ability to make my own decisions’, a gap does appear with

92.7% of men versus 87.9% of women agreeing to the statement. This indicates that youth generally feel confident in making decisions and sustaining effort; acting on that confidence depends on whether systems signal that effort will be recognized, supported, and lead to meaningful outcomes.

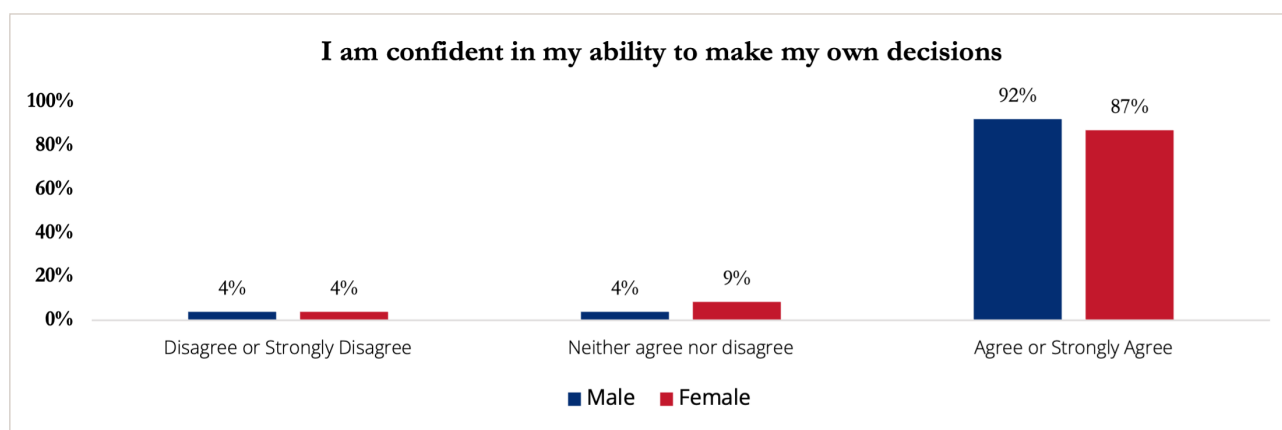


Figure 11: Level of confidence in decision-making abilities (n=1120)

Behaviorally, this creates a conditional sense of control where youth believe in their ability to act, but they do not always believe that action will lead to outcomes, especially in areas like employment, further education, or entrepreneurship, where system support is perceived as essential. This weakens the perceived link between effort and reward, making confidence internally strong but externally fragile. As a result, youth may persist in areas they feel they can influence directly, but hesitate, disengage, or choose safer (lower risk) alternatives in domains where institutions hold the power to validate or block their progress.

### Enablers of Agency – Where Youth Feel in Control

For most youth, control over their lives is something to be earned rather than granted. It is described as the outcome of persistence, preparation, and deliberate effort directed toward education, skills development, and work-related goals. These behaviors reflect self-efficacy in action, such as setting goals, acting intentionally, and linking effort to results in ways that support continued participation in education and training and proactive pursuit of employment opportunities. Importantly, this sense of agency is not experienced as a fixed state, but as something that strengthens in contexts where youth feel their actions can realistically make a difference to their education or employment trajectories. Youth across all demographics consistently emphasized that they could shape their own outcomes through discipline and commitment, even if external systems remain unreliable.

### Education and Credentials

Across groups, education, and particularly Tawjihi, was described as the first concrete step toward self-determination. Completing Tawjihi or earning a university degree was seen as proof of commitment and a credential that legitimizes ambition. *“The most important thing is Tawjihi... after school, then university, once you finish university, you can work and do whatever you want,”* explained a female participant from Karak. In this way, education is more than a milestone and becomes where youth begin to test whether effort leads to real results.

### Effort, Consistency, and Self-discipline

Effort and persistence were described as core parts of what gives youth a sense of control. More than half (52%) said their personal values and goals influence their decisions a lot or completely, with this influence stronger among young women (58%) than young men (47%). Youth explained that progress depends on self-motivation, discipline, and daily effort. A young man from Jerash said, *“Just because we fall the first time doesn’t mean it’s over. We fall and get back up until we reach the goal we want.”* A young woman from Karak added, *“Right now, I’m working on myself, studying and taking private lessons so I can build a better future.”* These reflections show how strongly youth link agency to hard work and continuous improvement, and they show that youth are more likely to stay focused on goals when they believe their effort directly shapes their outcomes. When they see progress, they keep pushing, but when effort feels disconnected from results, their motivation weakens because persistence no longer feels meaningful.

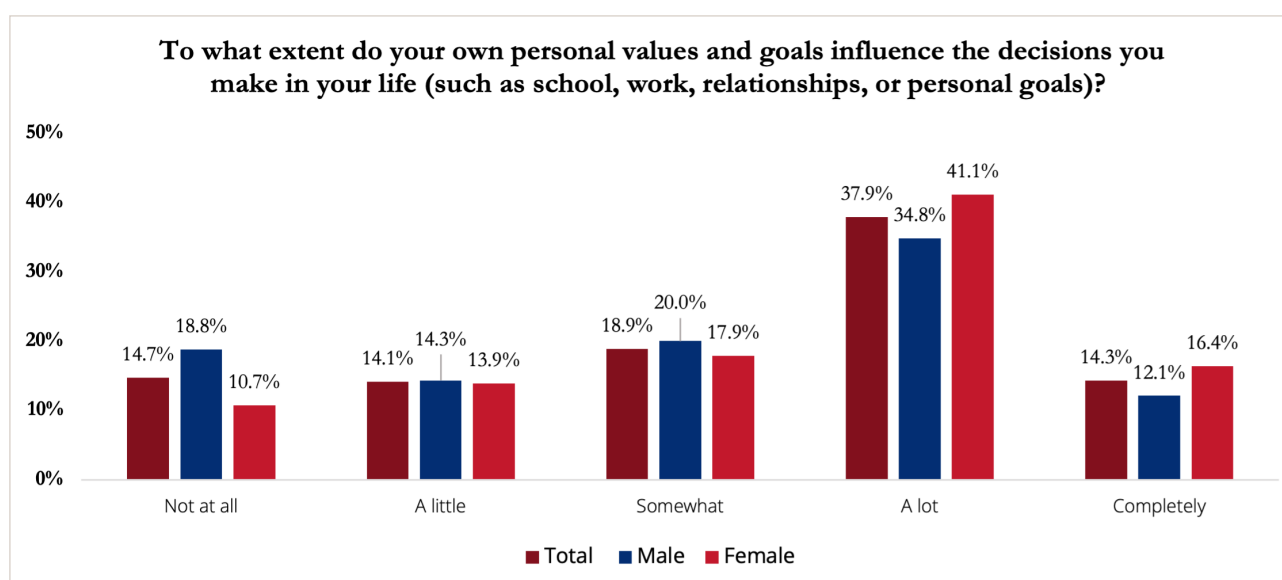


Figure 12: Influence of personal values and goals on life decisions (n=1120)

### Flexibility, Adjustment, and Making Trade-Offs

The work ethic youth demonstrate is matched by a willingness to adjust expectations when ideal jobs or opportunities are unavailable. Some youth rejected the idea that ‘there are no jobs in Jordan,’ arguing that success requires flexibility and starting small. As one young man from Madaba explained, *“Most of us want office jobs. You have to start from the bottom to reach that office.”* Others showed how agency continues even when opportunities are limited. A young man from Tafila shared, *“If I don’t have income and they require a certain skill I don’t have, that’s a problem. I’m currently trying to acquire skills for work, but those skills aren’t available in my area, so I had to go to another area, away from my family, to find part-time job to get that skill.”* Similarly, a young woman in Zarqa said, *“When you can’t find opportunities in your major, you turn to another one.”* This shows that youth see control as the ability to adapt, shift plans, and make practical decisions based on what feels possible, not ideal. When pathways are blocked, some youth adjust quickly to reduce risk and avoid feeling stuck. This flexibility helps them stay active and hopeful, but it can also push them into options they did not originally want simply because those options feel more reachable.

### Role Models and Motivational Anchors

Many youth described success as something that depends primarily on self-reliance, however the extent to which youth rely on external examples to reinforce this belief varies, depending on their exposure, life stage, and social context. Youth have consistently framed independence and personal responsibility as necessary for gaining respect and

moving forward. A young man from Karak explained, *“Even your father won’t stand by you... If you don’t get out by yourself, you’ll never understand it... you have to rise by yourself.”* Role models, such as parents, teachers, or public figures, often reinforce this sense of self-reliance; seeing others succeed reassures youth that effort pays off, helping them believe in their own ability to achieve their goals. A young man from Jerash shared, *“I work hard on myself, like I take someone as a role model. I take my father as my role model... he’s an officer in the Jordanian forces.”* These narratives show that agency is tied not only to internal drive, but also to examples that help youth imagine what is possible. For youth facing greater uncertainty or fewer visible pathways, these examples play a particularly important role in shaping expectations about what is achievable. This means youth are more likely to act, persist, and take risks when they can see themselves in someone who has succeeded. Self-reliance gives them direction, but role models provide proof that their effort can lead somewhere, making motivation stronger and more sustainable.

### Financial Independence

Financial stability was described as a major part of feeling in control. 62.2% of participants’ youth said their financial situation affects their life decisions a lot or completely, showing how closely money is tied to independence. Income, whether through part-time work, family financial support, or small jobs, allows youth to make choices on their own terms for their futures. A young woman from Karak explained, *“I can train in photography, be at university, and take photos at the same time. That way, I’ll be somewhat financially independent and*

*able to support myself now*”, highlighting that the desire for financial independence starts early and exists alongside academic aspirations, motivating youth to take active steps towards it. Gender differences suggest slightly different perceptions of independence; 13% of young men said finances do not influence their decisions at all, compared to 8% of young women. This may suggest that men may frame independence as self-sufficiency, taking into consideration factors beyond financial income, while women are more expressive about financial constraints shaping their choices. This shows that even modest income or financial security expands youth agency and risk tolerance.

### Health and Stability

Youth consistently described good physical and emotional well-being as a basic requirement for pursuing goals. When they feel healthy, they have the energy and focus needed to study, work, or plan for the future. As one young woman from Karak put it, *“If you have your health, you can reach your goal, God willing.”* This reinforces that agency is not only about mindset or opportunity, but also about feeling stable enough to act. However, when youth are under significant stress, physically unwell, or emotionally overwhelmed, their sense of control shrinks, simple decisions become harder, and their ability to plan long-term falls.

Overall, youth described control as something they build through education, effort, and resilience. Supportive networks, role models, and even small amounts of financial or emotional stability help reinforce this feeling, turning confidence into something they actively experience rather than something they hope for. However, these same reflections also show the limits of agency, so when systems like the job market, education pathways, or family expectations do not respond to the effort youth put in, they feel their control weaken. This shows how youth stay motivated when actions lead to visible progress but become more cautious or shift direction when the environment fails to reward their effort.

### Barriers to Agency – When Control Feels Out of Reach

While most youth described agency as something earned through effort and persistence, they also pointed to structural, social, and personal factors that make outcomes feel beyond their control. These barriers do not negate youth’s belief in effort but instead mark the conditions under which agency becomes harder to sustain or translate into action toward continued education or pursuit of gainful employment. These barriers define the

boundaries of self-efficacy, determining when confidence translates into action and when it fades into resignation.

### Economic Barriers

Financial insecurity emerged as the most common factor limiting youth’s sense of control. Many participants emphasized that motivation and hard work cannot replace stable income, access to credit, or affordable training. *“First of all, and this is the biggest issue, money. I might not have the money to buy a course. I might not have credit to recharge my phone for internet access,”* said a young woman from Balqa. For many, agency felt conditional on resources, and progress required not only willpower but material support. This could show how youth delay decisions, avoid risks, or choose safer short-term options because they cannot afford the cost of trying. When even basic steps require money they don’t have, youth focus on survival over personal growth, not because they lack motivation, but because the financial risk could feel too high, suggesting that financial scarcity narrows decision-making toward short-term, safer choices.

### Limited Opportunities

A recurring frustration amongst youth is the weak connection between effort and opportunity. While some youth expressed that shifting aspirations in response to blocked pathways supported their sense of control, others described it as a significant barrier to agency over the futures they hope for and actively worked towards. Youth described studying, training, persevering, and even seeking or moving to new physical environments, only to find themselves blocked by saturated job markets or strict qualification requirements. *“A person can change their environment, but I have an environment that didn’t create opportunities for me,”* explained a male participant from Tafila. A female participant in Zarqa echoed this *“Because all the fields already seem to be labeled ‘not in demand’... Even if you find a major that’s in demand and you study and graduate, when you go out to the real world, there’s nothing.”* This mismatch is heightened by experiences where merit seems secondary to connections and social networks. As one young woman in Zarqa said, *“My field requires a strong wasta... jobs in ministries or embassies require a lot of connections.”* Youth with disabilities expressed an even sharper sense of exclusion: *“I have the qualifications, the degree, the high GPA... and still, I can’t get a job,”* said a participant from Amman. These phenomena push youth to disengage from pathways that could feel unfair, or to lower their expectations because effort

does not feel rewarded. When opportunity feels outside their hands, they stop investing in long-term plans and focus on what seems realistically achievable, not what they actually aspire to.

### Social Norms and Family Influence

Although economic and institutional barriers matter, both religious beliefs and family expectations emerge as highly influential in shaping youth choices. However, family expectations function as the most consistent social constraint on youth agency, particularly where decisions involve education, work, mobility, or marriage. Two of every three respondents (61.7%) said advice or expectations from parents influence their choices a lot or completely, compared with only 16% who said the same about peers and 41% who said peers have no influence at all. This indicates that while religious beliefs strongly inform values and moral orientation, family remains the primary interpersonal decision-making reference point, especially for education, work, personal goals, and marriage.

While religious and spiritual beliefs shape how youth define what is right or acceptable, family expectations more directly shape what youth feel able to do in practice. For young women, these expectations often become direct limits on

autonomy. One in five women, compared to one in seven men, said family expectations completely shape their decisions. *“A lot of girls got opportunities to travel abroad but their families refused... ‘How can a girl travel alone?’”* recalled a young woman from Jerash. Others described how norms restrict even everyday choices: *“My family doesn’t like photography, so that’s my biggest obstacle... because it’s going out and coming back late, and because I’m a girl,”* said a participant from Karak.

Tradition and religion also remain influential but less dominant than family or economic pressures. 71.2% youth said religious beliefs shape their decisions a lot or completely, and 41.3% said the same about community traditions, while 24.4% said traditions have no influence at all. This suggests that many youth in these contexts are negotiating, not rejecting, traditional expectations, balancing respect with a desire for more personal choice. This could also reflect how some youth often choose the option that feels safest within family boundaries, even when it limits their aspirations. For these youth, decisions are shaped less by personal preference and more by what will avoid conflict, maintain approval, or protect family trust.

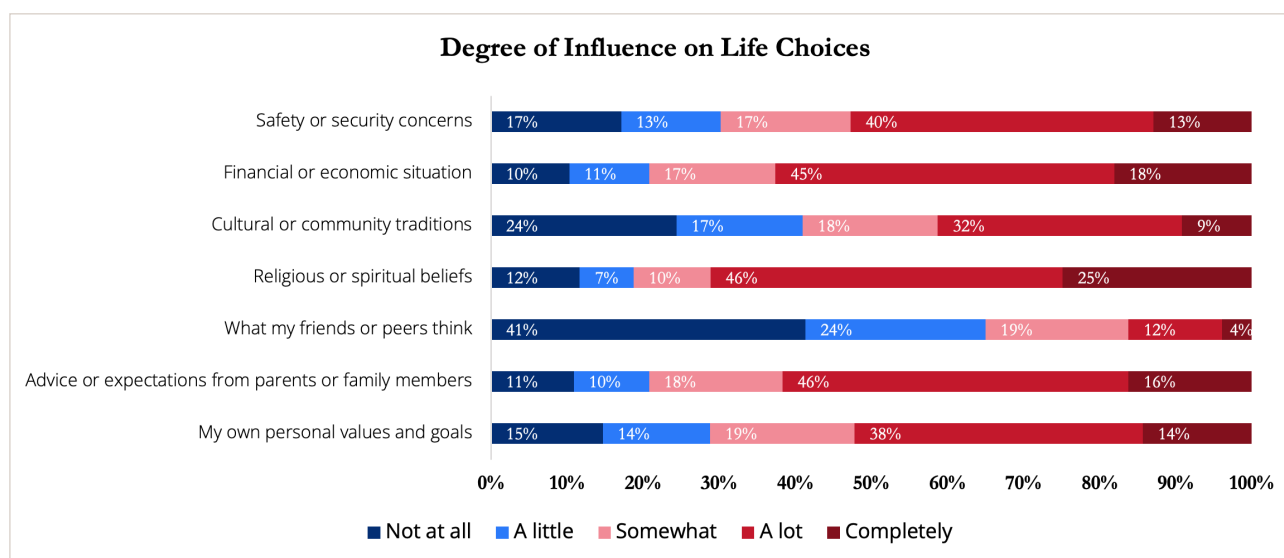


Figure 13: Influencing factors on life choices (n=1120)

### Internal Barriers: Fatigue and Stress

Beyond external challenges, many youth described internal barriers that weaken motivation after repeated effort with little reward. Experiences of failing to advance despite hard work create fatigue, frustration, and a sense of hopelessness. *“Sometimes one reaches a stage... where they lose hope. Even if a person has done many things, they*

*reach a stage where they say: ‘What more can I do?’”* said a young woman from Tafila. Another participant shared, *“I’ve been graduated for five years... I worked hard and spent a lot of money on courses and building my CV, all for nothing. I lost hope.”* This shows how youth begin to withdraw or reduce effort when the emotional cost of trying outweighs the progress they see. When effort does not lead to outcomes, motivation shifts from persistence to

self-protection, making disengagement a rational response rather than a lack of ambition.

Overall, these barriers show that youth agency is shaped as much by their environment as by their own motivation. Financial pressure limits what they can attempt, weak opportunities weaken belief that effort pays off, and family expectations, tradition or religion narrow the choices that feel socially acceptable. Over time, repeated disappointment also creates emotional fatigue that makes youth more cautious, even when they want to push forward. This is important because it shows that youth make decisions based on what feels fair, affordable, safe, and socially acceptable, and not only on what they hope for. When systems do not respond to their effort, they adapt by prioritizing safe choices, reducing efforts, or ceasing investment in long-term plans altogether.

### Youth Voice and Expression of Opinions

Youth described speaking up as something that depends on safety, trust, and the attitude of the listener. They express themselves freely when they feel respected, especially with family members or people who genuinely want to hear their ideas. As one young woman said, *“This is what I want, this is what I need... You won’t live my life, so this decision is mine.”* Others shared that they participate only with people who listen without judgment: *“Some people genuinely want to know you... and I respect those people.”* But when authority figures hold the power, such as teachers, elders, or decision-makers, many youth stay silent to avoid being labeled disrespectful. *“If you speak up... they’ll turn on you... and say, ‘She talks back to her parents; they didn’t raise her right,’”* explained one participant.

Youth also described a deep hesitation to share opinions when they believe nothing will change as a result, speaking up when they expect their voice to matter and staying silent when they expect dismissal or negative consequences. Many said that schools ignore their input or punish honesty: *“We used to talk a lot at school, but we stopped; school became so complicated.”* Others felt their ideas were taken without credit: *“He might not admit that I’m the one who came up with it,”* said a young woman from Jerash. These and other similar experiences weaken the belief that speaking up leads to impact. Behaviorally, youth treat speaking up as a calculated risk, choosing to express their views when safety and impact feel likely, and withholding their voice when the emotional or social cost of speaking outweighs the expected benefit.

### Self-Efficacy: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth trust themselves more than they trust systems.** They feel confident in goals that depend on their own effort such as studying, skill-building, or preparing for work, but this confidence drops sharply when success requires institutions, gatekeepers, or unpredictable processes.
- **Visible progress keeps motivation alive.** When youth can see even small results from what they invest, they continue engaging in learning or job preparation. When effort leads nowhere, confidence weakens and they shift toward safer or lower-risk education or employment decisions.
- **Confidence works as protection in challenging environments.** Youth use self-assurance to defend themselves from judgment, pressure, or exclusion **allowing them to remain engaged rather than withdraw from demanding pathways.**
- **Role models strengthen belief in personal ability.** Role models’ lived experience was perceived as a form of guidance; seeing someone they respect succeed, makes youth more willing to enroll, persist, and take risks in education, training, or job search because it proves that effort can pay off.
- **Agency collapses when systems feel unfair.** Failure of systems to create opportunities, or systemic barriers limiting available pathways make youth feel that control lies elsewhere, causing disengagement from education or withdrawal from employment pathways not out of apathy but because the effort seems pointless.

### Future Aspirations

Future aspirations represent the forward-looking dimension of agency, capturing how beliefs in one’s own abilities shapes youth’s visions of what they want to achieve in the future and how they orient themselves toward education and employment pathways. While self-efficacy reflects confidence in taking action, aspirations reveal how youth translate that confidence into long-term goals. This section explores what youth in Jordan hope to achieve in their lives, particularly in education

and work, and the challenges they anticipate in sustaining participation and translating aspirations into gainful employment. Their aspirations for education and employment offer insight into emerging pathways, including interest in entrepreneurship, remote and hybrid work, and the creative economy, but also highlight the social, economic, and institutional barriers that shape how achievable those futures feel.

## Youth Aspirations: Education, Work & Life Goals

Across qualitative and quantitative findings, youth described hopeful but grounded visions for their futures. 69.8% of respondents said they feel optimistic about what lies ahead, with much higher optimism among those aged 15-19 than among older youth. This shift suggests that aspirations evolve as youth begin to encounter structural limits, revealing that optimism is not only an emotional state but a behavioral signal. This shows that youth adjust their expectations as they learn which pathways feel open, fair, or achievable in practice.

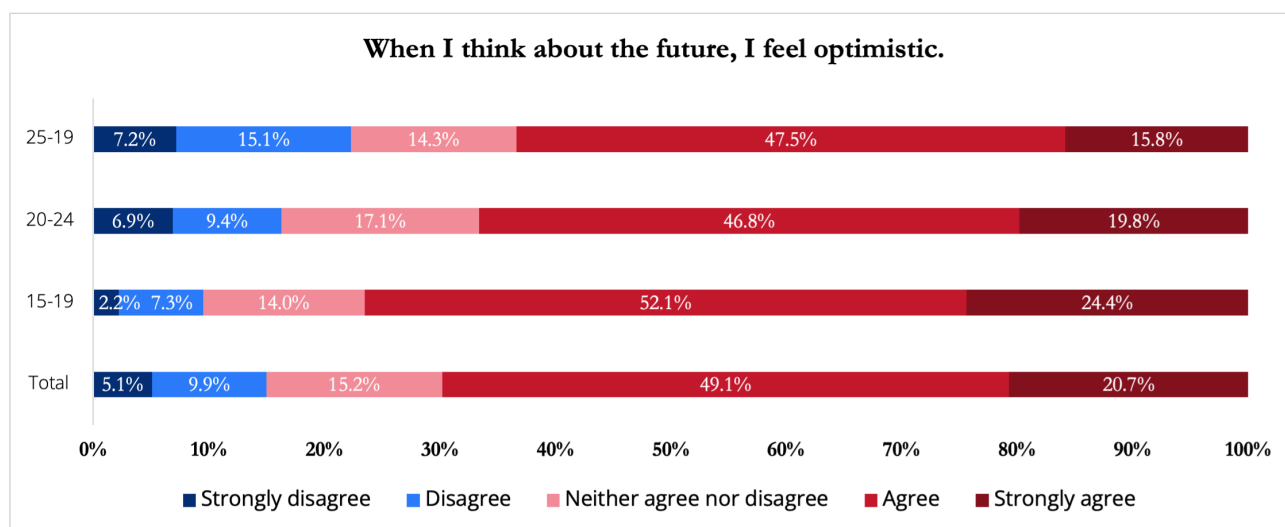


Figure 14: Level of optimism about the future across age groups (n=1120)

## Life Aspirations & Goals

Youth aspirations relate to engagement in gainful work and extend beyond it, often centering on stability, dignity, and the ability to support themselves and their families. Many described futures built around balance and comfort, such as *“I hope that ten years from now, I’ll have a family and be financially comfortable, with a steady income that allows me to live well, and time to spend with my family,”* shared a young man in Tafila. Financial independence was repeatedly described as foundational *“...and of course, to find a job, that’s the most important thing so we can be financially independent,”* explained a female participant in Karak, suggesting that employment aspirations, beyond an end in themselves, also represent a means towards those priorities. Others emphasized building inner strength and social respect as core life goals, for example, *“I want to be stronger and more confident. The most important thing is to build a strong personality that doesn’t break easily,”* said a young woman in Jerash. These aspirations reveal how youth judge opportunities: they gravitate

toward choices that feel stable, respectable, and aligned with their values, and they avoid paths that misalign with what they view as a ‘dignified’ life that allows financial comfort, personal development, and work-life balance. Behaviorally, these aspirations guide how youth evaluate opportunities, shaping which education and employment pathways they choose to invest in, persist with, or rule out based on whether they believe those choices can realistically deliver stability, dignity, and long-term wellbeing.

## Educational Aspirations

Education remains central in how youth imagine their future, but engagement with education is highly conditional. Completing Tawjihi or entering university is often viewed as an important marker of adulthood, independence, and mobility. As one female participant from Zarqa explained, *“I want to complete a bachelor’s year since it’s three years of diploma then a master. Let’s be logical here, from a financial perspective, my salary would be higher and my working hours fewer.”* Other youth linked higher education to relief from difficult work conditions: *“Nursing is very hard work, very exhausting, with*

*long hours and shifts. So, I want to [take a PhD to] become a university professor, something lighter than working in a hospital,”* said another female participant from Zarqa. For many, university also symbolized personal growth and independence: *“The most important thing is university, because that’s when you become your own person,”* said a young woman from Karak. A male participant echoed this spirit of autonomy saying *“God willing, the first goal I’ll achieve is to pay for my own Tawjihi, not relying on my father, just me.”* This shows that education is pursued not only for credentials but because it feels like the clearest and most legitimate path to future gainful employment. When youth believe education leads to concrete opportunities following its completion, such as increased and

improved work opportunities, higher salaries, and better work-life balance, their motivation to remain engaged and persist in education and training increases. Here, educational aspiration is therefore tightly tied to perceived payoff, system fairness, and confidence that effort will be rewarded.

### Work Aspirations

Across the sample, nearly all youth expressed a desire for meaningful and stable work. A large majority (84%) reported having career goals they want to achieve, and 79% feel confident they can reach them. Yet confidence decreases among older youth and those with disabilities, signaling that self-belief weakens when experience shows that effort does not always translate into opportunity.

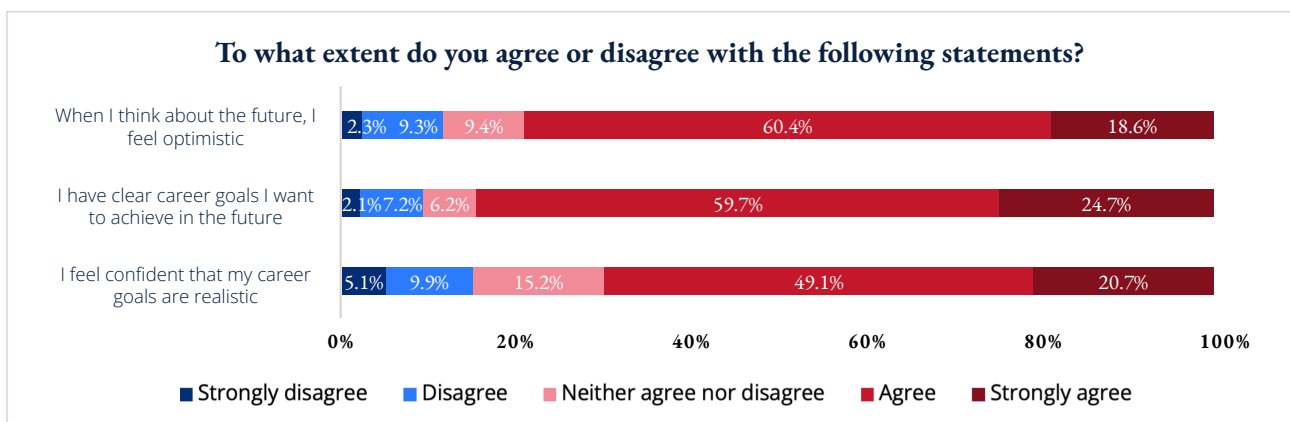


Figure 15: Level of confidence and optimism about career aspirations (n=1120)

Youth described a mix of formal employment and entrepreneurial ambitions. Young men highlighted government and security roles, *“I want to join public security, like the anti-narcotics or intelligence departments,”* said a participant in Irbid, while also considering small private ventures such as car washes or shops. Young women expressed entrepreneurial and creative goals rooted in autonomy and passion. A young woman from Jerash explained *“I want to start my projects in sewing and resin.”* These patterns of work aspirations show that youth seek pathways that balance stability with self-direction. When formal systems feel unreliable or competitive, with many citing limited availability of job opportunities as one of many motivating factors for self-employment, entrepreneurship and creative fields become attractive because they offer more control, flexibility, and identity-building.

Youth across groups reported being drawn to certain career sectors because each one offers a different sense of stability, dignity, or control. Understanding these preferences helps reveal why youth pursue some paths over others and how they use work choices to manage uncertainty, risk, and identity.

- **Entrepreneurship and self-employment:** Seen as a way to build something of their own, reflecting a shift toward self-reliance when institutional pathways feel limited or unpredictable.
- **Technology and digital fields:** Appealing because they feel merit-based, modern, and less dependent on social connections, allowing youth to bypass gatekeeping and imagine upward mobility on their own terms.
- **Army and police services:** Favored, particularly among young men in rural areas, for providing clear structure, respect, and guaranteed stability, reflecting a preference for predictable environments where effort is recognized.
- **Creative and media professions:** Attractive because they provide expression, autonomy, and meaning. For many young women, these fields offer a socially acceptable space to pursue independence while contributing economically, citing photography, design, translation, and media production as attractive opportunities.

## Barriers and Realities

While youth across groups hold ambitious visions for their futures, their ability to realize those ambitions is shaped by the social and structural environments around them. Aspirations exist within a web of expectations, from family and community norms to labor market realities that define what feels attainable or appropriate. Even when youth express clear confidence in their goals, they remain acutely aware that success depends on factors beyond their control: family approval, economic opportunity, and social acceptance. The gap between personal ambition and external constraint is therefore not only material but also psychological and actively shapes how youth plan, adjust, and sustain belief in their own potential.

### Social Expectations and Structural Limits

Youth described strong ambitions for their futures. However, many also emphasized that what they

want and what feels possible are not always the same. Aspirations are negotiated within family rules, community expectations, gender norms, and ideas of respectability. This shows youth pursue goals that feel socially permitted, not only personally meaningful, shaping the choices they take, delay, or quietly avoid. Survey findings reinforce this tension, where 81.4% of youth surveyed stated their families support their career paths. However, this confidence declines with age, as younger teens feel supported strongly, but older youth, those actively entering the workforce, report weaker agreement. This pattern suggests that once ambitions become real decisions rather than hypothetical hopes, family permission becomes more conditional. As a young man in Tafila put it, *“Right now, we ask, ‘Why aren’t we developing?’ It’s because we settle for the basics of life... society pressures us to accept these things, marriage, a car, a job.”*

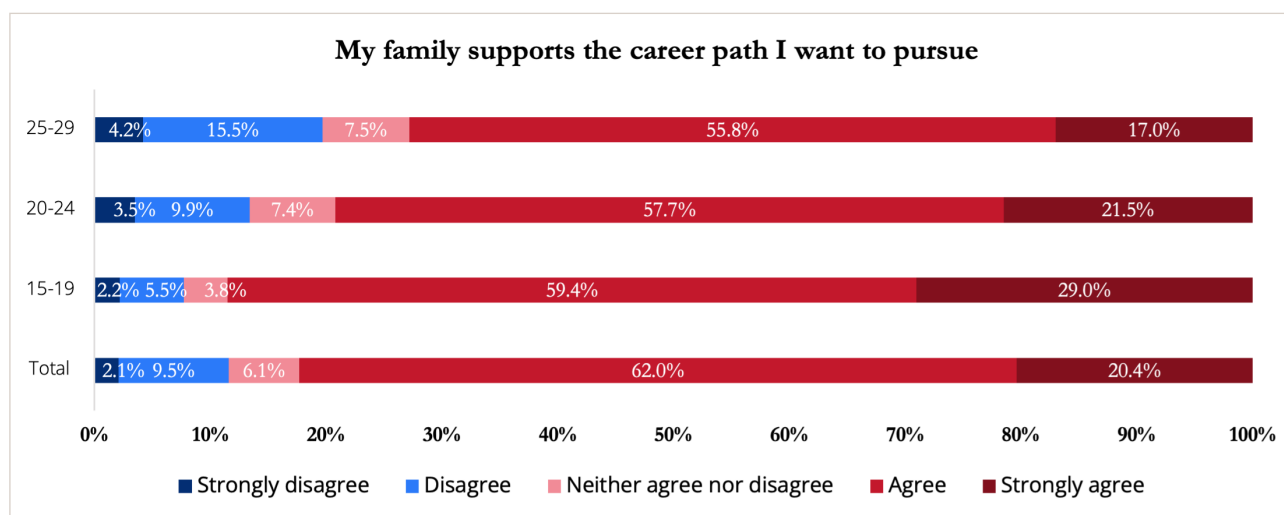


Figure 16: Family support of youth career aspirations across age groups (n=1120)

Gendered expectations create even sharper limits, where young men feel pressure to prioritize stability and income, and young women face scrutiny over modesty, reputation, or whether certain jobs are acceptable. *“Someone might say to me, ‘It’s haram, why are you doing this job: a makeup salon?’... It’s not about religion; it’s about customs,”* said a young woman in Jerash. These norms do not just influence opinions; they shape daily decisions such as what paths youth choose, which risks they avoid, and how confident they feel expressing ambition.

Yet many youth practice varied and subtle forms of resistance. Youth continue studying despite family pushback, work privately, or redefine success in ways that honor both aspiration and social safety. A young woman from Balqa shared *“even if, for example,*

*my family doesn’t allow me to go to university, I can still continue learning.”* Another young woman from Zarqa shared *“I got engaged once and told him everything... but two days before our wedding, he said: ‘You’re going to... quit this, quit that.’ He wanted to control everything. I told him, ‘Goodbye. I’ll leave you before I leave all that.’”* These acts of resistance show that youth agency often operates through negotiation and quiet boundary-setting. Youth bend norms where possible rather than break them outright, balancing autonomy with the need to remain accepted in their communities. Here, social expectations act as a behavioral filter where youth pursue goals that feel socially allowed, delay those that invite judgment, and adapt ambition to maintain dignity and belonging. Behaviorally, these forms of resistance show how youth make strategic

decisions under constraint, choosing where to invest time, effort, and persistence across education and employment pathways under uncertainty, and directing effort toward pathways that feel achievable without triggering exclusion or backlash.



### Aspirations vs Reality

Across the study, competition and limited openings were among the clearest stressors for youth. *“You want to apply to the Intelligence Department, 20,000 people apply, and they take 100,”* explained a young man from Madaba. When opportunities feel scarce, youth begin to ration their effort, choosing pathways that seem achievable rather than ideal. This reflects decision-making based on avoiding risk or choosing certainty over passion in order to protect dignity and reduce the chance of failure.

Overall, the distance between aspiration and opportunity does not eliminate ambition, it only reshapes it. Youth adjust goals to align with what feels actionable in their environment. When systems are perceived as unreliable, youth conserve effort, avoid high-risk choices, and prioritize options that promise dignity and stability over passion.

### Future Aspirations: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth aim for stability and dignity, but act within what feels socially acceptable when choosing education and employment pathways.** Family expectations, gender norms, and community judgment shape which dreams feel achievable and which feel risky, even when motivation is high.
- **When education or employment opportunities feel uncertain, youth adjust, not abandon, their goals.** They scale ambitions to match what seems realistically within reach, using pragmatic decision-making to protect themselves from disappointment.
- **Financial constraints directly shape which education and employment aspirations youth act on.** Many goals depend on resources youth do not have, so they choose paths that feel financially attainable, even if these are not their preferred futures.
- **Recognition influences persistence in education and employment-related effort.** Youth pursue opportunities where they believe their ideas or skills will be taken seriously and pull back when past experiences show that their contributions will be ignored or dismissed.

### Planning Ahead & Pathways to Work

Planning ahead and navigating pathways to work are central expressions of youth agency, reflecting how youth envision their futures, assess their options, and take steps toward economic independence. Across the data, youth demonstrate varying degrees of clarity, confidence, and preparedness in shaping their career trajectories. Their ability to plan for the future is closely tied to how they interpret the labor market, the resources they can mobilize, and the support networks guiding their decisions.

## Financial Planning and Future Readiness

Financial planning is not just about income; it represents long-term thinking, stability, and the ability to make healthy financial choices that support sustained participation in education and transition into gainful employment. Although 42% of surveyed youth felt very or extremely prepared to make long-

term financial decisions, readiness drops sharply among youth with disabilities, 15% of whom said they are not at all prepared. This pattern shows that youth willingness to plan is not the issue; feeling able to plan, however, depends on predictable income and trust in the systems around them.

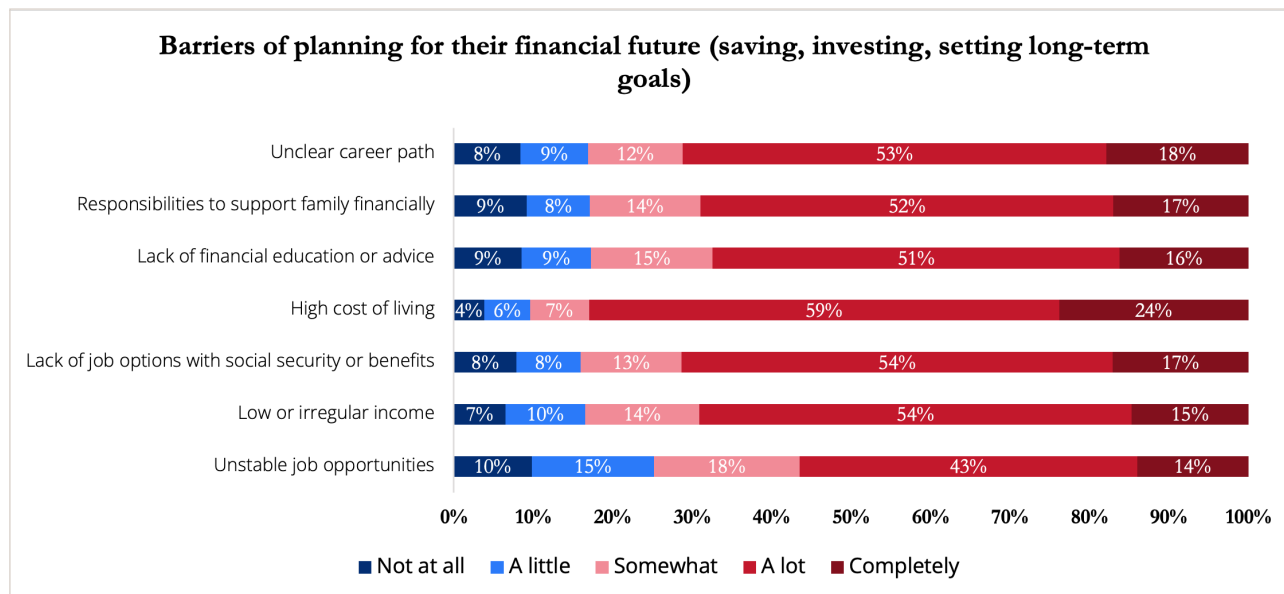


Figure 17: Barriers to planning financial future (n=1120)

Economic instability and unclear career pathways emerged as the biggest obstacles to planning ahead. 83% of surveyed youth cited high costs of living as a major barrier to saving or investing, 71% mentioned unclear job paths, and another 71% stated limited access to jobs with benefits (71%), and 69% expressed needing to support their families. These conditions push most youth into short-term survival mode, where they respond to immediate pressures rather than set long-term goals related to education completion or stable employment. This means planning becomes reactive rather than strategic, and youth focus on what they can control today because the future feels too uncertain to map out.

Although 2 in 3 youth said that lacking financial education is a barrier (67%), qualitative data show that knowledge alone is not the problem. Youth understand the basics of saving and investing, and what they lack is a stable foundation that makes planning feel worthwhile. They repeatedly expressed that financial advice is meaningless when income is irregular, opportunities are scarce, and systems feel unfair. This reveals that barriers are structural, not motivational, and that youth want to plan, but aforementioned conditions of instability and unpredictability make planning feel risky or premature.

For many, financial planning and job-seeking are essentially part of the same process to securing a stable future. Once youth feel ready to move toward their goals, they act quickly and start updating CVs, taking short courses, applying across sectors, and exploring freelance or hybrid options. A young woman in Jerash explains, *“I start applying to ... a mix between public sector, private sector, remote work, or my own project — whichever is available to me, so I can build experience and not just stay idle.”* Across surveyed youth, 69.2% agreed or strongly agreed that they *“would only accept an informal or freelancing job to gain initial experience”*. This approach shows initiative and adaptability, but also caution, as they try to balance stability, social expectations, and available opportunities. These patterns together show that youth pursue pathways that offer the highest sense of control with the lowest perceived risk. They diversify efforts not because they lack direction, but because the system doesn't offer a guaranteed route to stability.

## Priorities & Trade-Offs in Work Choices

Across groups, youth were clear that choosing a job is not just about earning money, it is also about securing dignity, safety, and social approval. Nearly 9 in 10 youth (88%) prioritized earning a

good salary, followed by working in a place with a good reputation and family approval (85%), and having a safe, supportive environment (84%). These trends show that youth make job decisions based

on minimizing risk as they gravitate toward jobs that feel predictable, socially acceptable, and low in personal exposure. A job is only attractive when it protects both income and identity.

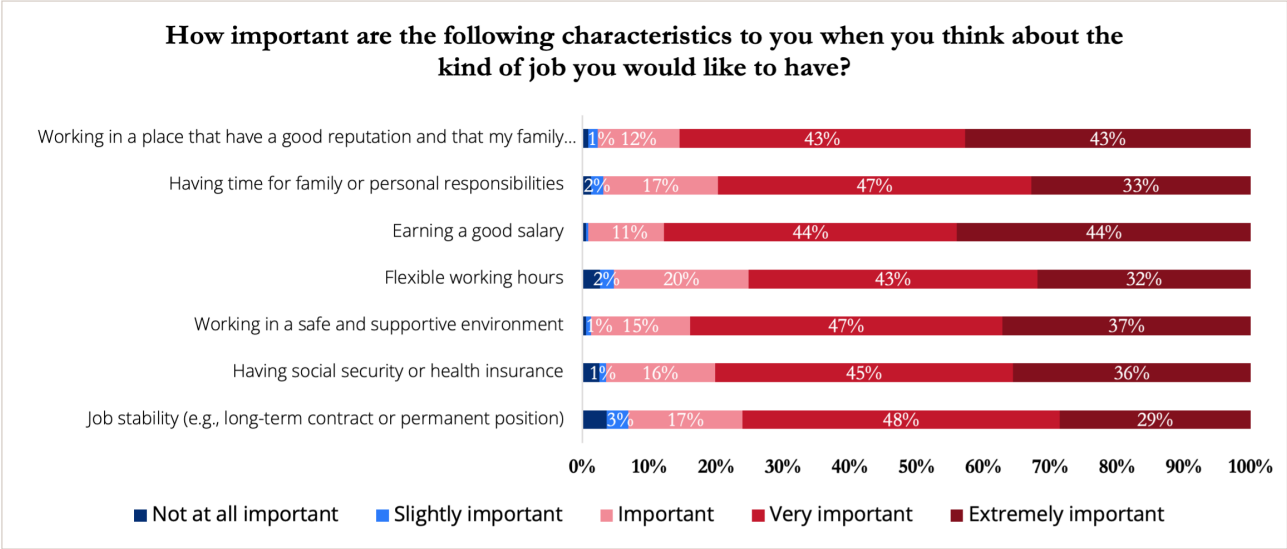


Figure 18: Influencing characteristics on job type preferences (n=1120)

Gender differences deepen this pattern. Nearly half of young women (48%) rated workplace reputation and family approval as very important, compared to 37% of men. This suggests that young women navigate a narrower margin of acceptable choices,

making family endorsement a critical part of whether they pursue or reject an opportunity. Career decisions for young women become as much about safety and legitimacy as financial reward.

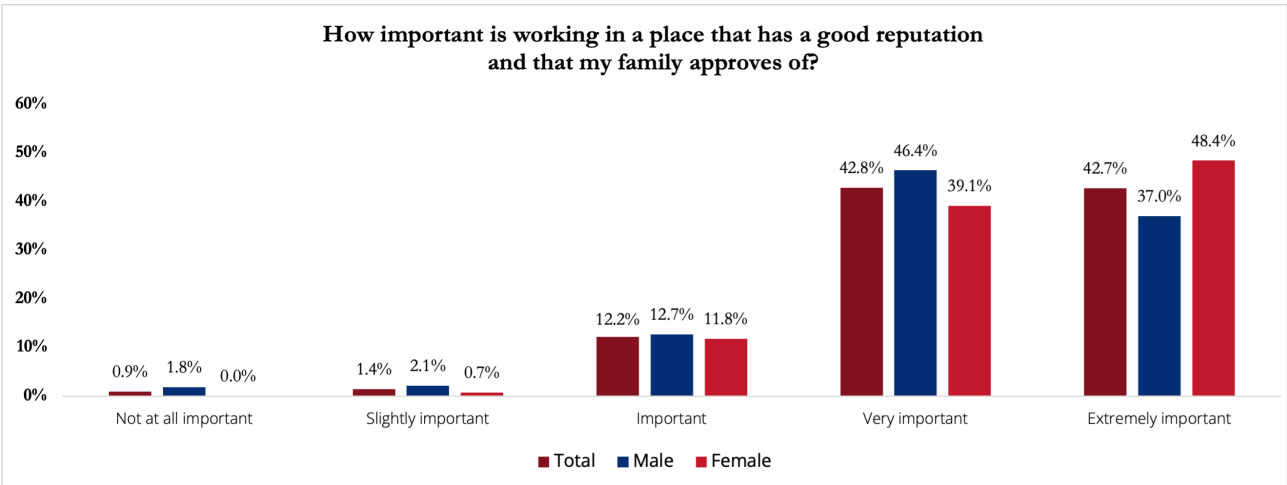


Figure 19: Importance of reputation and family approval on job selection, disaggregated by gender (n=1120, male=560, female=560)

Together, these patterns show that youth balance ambition with caution. They want meaningful work, but they choose paths that protect them from social judgment and economic volatility. A job becomes

worth it only when it promises stable income, approval from family, and environments where effort feels rewarded rather than risky.

## Approaches and Pathways to Finding Work

Youth reported approaching job-finding as a continuous, self-directed process, one that is built on activity, experimentation, and persistence rather than waiting for ideal opportunities. They prepare CVs, apply across sectors, pursue short courses, and build experience wherever possible, seeing movement itself as progress toward gainful employment. This reflects a strategy of momentum, so because outcomes feel unpredictable, youth reduce anxiety by staying in action, diversifying pathways, and building options that keep them engaged with the labor market. Another female participant in Jerash noted *“Since I’m about to graduate, maybe in a year or so, I want to work on something to gain experience or take courses... so that if I find something, I can put it on my CV and not be an empty candidate”*.

At the same time, youth know that effort alone does not guarantee results, so they adopt flexible, multi-pathway strategies to manage uncertainty, that include backup plans, small projects, migration possibilities, or informal work. Social expectations shape these pathways, especially for men who feel pressured to secure respectable jobs early, and for women who often combine informal work with study to remain engaged in education while gradually moving toward employment.

Youth also rely heavily on networks, both digital and personal to access opportunities, for example a female participant in Jerash said *“If you’re my friend and I have a lab, I’ll employ you with me... We’re talking about trust... I’d rather hire my relative whom I know than a stranger”*. This shows that in low-trust systems, youth anchor decisions in relationships rather than institutions, using networks to reduce risk when formal channels feel opaque or unreliable.

## Information & Support Gaps

Despite strong initiative, many youth operate without the information or support needed to navigate the labor market effectively. They described uncertainty about which sectors are growing, what skills actually matter, or where legitimate opportunities exist. This forces them to rely on peers, social media, or trial and error, which are strategies that help them cope but often leave them guessing. Youth repeatedly

emphasized that the issue is not motivation but lack of clear signals, which makes decisions about education, training, and employment pathways feel risky and reinforces inequality. Those with strong networks make better-informed decisions, while others depend on chance. This dynamic shows a pattern of compensating for systemic gaps with individual effort, even when that effort cannot fully substitute for guidance. Behaviorally, this means youth make education, skills, and employment decisions under high uncertainty, investing effort where information is most visible rather than where opportunities are most viable, which amplifies differences between those with access to guidance and those navigating by guesswork.

Youth have reported that training opportunities fail to connect learning with real employment, leaving them feeling like they are preparing in the dark. For example, a female participant in Tafila explained *“There is training, but it doesn’t match the labor market needs... training courses should be directly linked to employment opportunities.”* Without structured career guidance in school, many start adulthood without the information needed to choose majors or trajectories confidently to transition into gainful employment. This creates a disconnect between agency and outcome where youth try, prepare, and invest, but systems do not provide the pathways that make those investments pay off. As a behavioral consequence, youth keep acting, but often broadly and reactively, because they lack the targeted information that would allow strategic, confident decisions about education and employment pathways.



### Planning Ahead and Pathways to Work: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth plan reactively when the future feels uncertain.** When income, job security, or career pathways are unpredictable, youth focus on short-term steps rather than long-term strategies because planning only feels useful when the environment is stable enough to make it worth the effort.
- **Youth take action as a coping strategy, and a part of job-seeking.** Youth apply widely, pursue courses, and build experience because staying in motion helps them feel in control. Activity reduces stress and uncertainty, even when outcomes remain unclear.
- **Youth's existing networks shape the opportunities available to them, even more than internal motivation does.** Youth rely on family, friends, and informal connections because formal pathways feel opaque. This means effort alone does not guarantee success, and access to information and trusted peers often determines who progresses.
- **Information gaps turn agency into guesswork.** Youth want to plan and prepare, but when guidance is limited or outdated, they make decisions through trial and error. This leads to uneven outcomes, where those with better support systems make more confident and strategic choices.

### Emerging Behavioral Patterns for Agency

- **Youth anchor their decisions in what feels within their control.** They show strong belief in their own effort, persistence, and problem-solving, and naturally gravitate toward goals where they can clearly see the role of their own actions. When education or employment pathways feel more complex or dependent on multiple actors, youth approach them with more caution, not due to low motivation but because they are trying to reduce uncertainty.

- **Youth adjust how far ahead they plan based on the predictability of education and employment pathways.** When income, opportunities, or next steps are clear, they plan ambitiously and with confidence. When things feel less predictable, youth shift to shorter-term, practical steps that allow them to remain engaged in learning or job-seeking while postponing higher-risk commitments. This pattern reflects strategic adaptation, not lack of aspiration.
- **Taking action helps youth maintain momentum and emotional balance.** Sending applications, seeking courses, or building experience gives youth a sense of progress. Even small steps help them feel grounded and capable, especially during transitions. Here, activity functions as a behavioral tool for keeping youth engaged in education, training, or employment pathways even when outcomes are delayed.
- **Youth revise their goals to stay hopeful and realistic.** Rather than giving up on their ambitions, they fine-tune them to fit what feels achievable. This recalibration allows youth to continue investing effort in education or employment-related pathways while managing risk and disappointment.
- **Social expectations shape which choices feel acceptable or achievable.** Family advice, community norms, and perceptions of respectability influence how young men and women evaluate opportunities. These signals do not replace personal aspirations; they act as reference points that help youth judge what feels possible and appropriate.
- **Relationships and networks influence access to education and employment pathways.** Trusted people such as family, mentors, peers play an important role in supporting decision making, sharing information, and opening **doors** related to education and employment pathways. Youth rely on these networks because they offer clarity and reassurance during moments of uncertainty.
- **Youth make decisions with limited or uneven information.** Many youth navigate education or career choices using the information available to them, which varies widely by region, network, and exposure. This shapes behavior not by limiting ambition but by influencing how confidently youth take steps toward their education or employment goals.

# Contribution

This domain will explore how youth engage with and contribute to their communities and society and how these experiences influence decisions related to education and employment pathways. It will examine both actual participation and the desire to participate in civic, social, or economic life. The study will investigate barriers and enablers to contribution, including perceived impact, relevance, and access to inclusive platforms or decision-making spaces and how these factors reinforce or undermine motivation to remain engaged in education and gainful employment.

## Youth Engagement

Engagement is about how youth perceive and enact their role within their communities; socially, civically, and institutionally. It examines not only whether youth participate, but how they define meaningful engagement and what conditions enable or restrict it. Youth engagement reflects the behavioral expression of belonging: the ways in which youth voice opinions, participate in collective life, and translate motivation into action.

## Sense of Influence & Inclusion

Across the study sample, youth describe themselves as socially active but with limited power to shape decisions that affect them. Fewer than half feel they can influence community decisions, and about one in three explicitly disagree, signaling a gap between participation and actual influence. Slightly higher confidence among rural youth (41.2%) compared to urban youth (36.1%) may reflect closer proximity to local networks, while young women's stronger sense of contribution (72% vs. 64.5% of men) suggests they often engage through informal or relational roles even when formal leadership spaces remain restricted. Yet for roughly a third of youth, exclusion feels complete. This uneven sense of belonging shapes how youth judge whether civic spaces are genuinely open to them or only available in name. Therefore, the gap between participation and influence shapes whether youth continue to engage, withdraw into informal roles, or disengage altogether, depending on whether civic spaces are perceived as responsive and worth the effort, and whether engagement contributes to skills, confidence, or social legitimacy that youth can carry into other life domains.

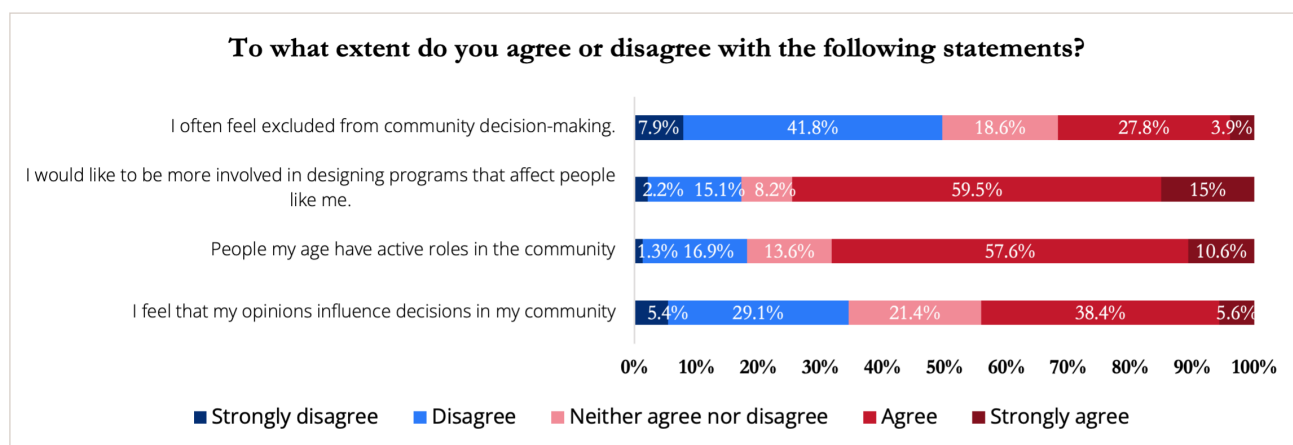


Figure 20: Perceptions of self and peers' community engagement (n=1120)

Across groups, youth repeatedly described influence as something tied to access rather than fairness. Many feel that decision-makers selectively listen to certain groups, reinforcing the idea that being heard depends on confidence, status, or connections rather than the value of one's ideas. *"They only hear what they want to hear,"* explained a young man in Amman, while another added, *"They listen to communities that have high status or influence. The other groups, they don't get heard."* For some men, being taken seriously is framed through strength or masculinity, such as 'be firm, be a man' which turns civic participation into a test of character instead of

a shared right that youth universally enjoy. These patterns create a selective model of inclusion where only the confident, connected, or outspoken feel able to influence outcomes. As a male participant in Tafila put it, *"We have a youth [representative], but I've never seen him or heard him speak about us... Only youth with connections get invited."* This highlights that youth want to participate, and make strategic decisions about where and when to engage in education or employment, speaking up selectively, conserving effort when impact seems unlikely, and relying on personal networks because institutional pathways feel unpredictable or opaque.

## Forms & Patterns of Participation

Youth participation in Jordan is active but largely shaped by the spaces that feel most accessible and meaningful to them. More than half regularly discuss community issues with family or peers (52.3%), suggesting that youth gravitate toward settings where dialogue feels safe, familiar, and reciprocal. Youth enrolled in school or university do so even more frequently, which could reflect that educational settings naturally provide routine, low-effort spaces

for exchange, such as classmates, teachers, and group activities, making it easier for youth to express opinions and stay connected to community issues. Once outside these environments, engagement becomes more dependent on personal initiative and available networks, which is why participation often becomes more informal and fragmented, and why the loss of structured spaces can indirectly weaken confidence, voice, and continuity across other life pathways.

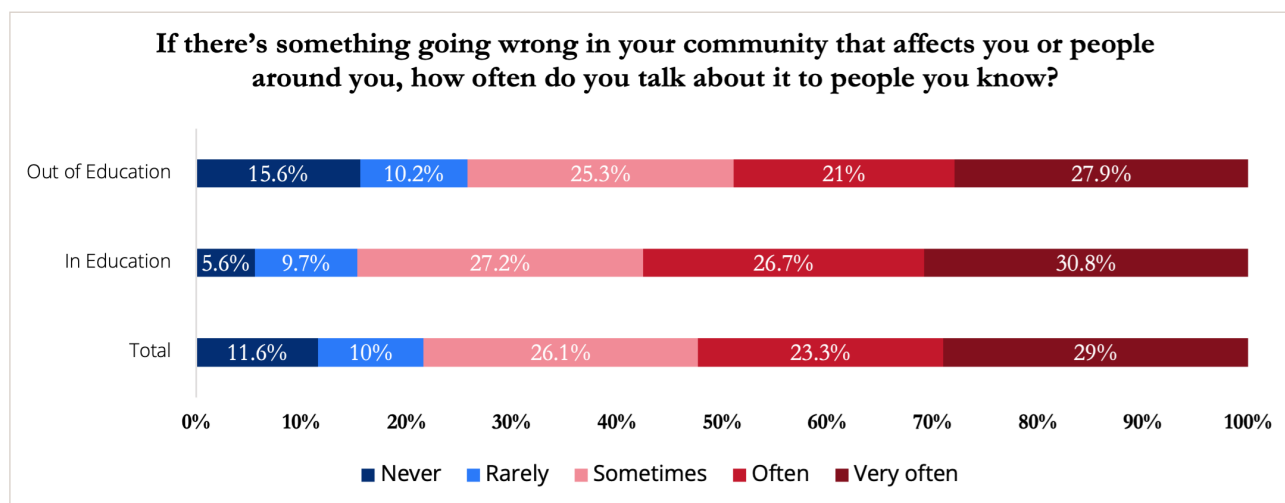


Figure 21: Talking to one's network as a coping mechanism to negative experiences, disaggregated by enrollment in school/university (n=1120, In education=445, Not in education=675)

Digital platforms play a secondary role, where roughly one in four youth frequently use social media to raise community concerns (22.7%), indicating that while online expression is common, it does not automatically translate into civic engagement unless youth believe it will have real influence. For some, especially youth with disabilities, digital spaces become a practical substitute for in-person engagement when physical or social barriers make

participation more difficult. As a young man with a disability in Irbid shared, *"I spend the day on the phone... just a normal regular day, nothing special,"* and his caregiver added, *"He basically gave up and stopped going out."* These patterns show how youth choose participation channels that feel manageable, responsive, and aligned with their daily realities.

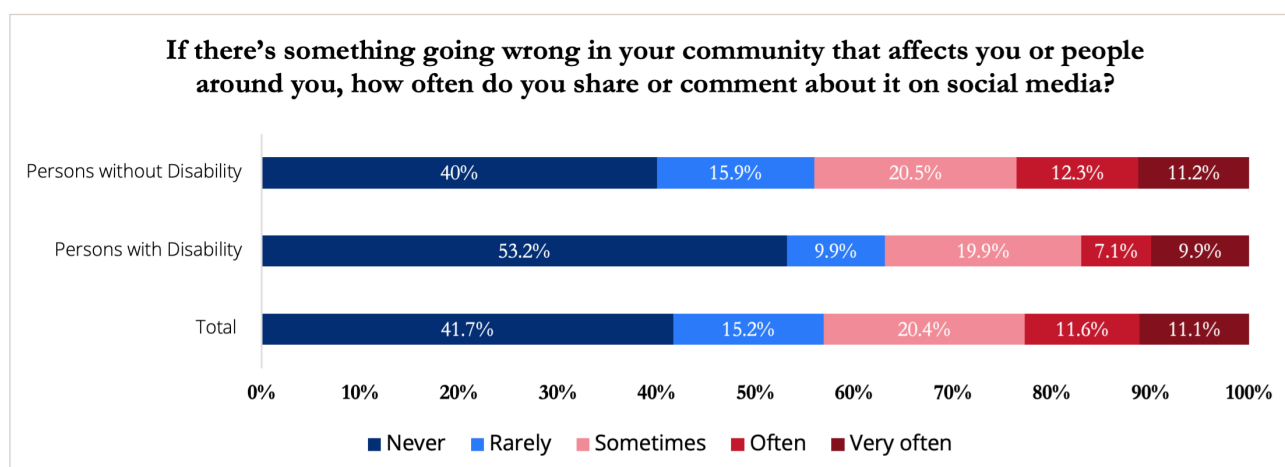


Figure 22: Social media as a coping mechanism to negative experiences, disaggregated by disability (n=1120, Youth with disability=141, Youth without disability=979)

Structured civic participation is less common, however, not due to a lack of interest, but because many youth perceive informal, self-initiated action as more effective. Fewer than one in four take part in organized community activities (23.4%), yet youth describe taking initiative independently, such as applying skills, solving problems, or volunteering when opportunities arise. *“Your message won’t get through if you don’t have a channel,”* noted a male participant in Karak, illustrating how youth often assess influence based on relational access rather than formal positions.

Others find meaning in contribution through volunteering and personal growth, for example, a young woman in Zarqa shared *“Volunteering in itself is experience... It doesn’t have to be paid.”* When institutional spaces feel unfamiliar, symbolic, or unresponsive, youth gravitate toward forms of participation that feel more immediate and meaningful to them. As one young man from Karak put it, *“We need youth institutions in Karak, not just ones named ‘Youth Centers’ but real ones that care about youth issues,”* capturing a broader preference for spaces that feel genuine, responsive, and connected to their lived experience. These patterns show that youth participate most where they feel their actions matter, prioritizing environments that offer recognition, connection, and immediate relevance. Behaviorally, youth tend to choose forms of participation based on perceived influence and immediacy, investing effort where impact feels visible and accessible rather than in formal structures that could feel distant, symbolic, or unresponsive.



## Youth Participation: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth engage most in spaces that feel safe and low risk.** They participate actively in personal and peer settings because these environments reduce judgement and uncertainty, making contribution feel manageable.
- **Perceived influence drives participation.** Youth step forward when they believe their voice matters, and withdraw when decisions seem predetermined or selective, shifting their energy to spaces where they feel more control.
- **Personal initiative fills gaps in formal channels.** With limited clarity on how to participate institutionally, youth rely on self-driven problem-solving, informal volunteering, and direct action as their primary modes of engagement, **developing skills and confidence that can support broader agency across education and work-related decisions.**
- **Networks shape who participates visibly.** being able to influence is seen as tied to confidence and connections, meaning motivation is high across groups, but opportunities to be heard remain uneven.
- **Digital engagement emerges when other spaces feel closed.** Youth, especially those facing mobility or social barriers, use online platforms to express themselves, though they rarely expect these spaces to lead to real influences.

## Economic Contribution

Economic contribution focuses on how youth contribute to their communities and society through economic participation, whether through formal employment, informal work, or entrepreneurship. Economic contribution represents not only income generation but also a form of agency, independence, and social value. In a context where structural constraints shape both opportunity and aspiration, youth economic participation serves as a critical marker of inclusion. By examining how youth navigate barriers to earning, entrepreneurship, and financial stability, this section explores how they construct meaning around work and productivity,

and how economic contribution functions as both a livelihood strategy and a pathway to social recognition.

### Perception of Economic Contribution

For many youth, earning money is not only a financial act but a marker of dignity, usefulness, and adulthood, or a way to *“feel you exist,”* as one participant in Karak explained. Economic contribution functions as a behavioral signal of self worth and social legitimacy, which is why public-sector jobs hold such strong appeal as they symbolize security, fairness, and stability, even when salaries are modest. As a young woman in Zarqa put it, *“Government jobs are better; you’re safe even if the salary is low.”* In contrast, the private sector is often viewed as unpredictable or extractive. For example, a young man in Irbid shared *“Private companies exploit people; they make you work long hours and pay little.”* These perceptions shape decision-making by making youth more likely to invest effort in pathways where outcomes feel protected and failure feels less personally costly, including education or work-related activities that preserve dignity and stability.

At the same time, youth recognize that private, remote, and entrepreneurial work can offer experience, flexibility, and independence, but only when the risks feel manageable. Youth often frame entrepreneurship as desirable in theory but out of reach without capital, networks, or mentorship. As one young woman in Balqa shared, *“If I could start something online, from home, I would, at least I’d be my own boss.”* Behaviorally, this reflects a conditional openness to risk where youth are willing to pursue innovation when autonomy feels attainable, but default to stability when uncertainty is high. Their economic choices therefore reflect a pragmatic strategy where they seek contribution that is both meaningful and safe in contexts where long-term employment or education outcomes feel uncertain or externally controlled.

### Income Generation Patterns

Across groups, youth described income generation as a continuous balancing act between earning, learning, and staying active. Most youth reported limited access to stable formal employment where those who do often hold short-term or entry-level positions secured them through connections or technical skills. For many others, income comes from informal, part-time, or family-based work that offers flexibility but limited security. This kind of work is especially common among rural youth, out-of-school youth, and those facing mobility constraints. As one young man in Irbid explained,

*“I work at a barbershop; I help out after school to learn the craft.”* These accounts show that youth often engage in work that allows them to combine earning with learning, using accessible opportunities to build experience even when pathways to stable employment remain uncertain.

Informal work also carries social and emotional meaning, becoming a substitute for formal contribution when stable pathways are out of reach. Many youth tend to blend earning with volunteering, apprenticeships, or skill-building, where the boundaries between labor and learning are intentionally fluid. Taking on ‘anything available’ allows youth to maintain dignity, signal responsibility, and avoid the stigma of idleness, even when the work provides little long-term payoff. At the same time, some described unpaid roles as double-edged: useful for gaining experience but not always recognized or rewarded. Behaviorally, this reveals that youth stay in motion because effort itself is treated as progress, particularly when formal systems offer limited or delayed validation. When structured opportunities are scarce, youth construct alternative routes to contribute economically, socially, and personally allowing them to remain engaged rather than disengaging from longer-term gainful employment aspirations.

### Barriers to Work & Entrepreneurship

Across groups, youth described financial and procedural barriers as the main limits to entering the workforce or starting a business. Limited savings, lack of access to small loans, and uncertainty about bureaucratic steps make entrepreneurship feel out of reach, even for those with clear ideas. As one young man in Karak shared *“We don’t have places to work or start projects; even if you have an idea, there’s no one to help you.”* These constraints shape behavior by pushing youth toward lower-risk, short-term income strategies rather than long-term investments that depend on resources or systems that do not reliably reward effort in education or employment pathways. This leads to cautious, incremental decision-making where youth prioritize stability over ambition because they feel like their environment does not reward long-term bets.

For young women and youth with disabilities, social norms and mobility restrictions create an additional layer of exclusion. Family expectations, safety concerns, and limited accessible transport reduce the range of opportunities they feel able to pursue. A female participant in Balqa explained, *“My father doesn’t let me work outside; he says women shouldn’t mix with men.”* These constraints make entrepreneurship appealing in theory:

flexible, self-directed, independent, but still difficult to act on, particularly when capital or licensing feels unattainable, as one young woman in Irbid noted *“If I wanted to open something, I’d need a license and capital, both are impossible.”* In response, many youth adapt by relying heavily on individualized strategies such as self-learning, informal networking, and trial-and-error, which allow them to retain agency within constrained or uncertain conditions. This reflects persistence rather than disengagement, showing how youth adjust their behavior to what feels realistically achievable while keeping future education or employment options open where possible.

#### Economic Contribution: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth pursue the safest available path, not necessarily the most aspirational one.** When job markets feel unpredictable, youth gravitate toward roles that guarantee stability and protect dignity, often prioritizing options that allow them to remain economically active rather than disengaging while waiting for education or employment pathways to stabilize, even if the work is less aligned with their skills or interests.
- **Economic contribution is tied to identity and self-worth.** Youth seek work not only to earn income but to feel useful, visible, and respected, meaning productivity itself becomes a behavioral driver, even when opportunities are limited.
- **Informal work becomes a default strategy when formal pathways feel blocked.** Youth rely on flexible, short-term, or part-time options because they offer immediate entry and control, reinforcing a behavioral pattern of *“doing what is possible now”*, while keeping future education or employment options open, rather than waiting for ideal opportunities.

## Emerging Behavioral Patterns for Contribution

- **Youth participate where they feel their presence matters.** They engage most in interpersonal or informal spaces because these offer immediate feedback and social recognition. When influence feels uncertain, youth do not disengage, they simply redirect effort toward settings where contribution feels visible and valued, **reinforcing confidence and willingness to stay engaged across other life domains.**
- **Youth calibrate their level of engagement based on perceived openness.** When pathways for involvement feel clear and accessible, they step in confidently. When processes feel selective or unclear, youth shift to individual or peer-driven actions. This is not withdrawal but a strategic move toward spaces that feel fair and predictable, mirroring how youth manage risk and effort in education and work-related decisions.
- **Youth express motivation even when formal opportunities feel limited.** High willingness to contribute paired with low perceived influence shows that desire is not the issue, opportunity is. Youth continue to look for entry points, but they invest effort where the likelihood of being heard feels strongest.
- **Digital engagement is used selectively rather than symbolically.** Youth turn to online spaces when they offer comfort, accessibility, or anonymity, especially for youth with disabilities, but do not view them as strong levers for change. This reflects a preference for platforms where credibility and impact feel attainable.
- **Entrepreneurial interest reflects a desire for autonomy, not risk-taking.** Many youth imagine running small businesses because it symbolizes control, dignity, and self-reliance. This ambition shows a strong orientation toward independence, even when structural barriers make immediate action difficult.

## Enabling Environment

This domain examines the broader systems, structures, and social norms that influence youth behaviors and opportunities related to participation in education and training and engagement in gainful employment. It includes an exploration of formal policies, programs, and services, as well as informal

cultural dynamics and societal expectations. By understanding how these environments support or constrain youth to enroll, persist, or disengage from education and employment pathways, the study identifies areas for systemic improvement and more equitable access to opportunities.

## Social Norms & Networks

Social norms and networks are the informal systems of influence that shape how youth navigate opportunity, agency, and belonging, including how they approach education and employment pathways. The data consistently show that youth decision-making is embedded in their relationships, and that these same networks often act as both enablers and constraints. By analyzing how youth describe support, pressure, expectations, and perceived social obligations, this section explores the behavioral mechanisms through which norms are transmitted and reinforced and how they shape where youth invest or withhold effort. The qualitative evidence helps unpack the lived dynamics of trust, authority, and gatekeeping, while the quantitative

data provide signals about whose influence is strongest and in which contexts.

### Social Pressure, Expectations & Conformity

Across the study, social norms consistently shape how youth evaluate choices, manage risk, and define what feels acceptable. Youth behave with a constant awareness that their decisions are socially interpreted, which means many choices are filtered through the question: *“How will this reflect on my family?”* With 83.5% considering family reputation when making decisions, these social expectations operate as a boundary that encourages options that signal responsibility and discourages paths that might invite judgment or uncertainty.

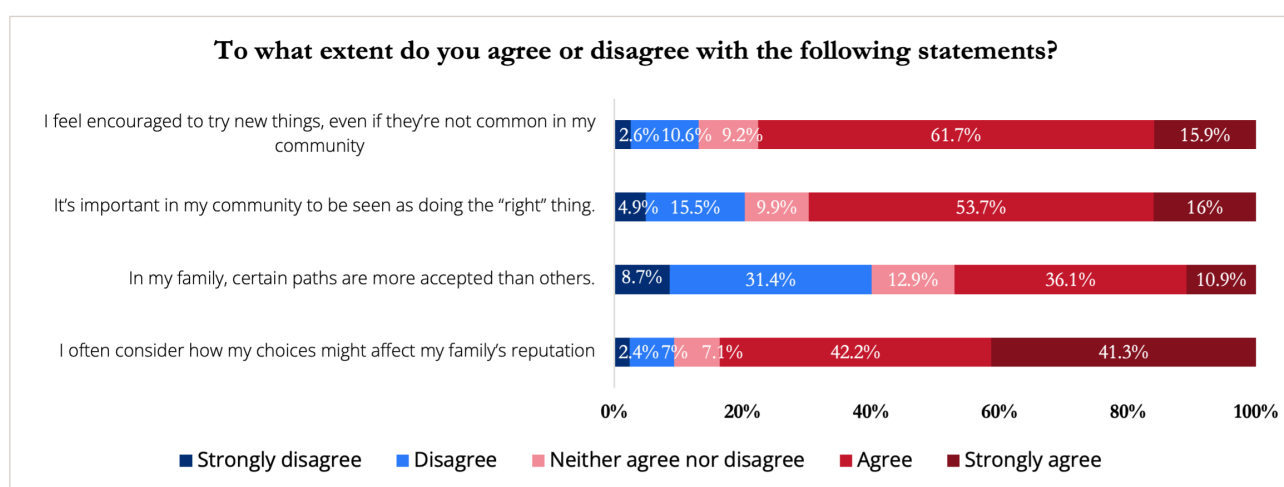


Figure 23: Community and family considerations in decision-making (n=1120)

For many youth, conformity is less about obedience and more about protection. Strong moral expectations and reputational concerns make youth prefer choices that minimize conflict, maintain dignity, and avoid community criticism. With 87.3% of female respondents stating that they often consider the impact of their choices on their family reputation, in comparison with 79.6% of male respondents, young women feel this pressure more intensely and often adjust their behavior pre-emptively to stay within what is considered appropriate, including in decisions related to education tracks, work options, and timing of transitions. These pressures begin at home with parents acting as the primary reference point, shaping not only what youth believe is possible but also what feels allowed. As a male participant in Karak put it, *“Everything starts with the parents... anything you build comes from them.”* This learned responsibility leads youth to choose education tracks, jobs, and daily practices that align with family values, even when personal interests diverge. Behaviorally, this means youth assess opportunities not only by potential benefit, but by perceived social

risk, affecting whether they persist, delay, or avoid certain education or employment options.

Community judgement reinforces this dynamic as a young woman in Tafila describes: *“It’s not just family pressure; society outside also pressures family, and you feel it.”* Youth described social environments that quickly correct or critique deviation, making experimentation or non-traditional choices feel risky. For example, one young man in Irbid said *“Society gives you negative feedback on everything, even if it’s not true... someone might come up to me and say: ‘What you’re doing is wrong’”*. This reflects cautious decision-making where youth aim for paths that are familiar, respectable, and socially validated, and often avoid actions that might be misunderstood or questioned. As a result, youth often delay exploration, self-censor their ambitions, or narrow their choices early, prioritizing paths that are socially legible over those that require explanation or defense.

## The Role of Networks

Youth across groups describe growing up in environments where life paths feel largely predetermined. With 60% agreeing that people in their community tend to follow similar trajectories, networks act as signal which choices are normal, which are risky, and which paths lead to social acceptance. As a result, many youth make decisions not only based on personal preference but on what feels socially validated and safe. This turns networks into informal decision guides, where youth interpret what others do as evidence of what is feasible, worthwhile, or safe to pursue.

Within this context, community norms are reproduced through observation and comparison. Youth monitor what others around them do, whether peers continue school, take certain jobs, or start families, and adjust their expectations accordingly. As a young man in Amman put it, *“You’ll be influenced by the people around you... why should I study if nobody around me does? They’re living fine, so I’ll end up like them.”* This shows how the most visible choices in a network become the default, making alternative paths feel unnecessary or unrealistic. In this way, social networks do not just influence aspirations, they actively shape which choices youth act on and which they withdraw or disengage from.

Families reinforce these signals through everyday guidance that channels youth into familiar and proven-to-work options. These micro-interactions act as informal gatekeeping, nudging youth toward what siblings or relatives consider appropriate. For example, a young man in Irbid shared, *“My brother... grabbed me and said: ‘No, barbering is better for you’... I fought with him a hundred times because I didn’t want to become a barber.”* Even when well-intentioned, pressure like this narrows the range of options youth feel able to pursue, as different options start to feel unsupported, or unfamiliar.

Youth also behave cautiously to avoid judgement or misunderstanding. Deviating from expected roles, such as choosing a less common major, seeking an unconventional job, or delaying marriage, can attract scrutiny, so many default to choices that minimize the social risk, often narrowing education or work choices early. Teachers further shape these boundaries, functioning either as enforcers of local norms or as rare disruptors who expand what students see as possible. One young man from Amman explained how mixed messages from teachers shape confidence: *“One teacher gives you the feeling that you’re very smart... then another tells you, ‘You are not smart since the beginning.’”*

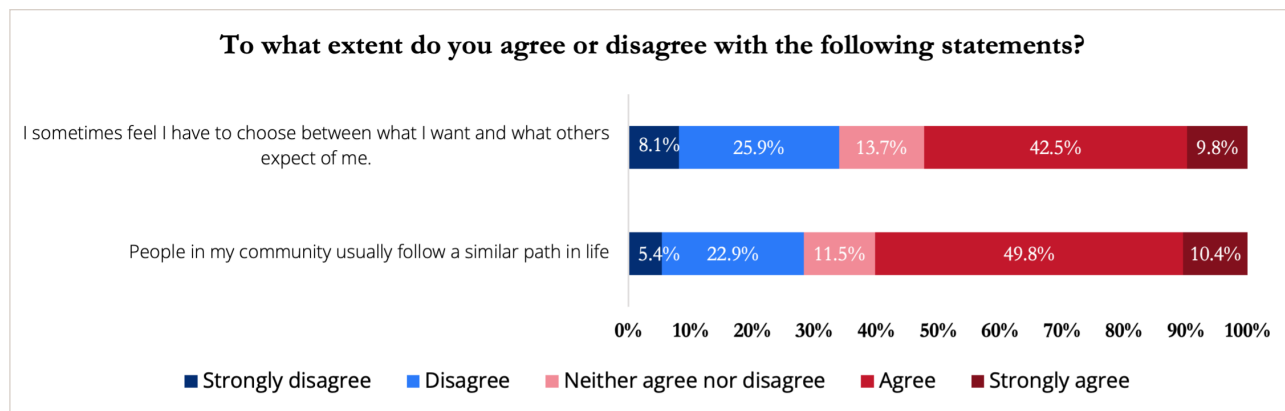


Figure 24: Influence of community norms (n=1120)

## Internal Tension, Motivation & Risk-Taking

Youth decision-making is shaped by a tension between wanting to choose for themselves and wanting to meet the expectations of others. With over half reporting they often must choose between what they want and what others expect (52%), many youth navigate their futures with an internal push-pull, as aspiration drives them forward, while social obligation pulls them toward safer and more socially acceptable options. Being seen as doing the ‘right thing’ by one’s community was a priority for almost 7

in 10 youth (69.6%), yet roughly 8 in 10 say they feel encouraged to try new things (77.6%), showing that both motivation and pressure often come from the same relationships, acting as an ongoing source of influence over youth decision-making. This tension reflects the interaction between two types of social norms: the first where youth perceive what others around them typically do, signaling which paths are common or proven, and the second around what youth feel they should do to gain approval, avoid judgment, or meet family and community expectations. Here, youth decision-making is shaped by the need to navigate both: observing what seems

to work for others while responding to pressure about what is socially expected of them.

Encouragement plays a powerful role as well. When support is consistent across home, school, and peers, it strengthens confidence and lowers the perceived risk of trying something new, signaling that both exploration and effort are socially acceptable. As young men in Amman explained, *“You need someone to encourage you... everywhere: at home, your family, your friends, your relatives, the school.”* This kind of multi-source reassurance expands what youth feel capable of attempting, increasing willingness to engage in education, training, or work pathways that involve uncertainty.

But the same relationships that motivate youth can also constrain them. Encouragement can blend with obligation, turning support into pressure to succeed, avoid embarrassment, or uphold family reputation. This produces a caution where youth avoid risks that might lead to failure or judgement. A male participant in Tafila explained *“Sometimes, there’s discouragement from the family, or the family might pressure you... you must make a place for yourself in society... you feel like you can’t be afraid or have anxiety about working.”*

These dynamics mean that youth approach choices, whether about education, work, or mobility, by weighing not only personal desire, but also the social and emotional costs of stepping outside expected paths. Their risk-taking becomes calibrated: bold when social signals suggest exploration is acceptable, and cautious when expectations emphasize conformity and the avoidance of failure, shaping persistence, delay, and withdrawal across education and employment trajectories.



### Social Norms and Networks: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth make education and employment choices with a focus on how they will be interpreted socially.** Because reputation and doing the right thing carry real consequences, youth evaluate options not only for personal benefit but for how they will reflect on their families. This makes socially approved education and employment pathways feel safer and more rewarding, even when personal interest differs.
- **Youth motivation is shaped by community behavior, seen as a ‘default script’ for life pathways.** When most people around youth follow similar life paths, they treat those patterns as the expected route. This lowers the likelihood of exploring unfamiliar options and reinforces choices that minimize social risk, while also signaling unspoken deterrence from alternative pathways and aspirations.
- **Networks guide decisions through both encouragement and correction.** Family, peers, and teachers serve as the main interpreters of what is acceptable or wise. Supportive environments expand what youth feel able to pursue in education or work, while disapproval narrows the set of choices they consider.
- **Norms influence behavior indirectly by shaping expectations about outcomes.** Youth assume that sticking to accepted paths will protect them from judgement, while deviating may lead to scrutiny or criticism. This expectation shapes not just what education or employment youth choose, but how confidently they pursue it.

### Policies & Programs

Youth across Jordan describe a landscape rich with organizations, centers, and initiatives designed to support their development, yet their experiences reveal that awareness, access, and impact unevenly distributed. While many can name well-known institutions and national youth actors, this visibility does not always translate into meaningful reach, especially for young women, youth with disabilities,

and those living outside major cities, where a larger proportion of these are perceived to exist. Although many youth believe programs can help them build skills or improve their future, a significant proportion remain unaware of opportunities considered “*interesting*” or relevant to their lives, and perceptions of accessibility differ sharply by age, geography, and ability. As a result, youth often interpret programs not as a coherent system but as a fragmented landscape where access depends on networks, convenience, and luck.

## Access & Awareness

Despite the presence of numerous institutions offering youth activities, youth consistently described a gap between knowing these actors exist and their actual ability to access the opportunities. Many youth acknowledged that Jordan’s youth programming ecosystem is large and diverse, spanning courses in technology, entrepreneurship, sports, and psychosocial support. However, youth described

unclear or restrictive eligibility criteria, complex registration processes, and insufficient outreach, creating a gap between the existence of programs and youths’ ability to access them. Access was often described as uneven and, in some cases, mediated by personal or social connections. As one young woman in Tafila described, “*Sometimes the person leading the project brings their own acquaintances or friends... the advertisements are fake, and the names are already chosen in advance*”. Others emphasized poor communication and outreach, noting that information rarely reaches them unless shared informally by peers. For example, a female participant in Zarqa shared, “*If it weren’t for my friend, I wouldn’t have known there was a Ministry of Youth or dialogue sessions... there’s no marketing at all*”. These access barriers point to broader gaps in program readiness, where systems exist in principle but are not consistently designed to receive, guide, and include youth in practice.

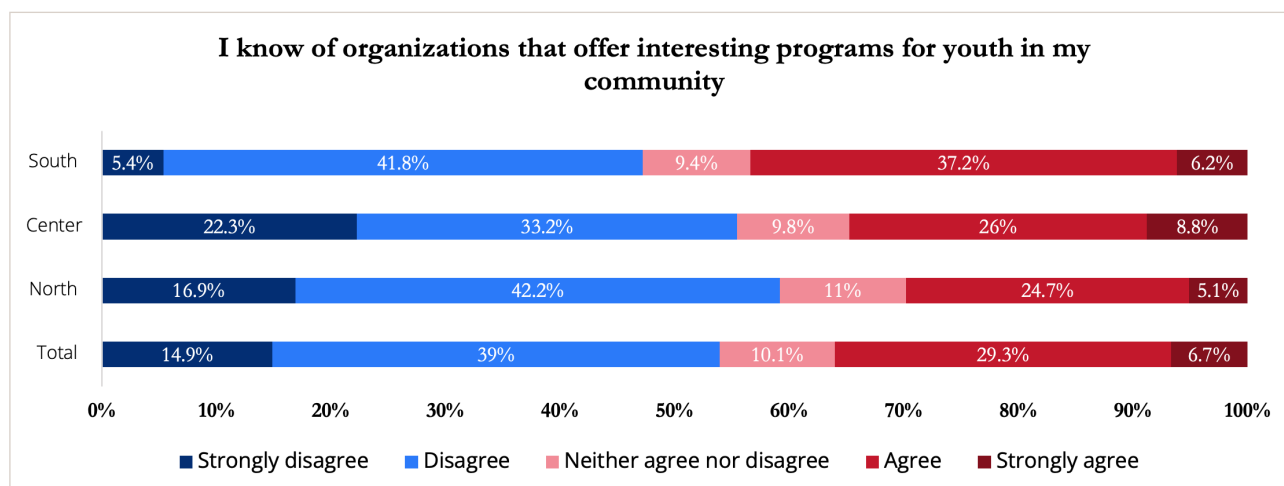


Figure 25: Awareness and interest in existing programs, disaggregated by region (n=1120, North=372, Center=377, South=371)

Across regions, youth described a clear gap between the services that exist around them and the ones they feel are truly accessible. More than half of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that they know of organizations offering interesting programs in their community (54.9%). This does not necessarily mean youth are unaware of facilities; rather, they may not view existing offerings as meaningful, targeted, or close enough to count as something ‘for people like them’, reducing the likelihood that youth attempt to participate.

## Effectiveness Gaps

Youth showed how physical and emotional environments shape impact. Learning spaces that feel neglected, such as broken chairs, poor lighting, uncomfortable rooms, signal low expectations and

reduce motivation, whereas inviting, youth-friendly environments make participation feel dignified and worthwhile. Beyond their impact on personal motivation, this is important in understanding the true ability of programs to expand youth opportunities. From an effectiveness perspective, inspiration alone is not sufficient as youth evaluate programs as effective only when participation leads to tangible progression toward jobs, income, or real experience. Where learning remains theoretical, programs fail to translate motivation into opportunity. As a young man in Amman (PWD) observed, “*I have the qualifications... and still, I can’t get a job.*” This reveals a clear logic where youth evaluate programs as expanding opportunities only when participation leads to tangible progression in education or employment pathways.

## Policies and Programs: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Youth programs expand opportunities when they visibly connect participation to education or employment pathways.** Youth are motivated and proactive, but how a program links to jobs, income, credentials, or meaningful experience shapes its influence on youth pathways. When the pathway is unclear, participation feels like a risk rather than an investment.
- **The quality of spaces signal value.** Comfortable rooms, functioning furniture, youth-friendly design all act as a cue for how seriously a program takes its participants. When environments feel neglected, youth interpret this as low regard, disengage, and are not able to reap the benefits of programs on potential opportunities.

## Context & Other External Factors

Youth perceptions of their futures are shaped not only by immediate social environments and available programs, but also by wider contextual forces, technological shifts, regional instability, economic shocks, and evolving global labor markets. These broader conditions influence how youth understand opportunity, risk, and preparedness, and how they adapt their aspirations accordingly. Youth described feeling both empowered and unsettled by rapid technological change, while also grappling with the implications of regional conflict, economic volatility, COVID-19 disruptions, and rising living costs. These factors form a crucial part of the enabling environment: they define the horizon of what youth believe is possible, determine the skills they prioritise, and shape the incentives that guide their decisions around education, work, and entrepreneurship.

### Shifting Futures in the Digital Age

Youth frequently described technology as a significant force reshaping how they imagine and plan their future, particularly in how they assess the relevance and durability of education, skills, and career pathways. Digital acceleration widens their sense of what is possible, but it also disrupts the predictability they rely on for confident decision-making. A young female in Tafila pointed towards the dynamism of technology today as a contributor to uncertainty: *“Because the world is developing so fast, naturally your ambitions and interests all need*

*to shift toward what’s current in order to keep up with future demands. For example, if you learned a programming language this year, next year there might be a stronger, more popular one.”* This creates a behavioral tension where technology fuels ambition and risk-avoidance at the same time. Many youth feel pulled toward high-demand digital fields for advancement, as a young man in Karak mentioned *“Technology is positive, look at its impact in world countries... it’s a strength and a way to develop the state and help youth”*, while others respond by seeking careers that feel resistant to automation. As one young man in Amman put it, *“Regarding technology... it no longer relies on humans as much... So, you need to try to choose careers where... it’ll still be humans who do the work.”* These perspectives show how technological change shapes youth decision-making across decision making outcomes, from which skills they choose to invest in, to which education or employment pathways they view as viable over time. Rather than disengaging, youth adapt by evaluating options not only based on interest, but on perceived longevity and resilience in an uncertain digital future.

### Regional Instability & Economic Shocks

Youth rarely spoke about regional instability directly, but when it came up, it was explained as a factor affecting perceived ability to plan for the future. Over half of surveyed youth (55.5%) agreed that conflict, displacement, and uncertainty in the region make it harder to plan their futures, increasing caution around long-term commitments such as extended education or higher-risk career paths. As one young woman in Karak shared, *“External circumstances, like war and becoming a refugee, might make it hard for people my age to reach the future they want.”* This shows that instability or conflict are seen as potential disruptors to successful pathways towards youth aspirations.

Economic pressure is where this uncertainty becomes most concrete. Rising living costs, described by youth as a daily constraint on their choices, push decision-making toward what feels financially necessary rather than personally meaningful. The quantitative data underscores this shift where 8 in 10 youth said rising living costs make future planning a lot or completely harder (82.8%), and 7 in 10 said the same about economic uncertainty (71%). As a young woman in Balqa noted, *“Everyone is struggling, maybe your father wants to support you, but he simply doesn’t have the money.”*

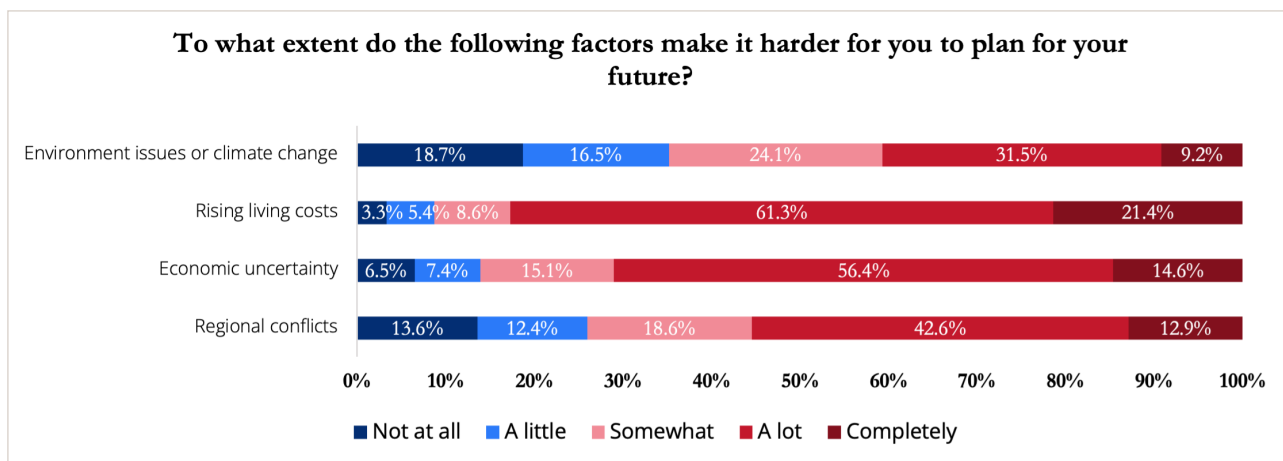


Figure 26: Factors perceived as increasing difficulty to plan the future (n=1120)

These dynamics create an environment where youth do not abandon their aspirations but strategically narrow or reframe them in response to heightened uncertainty. In this sense, regional instability and economic shocks do not simply shape youth perceptions, they actively reshape their decision-making, lower risk tolerance, shorten planning horizons, and reinforce a preference for secure, predictable, and gainful education or employment pathways in a world that feels uncertain.

#### Context and Other External Factors: Key Behavioral Takeaways

- **Regional instability and economic shocks compress youth decision-making.** Uncertainty linked to conflict, displacement, and rising living costs makes long-term planning feel risky and unreliable. As a result, youth narrow their aspirations, shorten planning horizons, and prioritize options that feel financially secure and predictable, often favoring immediate income or “safer” pathways over longer-term or higher-risk education and career choices.
- **Technology accelerates both opportunity and anxiety.** Digital change expands what youth can aspire to, but it also makes the future feel unstable. As a result, youth strategically gravitate either toward high-growth digital fields or toward “future-proof” careers that seem protected from automation.

## Emerging Behavioral Patterns for Enabling Environment

- **Social norms and networks guide how youth interpret risk, opportunity, and belonging.** Family expectations, community guidance, and peer signals shape which choices feel acceptable and achievable. Supportive networks expand possible futures, while disapproval or judgement narrows them.
- **Trust determines whether systems feel supportive.** Perceptions of waste, unclear selection criteria, or previous disappointment can negate the potential of available programs to expand youth opportunities. As a result, youth perceive these challenges to accessing programs as unsupportive factors.
- **Quality of delivery shape whether engagement enables expanded opportunities.** When youth programs align with young people's goals and offer credible pathways to education or employment, they reinforce motivation and sustained engagement; when they do not, they risk widening the gap between inspiration and tangible outcomes. Even where interest is high, practical factors such as time, location, safety, and family constraints ultimately determine whether programs meaningfully expand youth opportunities or remain inaccessible in practice.
- **Technology expands aspirations and uncertainty.** Youth perceive technology as both opening new pathways but also making the future feel less stable and adapt by gravitating either toward high-growth digital fields or toward careers they perceive as resistant to automation. This shows youth's process of balancing aspiration with the need for long-term security.

- **Economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, and regional instability narrow youth decision-making toward predictable, low-risk pathways.** In contexts shaped by regional instability and rising living costs, youth adapt their behavior by shortening planning

horizons and prioritizing choices that feel financially and socially secure. Rather than signaling reduced ambition, this reflects an enabling environment that constrains risk-taking.



## Cross Cutting Patterns

Across the study, four cross cutting factors consistently shaped how youth think, plan, and participate: (1) gender, (2) region, (3) enrollment in education, and (4) disability status. This is the disaggregation captured in the research, which together helps explain why youth across Jordan experience opportunities and challenges differently in relation to education and employment pathways.

Each factor influences behavior in a distinct way. **Gender and disability** shape mobility, safety, expectations, and the level of social scrutiny youth anticipate in their choices. **Regional differences** affect exposure to services, connectivity, and the types of opportunities available in everyday life. **Enrollment in education** determines whether youth remain connected to information, peers, and supportive networks, or whether they navigate decisions more independently.

These factors were addressed as a cross-cutting factors as their influence appears across the 4 PYD domains. These factors were addressed to show how youth's interpretation of opportunity, confidence in pursuing pathways, and willingness to persist or withdraw shifts depending on context. These factors are therefore not presented as a list of structural influences, but as the strongest and most visible behavioral drivers within the scope of this research.

### Gender

Gender in this analysis was not studied just as a demographic category; it is the behavioral condition that shapes what youth are able to do, what they feel permitted to do, and how they interpret opportunities. Across the interviewed youth, gender differences do not reflect differences in motivation

or capability, but rather the different constraints and expectations that structure youth's everyday decisions.

Young women express higher optimism about the future than young men, yet this optimism operates within narrower boundaries. While 47% of young women strongly agree they feel optimistic, fewer express high confidence in risk-taking roles such as entrepreneurship (22.7% extremely confident, compared with 29.5% of young men). This gap reflects different social conditions shaping risk and agency by gender. For young women, qualitative data point to higher perceived costs of failure, driven by family gatekeeping, reputational expectations, and

mobility and safety concerns. As one young woman in Balqa explained, *“The family doesn’t encourage at all... they don’t support a girl to achieve her dream or to go out and come back.”*

By contrast, young men report stronger confidence in public-facing or entrepreneurial pathways, shaped by social pressure rather than freedom from constraint. Expectations to provide financially, assert independence, and earn social respect create a behavioral environment where initiative and risk-taking feel necessary, even when uncertainty is high. As a male participant in Jerash explained *“Your wallet is what makes your voice heard.”*

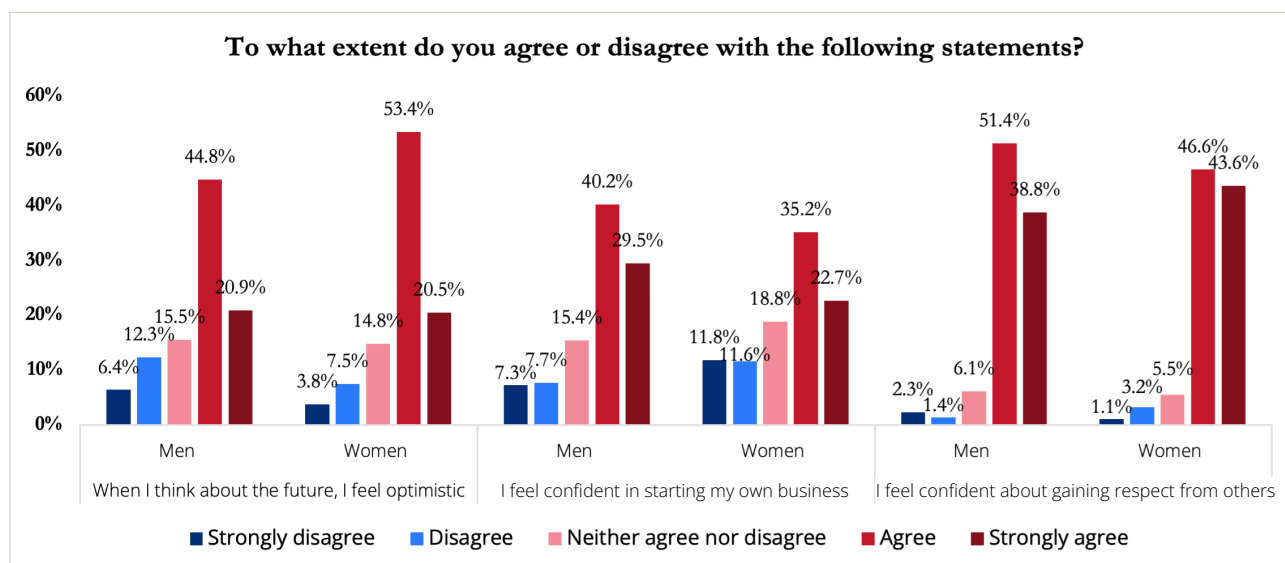


Figure 27: Optimism and confidence about the future, business-starting, and gaining respect from others, disaggregated by gender (n=1120, male=560, female=560)

Social expectations amplify these differences. 87.3% of young women say they consider how their choices affect family reputation, compared with 79.6% of young men. Women are also more likely to follow family advice when selecting majors (68.3% vs. 56.7% of young men), showing how decisions are shaped through relational accountability. Men, meanwhile, describe a more individualized decision logic influenced by competition, economic pressure, and the expectation to stand on your own.

Structural experiences reinforce these patterns as young women report lower trust in institutions (60.2% vs. 53% of men), reflecting qualitative

accounts of gatekeeping and favoritism concerns in youth centers or workplaces. As a female participant in Tafila noted, *“I see courses advertised, I apply to participate but then they never get back to me... the same faces get repeated, and unfortunately some people get left out.”* Young men, by contrast, more often frame disengagement in terms of fairness and relevance, citing age restrictions, wasta, and procedural barriers, rather than concerns related to visibility or personal safety. For example, a male participant with *“If you just wait after applying, you’ll just keep waiting... you have to try to find a wasta’ to introduce you”*.

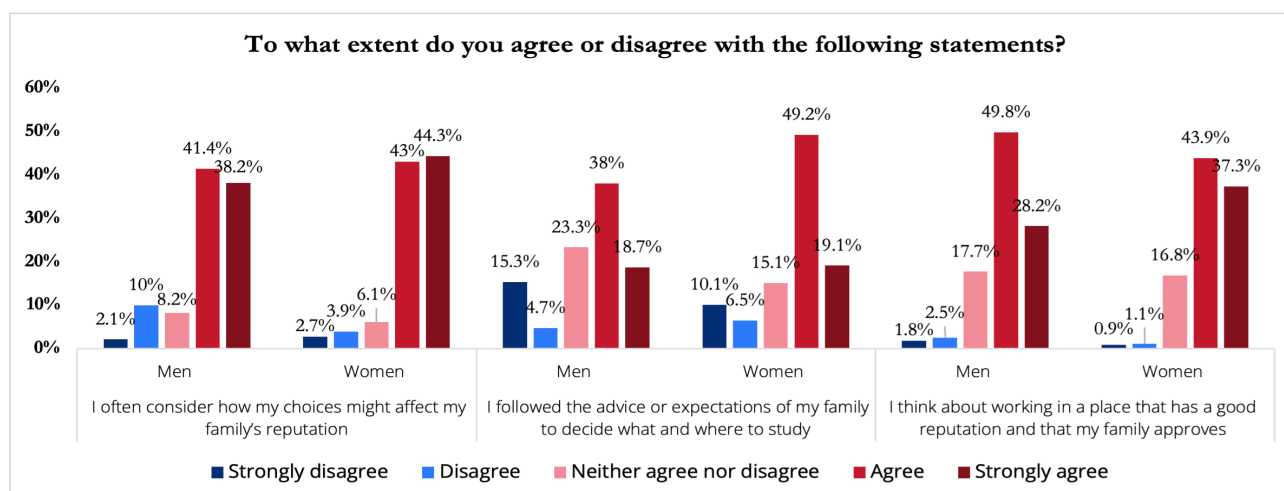


Figure 28: Considerations of family reputation, influence of family advice/ expectations, and employer reputation in decision-making, disaggregated by gender (n=1120, male=560, female=560)

Overall, men and women demonstrate similar motivation but inhabit different opportunity structures. Women calibrate decisions within a social environment that demands caution, approval, and predictability; men navigate pressures that demand initiative, confidence, and financial performance. These are not differences in capability, but differences in the environments youth must account for when imagining and pursuing their pathways.

## Disability

Youth with disabilities navigate opportunities within a behavioral environment shaped by mobility constraints, safety concerns, heightened social scrutiny, and limited institutional accommodation. These conditions do not diminish aspiration, youth with disabilities demonstrate strong motivation to learn, work, and participate, but they fundamentally shape how confidence is translated into action. For example, a young woman with disability in Balqa shared *“I like law, and I want to be a lawyer in this country... I don’t go [out] Because the street feels scary, that’s why.”* This shows how decision-making

is guided less by personal preference and more by an ongoing assessment of what is realistically accessible, predictable, and socially safe.

Youth with disabilities express the strongest desire to take initiative yet report the highest levels of exclusion (43% compared with 30% of youth without disabilities). Their elevated rates of self-driven problem-solving (61.7% vs. 50.5%) reflect not increased empowerment, but the reality of navigating environments where institutional support is uneven or absent. What appears as resilience is often a form of forced independence, so when transportation is unreliable, physical spaces are inaccessible, and assistance is inconsistent, youth with disabilities learn to rely on themselves because the alternatives cannot be counted on. This shapes future planning, where long-term goals feel harder to commit to, not due to lower ambition, but because everyday access barriers make outcomes feel less within their control. As a young man with a mobility-related disability in Karak put it, *“If I can’t reach the place, I can’t work.”*

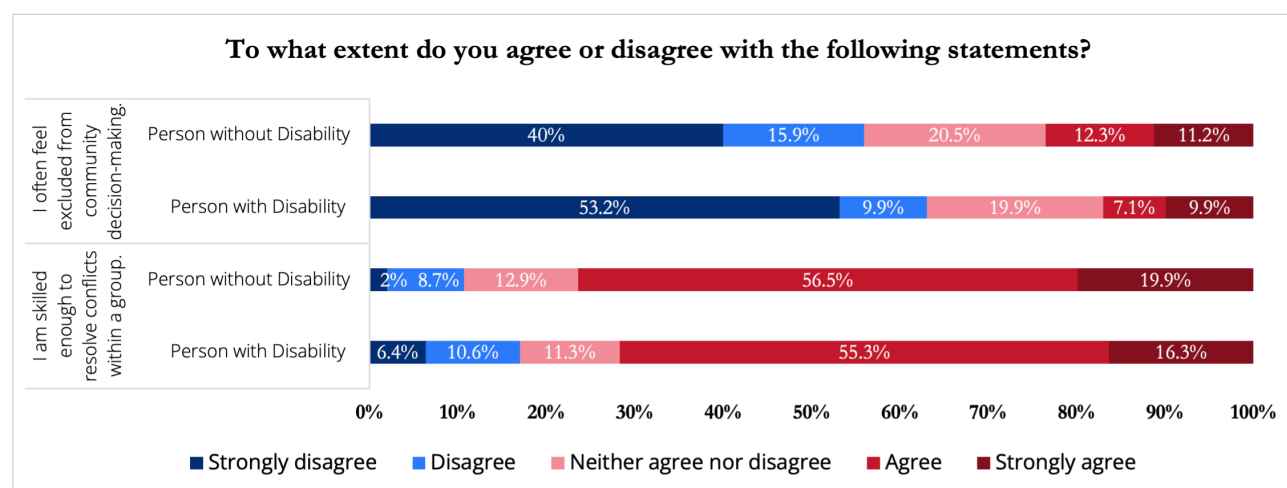


Figure 29: Perception of exclusion from community decision-making and ability for conflict resolution, disaggregated by disability (n=1120, Youth with disability=141, Youth without disability=979)

Youth with disabilities repeatedly express willingness to engage but encounter barriers that their peers may never notice. Program awareness is lower not because they are disengaged, but because many opportunities are physically or socially out of reach. One young man in Amman explained how a simple design flaw became a barrier to participation: “*There*

*is a second floor, and I can’t go upstairs... there was no elevator, so I stopped going.*” The result is a cycle where interest is high, but feasibility is low, leading youth to withdraw not from lack of motivation, but from repeated experiences that signal exclusion.

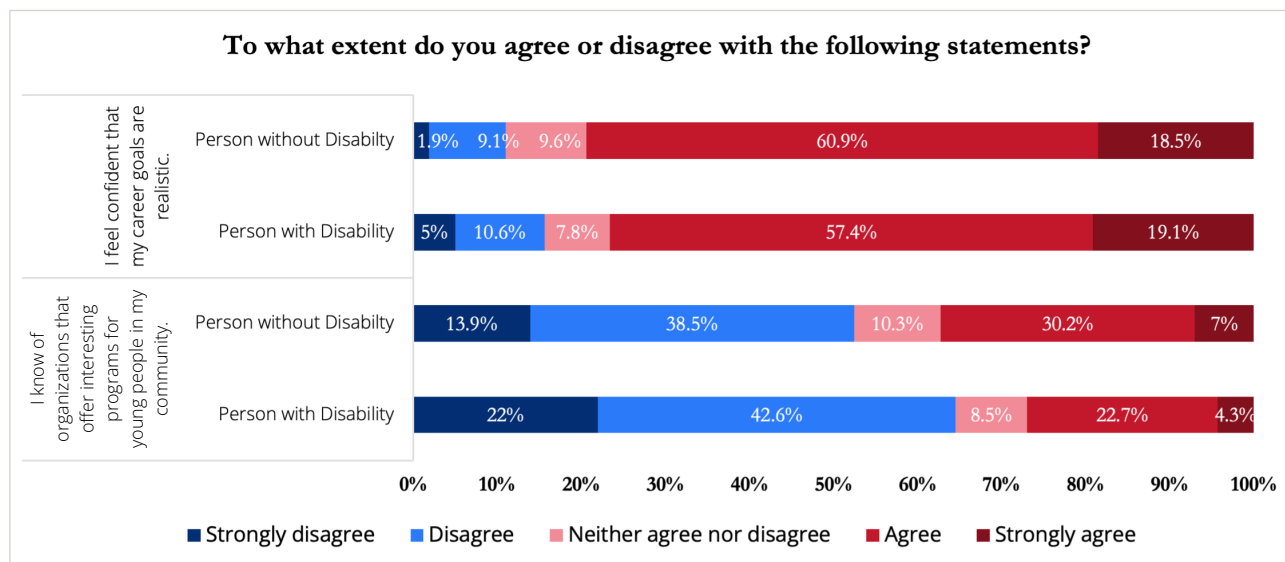


Figure 30: Confidence in career goals being realistic and awareness of organizations that offer programs of interest, disaggregated by disability (n=1120, Youth with disability=141, Youth without disability=979)

While digital environments are often assumed to equalize access, qualitative insights suggest this is not automatically the case for youth with disabilities. Given their broader experiences of conditional participation and heightened risk management, digital pathways may replicate existing barriers when accessibility, support, or institutional responsiveness are lacking. As education and work become increasingly mediated through digital platforms, these dynamics risk reinforcing long-term inequities and encouraging more cautious engagement with online opportunities. For example, a male participant with disability in Amman explained “*All the [university] professors were explaining using visual materials, things I couldn’t convert into paper to print in Braille at all, and the software they use wasn’t adapted either*”.

Youth with disabilities describe stronger scrutiny around their movements, choices, and ambitions, leading to more cautious decision-making and a higher perceived social and emotional cost of risk-taking. While their aspirations are no less ambitious, the margin for error is smaller, as choices must account for how families, communities, and institutions are likely to respond. As a result, their pathways reflect strategic adaptation to environments not designed with them in mind, where mobility is uncertain, participation is

conditional, and long-term planning is shaped less by impairment itself than by the systems, structures, and norms that determine what is accessible, safe, and socially supported.

## Regional Differences

Geography shapes how youth in Jordan understand their options, experience support, and navigate constraints. While all youth contend with social expectations, economic pressures, and institutional gaps, where they live determines the behavioral environment in which these challenges unfold. The North, Center, and South each generate distinct patterns of agency, belonging, pressure, and opportunity, shaped by differences in social cohesion, institutional density, exposure to services, and the strength of informal networks. These regional dynamics do not simply reflect disparities in resources, they produce different behavioral logics, influencing how youth interpret influence, take initiative, seek support, and balance personal aspirations with collective expectations.

### Youth in the Northern Region

In the North, youth grow up in communities that are socially dense and highly interconnected. This connectivity strengthens participation as youth

discuss issues, volunteer, and show up, but it also reinforces visible hierarchies and gatekeeping, which teach youth early on that effort does not always lead to influence. Even when youth speak up, decisions often depend on pre-existing networks or community status. This leads to patterns of cautious engagement where youth stay active because they

care and because community ties are strong, but they temper expectations because outcomes feel only partially within their control. The result is a pattern of motivated participation with lowered expectations, where youth engage regularly yet approach opportunities, risk-taking, and leadership with strategic restraint.

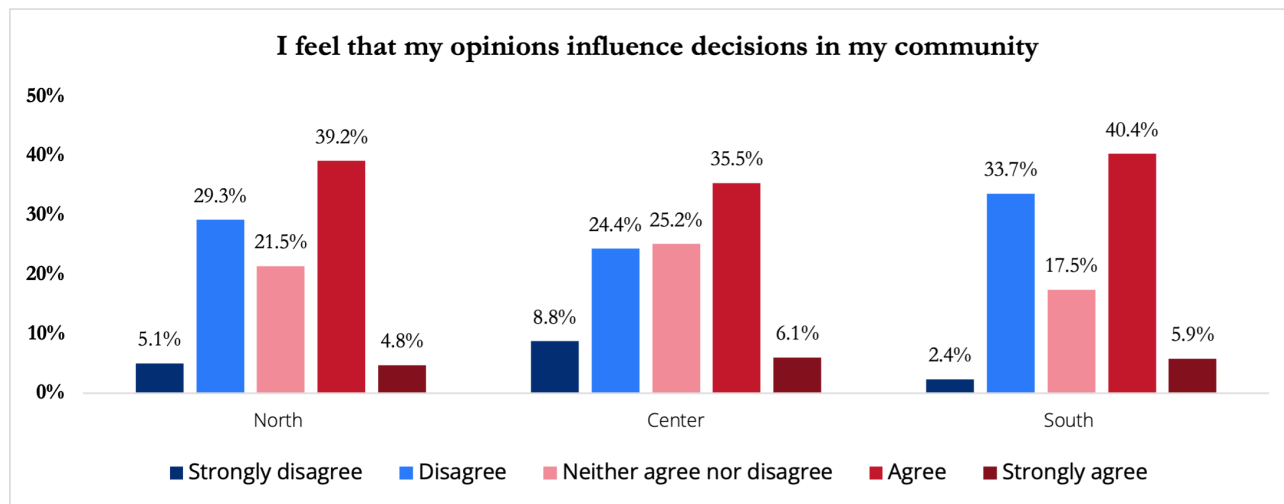


Figure 31: Perceived influence of opinions on community decision-making, disaggregated by region (n=1120, North=372, Center=377, South=371)

## Youth in the Central Region

The Central region offers the highest concentration of institutions, trainings, and programs, yet youth living in this area report more confusion, weaker social cues, and less collective efficacy than any other region. The challenge, therefore, in this area is not access, but having too many options without clear guidance. Youth see many programs and services around them, but without support in navigating them, opportunities feel confusing rather than empowering. While youth are exposed to many pathways, few feel clearly navigable, trusted, or relevant. Quantitative findings show that only 48% of youth in the Central region regularly discuss issues with peers, and they report the highest levels of uncertainty about how to act when problems arise (17%). In the absence of strong community anchors, decision-making relies heavily on individual judgement rather than shared norms, producing hesitant engagement in a context that is otherwise resource rich.

and interpreted through community expectations. This produces a behavioral strategy of conformity as protection where youth pursue opportunities, but within accepted boundaries to avoid jeopardizing reputation or future access.

The South also shows the highest sense of exclusion (37.2%), suggesting that in highly visible environments, even motivated youth may feel limited when their choices fall outside what is socially recognized or supported. In these contexts, participation often requires additional social, logistical, or familial resources to navigate visibility, approval, and potential backlash. For young women in particular, qualitative insights point to ongoing negotiation between personal ambition and community acceptance, shaped less by lack of agency than by the need to manage visibility and social response.

## Youth in the Southern Region

In the South, tight-knit communities create an environment where youth feel both more influential and more constrained. Nearly half believe they can shape community decisions (46.4%) and self-driven problem-solving is high (57.4%), reflecting a strong sense of local agency. Yet visibility also amplifies social surveillance as choices are noticed, judged,

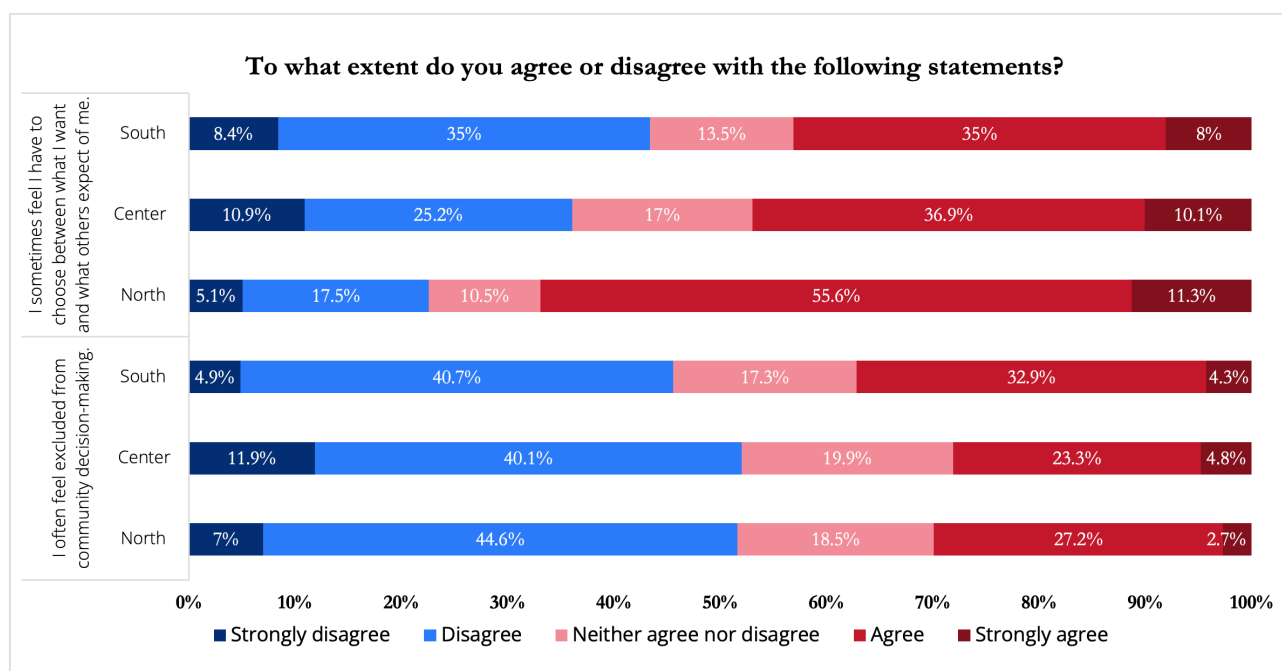


Figure 32: Choosing between own and others' expectations and perceived exclusion from community decision-making, disaggregated by region (n=1120, North=372, Center=377, South=371)

## Enrollment in Education

Enrollment in education fundamentally reshapes the environment in which youth operate. The result shows a consistent pattern where being in school or university provides structure, feedback, and social reinforcement that strengthen agency and clarify pathways, while being outside formal education creates conditions of uncertainty, reduced visibility, and fewer cues about how to act. These differences do not reflect variations in motivation as youth across groups are equally aspirational, but rather the contrasting environments in which they are making decisions.

Youth enrolled in education report stronger optimism, higher confidence, and a clearer sense of control over their futures. Classroom routines, assignments, and peer interactions create repeated signals that effort leads to progress. This is reflected in patterns where enrolled youth are more likely to discuss community issues, take initiative when problems arise, and engage in self-driven problem-solving. In the survey, 51.1% of enrolled youth said they would participate in community initiatives when something goes wrong, compared with 40% of non-enrolled youth. They also show lower uncertainty, with fewer reporting that they *“don't know what to do or where to go”*. Beyond skills development, educational environments appear to increase exposure to opportunities and pathways for action, making participation more visible, familiar, and socially reinforced. Through daily interaction with peers, teachers, and institutional structures, enrolled

youth are more likely to encounter information about initiatives, observe others participating, and learn where and how to engage, which helps translate awareness into action.

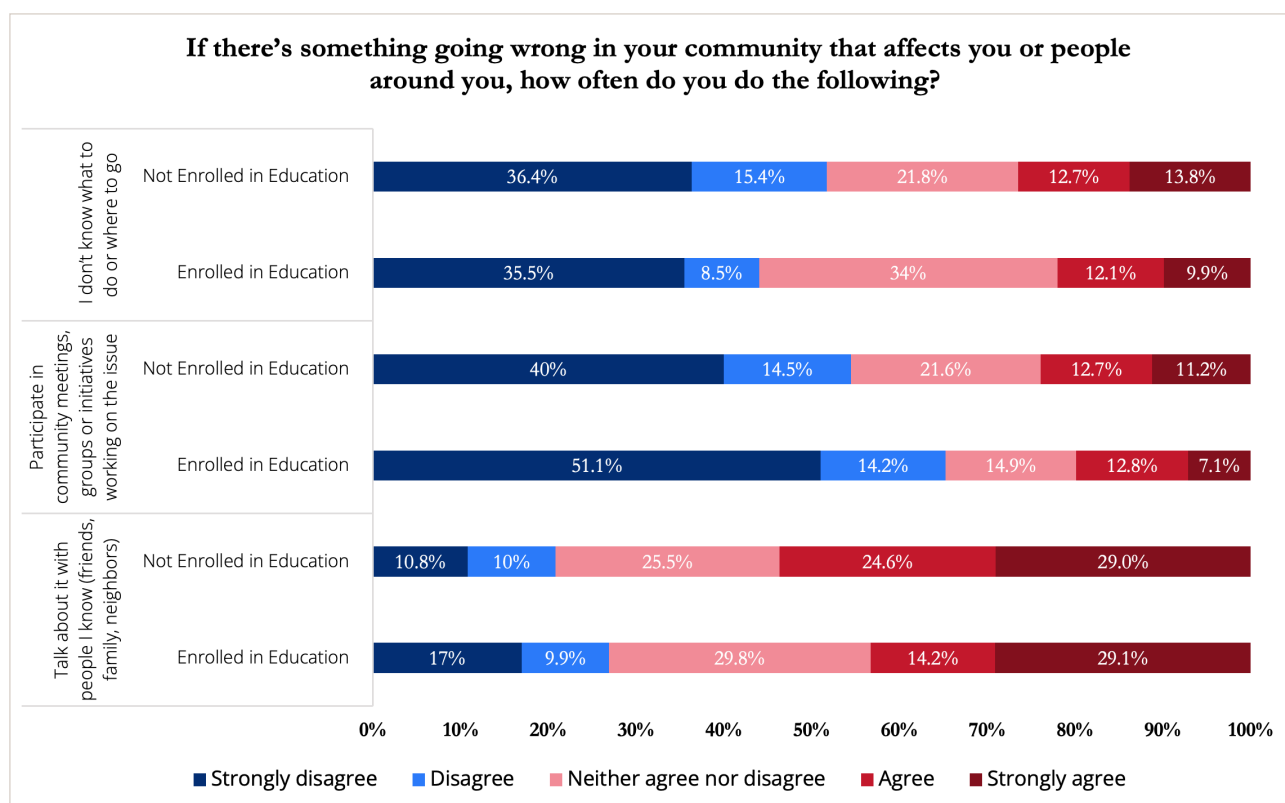


Figure 33: Coping mechanisms in response to “something going wrong” in community, disaggregated by enrollment in school/college (n=1120, In education=445, Not in education=675)

For youth outside formal education, the behavioral context is differently marked. They navigate decisions without institutional prompts, peer comparison, or structured opportunities for engagement. As a result, avoidance and uncertainty rise, not due to apathy, but due to weaker cues about where to start. When faced with community problems, 36.4% of non-enrolled youth strongly disagreed that they knew what to do, compared with 35.5% of those enrolled. Non-enrolled youth also report higher feelings of exclusion from decision-making (35.4% vs. 26.1% of enrolled youth), reflecting the absence of spaces where their voice is recognized.

These differences extend into economic pathways. Enrolled youth tend to prepare more proactively for work such as seeking trainings, refining CVs, or exploring internships because institutional settings normalize future planning. Yet, they still express frustration with the mismatch between education and labor market needs, showing that institutional preparation does not guarantee opportunity. Meanwhile, youth outside education often pursue *“anything available,”* leaning into informal work as a rational response to immediate financial pressure and limited structural support.

Exposure to opportunities follows the same pattern. Enrolled youth are more likely to know of organizations offering interesting programs (32.8%

vs. 27% of non-enrolled youth) and are slightly more willing to join them, with 61.1% saying they would participate if a program matched their interests, compared with 52.7% of non-enrolled youth. Qualitative insights reinforce this gap, and despite shortcomings in schools’ outreach, educational spaces still act as indirect channels of awareness, while non-enrolled youth rely heavily on informal networks or chance encounters. The difference is not in motivation, as both groups express strong interest, but in how consistently opportunities are made visible, credible, and actionable.



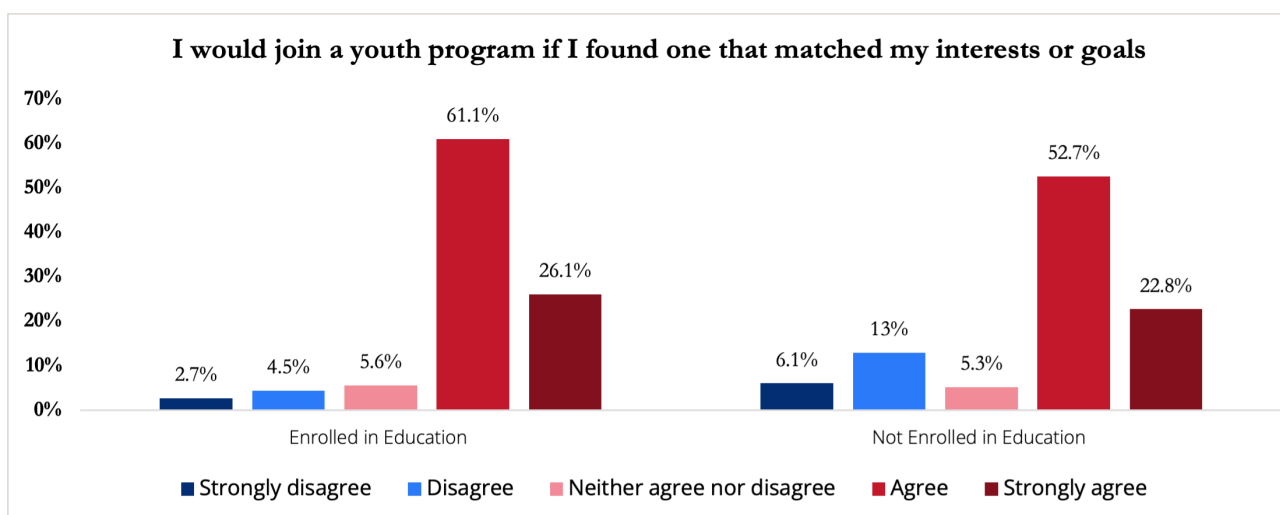


Figure 34: Willingness to join youth programs if they match ones' interests or goals, disaggregated by enrollment in school/college (n=1120, In education=445, Not in education=675)

These findings show that schooling is not simply an educational variable, and rather a behavioral infrastructure. It provides the cues, validation, and social modelling that help youth interpret choices as

possible, worthwhile, and within reach. Youth outside these systems are equally capable and aspirational, but they operate with fewer signals of possibility and greater pressure to prioritize immediate stability.

## Conclusion & Implications for Programs and Policies

The findings of this study show that youth behavior in Jordan is not simply a reflection of individual preferences or motivation, it is a behavioral map of the systems surrounding them. Across regions and demographic groups, youth demonstrate determination, curiosity, and a desire to contribute, yet the shape of their choices is defined by how predictable, accessible, and socially accepted education and employment pathways feel. Their daily behavior reveals a consistent truth as they act where the environment signals possibility, and they disengage where it signals uncertainty or risk.

Assets, agency, contribution, and the enabling environment do not operate as separate domains; they reinforce one another in shaping whether youth participate in education and training and pursue or sustain gainful employment. When pathways feel opaque or blocked, agency becomes cautious. When institutions do not follow through, contribution becomes symbolic rather than transformative. When social expectations tighten, decision-making narrows even when ambition is high. And when the enabling environment lacks predictability, whether due to economic strain, structural barriers, or digital inequities, youth adapt by prioritizing short-term security, familiar trajectories, and opportunities with the lowest social or financial risk. What could look like low engagement is often self-protection,

and what looks like resilience is frequently forced independence in the absence of support.

Across the ecosystem, three behavioral drivers consistently surface:

- Youth rely on perceived access, not formal availability, when deciding whether to engage in education, training, or work.** Youth engagement is driven less by whether opportunities exist and more by whether they feel reachable, predictable, and worth the effort required. Opportunities that appear distant, socially risky, or difficult to navigate quickly lose perceived value, while those that feel accessible, geographically, socially, or emotionally, are more likely to translate intention into action.
- Youth interpret their education and employment related decisions through the lens of social meaning, weighing how their choices will be understood by families, peers, and communities.** Rather than evaluating opportunities solely on individual interest or benefit, youth assess how participation will be interpreted by families, peers, and communities. When choices risk negative judgement or social cost, youth delay, withdraw, or seek socially acceptable

alternatives, even when motivation is high. This dynamic is especially pronounced for young women and youth with disabilities, for whom visibility and perceived risk are higher and the margin for error is smaller.

- **Youth seek stability in environments that feel uncertain**, using internal motivation, peer learning, and small daily routines to anchor themselves when structural systems do not provide consistent guidance.

These patterns reveal a generation that is not disengaged but navigating complexity with strategic caution. The findings show a youth ecosystem where effort does not reliably translate into opportunity, where inspiration is abundant, but pathways are uneven, and where motivation thrives in pockets but struggles to scale without institutional backing. Understanding these behavioral dynamics is essential, not to describe what youth lack, but to identify how systems can be reshaped to support sustained participation in education and training and more reliable transitions into gainful employment, building the confidence, initiative, and aspirations that Jordan's youth already possess.

## Implications for Program Design

- **Build pathways, not standalone activities.** Youth engage when an opportunity clearly leads somewhere, not when it exists in isolation. Programs that connect skills to practice, exposure, and tangible next steps reduce the sense of risk and make participation feel like a purposeful investment. When pathways are unclear, even highly motivated youth hesitate because the outcome feels uncertain.
  - **In practice:** Programs should be designed as sequenced journeys (for example: orientation, then skill-building, then exposure, then placement), clearly communicating what comes at every stage. Avoid one-off workshops unless they are explicitly tied to follow-up opportunities such as internships, certification, or community roles.
- **Reduce uncertainty to unlock agency.** Because unpredictability narrows the choices youth feel they have, programs must create conditions where the next step is clear and dependable. Transparent selection criteria, predictable schedules, and reliable follow-up communicate stability in environments where youth often expect inconsistency. When uncertainty is lowered, youth are far more willing to experiment, persist, and take meaningful risks.
  - **In practice:** Selection criteria should be published in advance and timelines to be confirmed upfront. Even rejection messages signal reliability and reduce disengagement driven by uncertainty.
- **Make opportunities feel reachable and relevant.** Behavior shifts when youth genuinely believe they have a fair chance of accessing a program. Clear messaging, visible outreach in all governorates, and simplified eligibility requirements help reduce the psychological distance that often discourages participation. When perceived access expands, youth initiative increases accordingly.
  - **In practice:** Outreach should be shifted from passive announcements to active presence, such as school visits, local partners, youth ambassadors, and repeated messaging. Simplify eligibility language and explicitly state who can apply, not only who cannot.
- **Clarify opportunity landscapes and decision signals.** Youth struggle not from lack of motivation but from unclear information about what opportunities exist, which skills matter, and where pathways realistically lead. Consolidated mapping of education, training, and employment options, paired with basic labour market forecasting and career guidance, helps youth assess risk and invest effort more strategically.
  - **In practice:** Develop simple, regularly updated maps of local opportunities and growth sectors, paired with light-touch career counselling that helps youth interpret options rather than choose for them.
- **Design around social meaning, not just content.** Youth make decisions with their social environment in mind, especially regarding reputation, family approval, and safety. Programs that signal trustworthiness, offer gender-sensitive environments, and minimize social risk enable youth, particularly young women, to choose paths they might otherwise avoid. When social meaning feels positive, engagement becomes far more likely.
  - **In practice:** Opportunities for opt-in privacy such as small groups, mixed/segregated options should be offered and working through trusted intermediaries such as community organizations, teachers, or local mentors who can legitimize participation socially should be utilized.

- **Ground skills in real, observable practice.** Youth value learning that feels real, usable, and immediately relevant to their goals. Practical exercises, role-modeling, employer interactions, and project-based learning help translate theoretical content into actionable behavior. When training is embedded in everyday realities, youth confidence grows and the likelihood of sustained participation increases.
  - **In practice:** Purely classroom-based training should be replaced with applied outputs, such as live projects, employer-linked tasks, community problem-solving, or portfolios youth can point to. This ensures participants leave with something visible they can show others.
- **Build support systems that sustain motivation over time.** Motivation among youth is strong but vulnerable to fatigue when challenges accumulate without support. Regular check-ins, peer groups, mentors, and community champions provide the reassurance and encouragement that help youth maintain momentum when facing setbacks. Consistent reinforcement turns short bursts of motivation into durable engagement.
  - **In practice:** A consistent focal person should be assigned (mentor, facilitator, peer lead) for each cohort, scheduling regular check-ins, and building peer groups that continue beyond formal sessions to reduce drop-off after initial engagement.
- **Integrate digital spaces as core environments for learning and belonging.** Digital platforms allow youth to learn at their own pace, seek emotional support, and explore opportunities with less fear of judgment. When designed accessibly and used intentionally, they provide continuity for youth who face physical, social, or mobility constraints. This widens participation by offering alternative pathways into skills, networks, and information.
  - **In practice:** Digital platforms should not only be used for announcements, but for ongoing learning, peer interaction, and support, ensuring accessibility, low data requirements, and moderation. Blending online and offline participation ensures youth can move between them without penalty.

## Implications for Policy and Systems Actors

This section outlines implications for both policy and systems actors. While some actions could require formal policy change or national coordination, others relate to how institutions, implementers, and intermediaries operationalize existing frameworks.

### Implications for Policy and Governance Actors

- **Restore the connection between effort and opportunity.** Youth act decisively when they believe their effort leads to real outcomes. Policies that ensure transparent recruitment, reduce reliance on wasta, and establish credible progression pathways rebuild this essential link. When the system signals fairness, youth are more willing to invest in education, training, and work.
  - **In practice:** Transparent recruitment and selection standards across public and publicly funded programs should be established, requiring clear feedback to applicants, and limit discretionary selection where possible. This strengthens accountability mechanisms that signal merit-based progression rather than informal mediation.
- **Institutionalize early guidance and exposure to future pathways.** Youth cannot aspire to futures they have never seen. Introducing labor market orientation, digital literacy, and practical career exposure early in schooling helps them form realistic expectations and reduces later decision paralysis. Consistent guidance creates habits that persist into adulthood.
  - **In practice:** Labor-market orientation and digital career awareness should be embedded into school curricula, including exposure to emerging work models such as freelancing, remote work, and platform-based employment. Guidance services must be regularly updated to reflect technological change and evolving skill demand.
- **Make accessibility a baseline, not an exception.** For youth with disabilities, patterns reflect adaptation to environments not designed for them. Policies that ensure physical accessibility, inclusive transport, adapted digital content, and equitable program design transform feasibility, not just intention. When access becomes predictable, agency can finally translate into action.

- **In practice:** Enforceable accessibility standards should be set across physical infrastructure, transport, and digital platforms, and require inclusive design as a condition for funding. This would guarantee a move from ad hoc accommodations to predictable, system-wide accessibility so participation does not depend on negotiation.
- **Align training ecosystems with real economic demand.** Skill-building increases frustration when it is decoupled from opportunity. Policy frameworks that link training institutions with employers, incentivize apprenticeships, and promote job-relevant curricula ensure that effort is rewarded rather than stalled. Alignment between training and labor markets reduces the perceived costs of trying without seeing results.
  - **In practice:** Formal links between training providers and employers should be strengthened through co-designed curricula, apprenticeships, and recognized work placements, including in digital and non-traditional sectors. Regulatory frameworks must be updated regularly to recognize alternative credentials and pathways aligned with evolving labor markets.
- **Support long-term planning in an environment of economic strain.** Economic volatility pushes youth into short-term survival modes that crowd out ambition. Policies that stabilize costs, improve social protection, and expand early work opportunities give youth the psychological safety to plan beyond immediate needs. When the environment supports predictability, aspirations expand naturally.
  - **In practice:** Social protection measures, transitional income support, and early work opportunities should be expanded to reduce immediate financial pressure on youth. By stabilizing basic costs and risks, policies can create the psychological safety needed for longer-term planning and skill investment.
- **In practice:** Opportunities should be designed and delivered through trusted institutions and intermediaries, engaging parents and community figures where relevant, and offering participation formats that reduce reputational risk. This helps legitimize diverse pathways and makes engagement socially acceptable.
- **Decentralize opportunity by strengthening regional ecosystems.** Youth outside Amman face thinner networks and fewer credible signals about available options. Investing in counsellors, information hubs, employer linkages, and program delivery in governorates, specifically in the south reduces inequality in exposure. When opportunity feels local rather than distant, youth are more able and willing to act.
  - **In practice:** Regional guidance services, employer partnerships, and information hubs outside Amman, with particular attention to the south should be invested in. Bringing credible opportunities closer reduces geographic and psychological distance and strengthens local signals about what is possible.

## Implications for Systems and Institutional Actors

- **Recognize social norms as part of the policy environment.** Reputation, gender expectations, and family influence shape youth decisions just as strongly as formal rules. Policies that provide safe, reputable spaces, engage parents, and normalize diverse pathways broaden what youth feel able to choose.

# Behavioral Segmentation Analysis

Youth segmentation is a way of understanding the diversity within Jordan's youth population by identifying groups of youth who share similar motivations, behaviors, pressures, and ways of making decisions. Rather than treating youth as a single, uniform group, segmentation highlights the distinct patterns that shape how different youth think, plan, cope, and engage with opportunities around them.

The segmentation was developed by analyzing survey responses across multiple themes, including education, agency, wellbeing, financial planning, labor-market perceptions, and community participation. The data was standardized so that all items could be compared fairly, allowing us to understand how each group sits above or below the total survey population average (the national norm). These items were then grouped into broader behavioral factors, such as confidence, coping approaches, and perceptions of work, which were used to identify clusters of youth who consistently respond in similar ways.

The aim of this segmentation is not to label or rank youth, but to acknowledge the diversity of experiences, strengths, constraints, and behavioral patterns that shape their daily lives. Understanding these differences provides a more grounded foundation for designing interventions that feel relevant and respectful. For program teams, policymakers, and youth-facing institutions, segmentation helps clarify what motivates each group, which barriers matter most, and the kinds of support that activate participation and engagement.

This process resulted in six distinct youth segments who differ in how they navigate their environments, make decisions, and respond to opportunities:

- Stability-Seeking Youth
- Community-Guided Youth
- Clarity-Seeking Youth
- Self-Driven Youth
- Value-Driven Youth
- Systems-Guided Youth

## Methodological note

The segmentation analysis draws on three layers of data that work together. **Factor scores** capture broad behavioral patterns by combining multiple survey items into a single construct (such as self-efficacy, motivation for education). **Item-level data** refers to the percentage responses to individual survey questions within those constructs. Because factors show overall tendencies and item percentages reflect specific behaviors, the two do not always align perfectly. When results diverge, **qualitative data** from workshops and interviews help explain why the pattern occurs and what it means for each segment.



## Segment 1: Stability-Seeking Youth

- ▶ Prefer safe, predictable pathways that **minimize social and financial risk**. They **turn to their social circles** when making decisions.

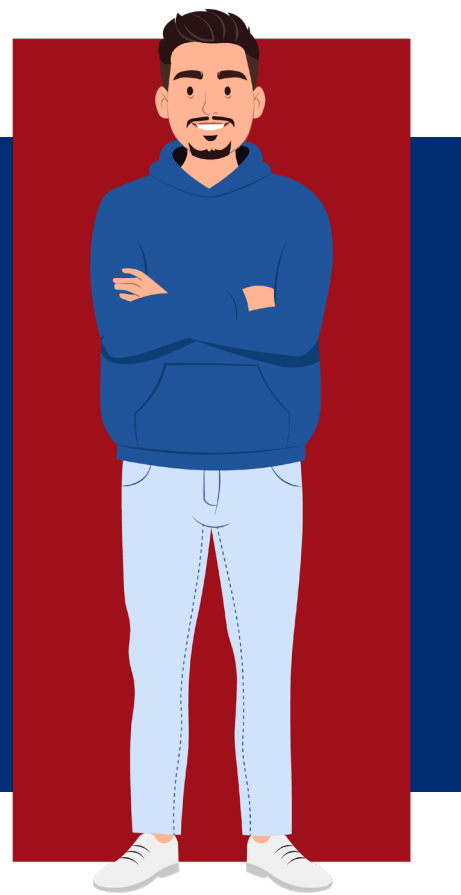
### Fictional Case Study

My name is Rami.

I see myself as ambitious, but I've learned to be careful. Where I come from, one wrong decision can have real financial or social consequences, and people notice mistakes quickly. Because of that, I usually lean toward options that feel stable and familiar, like government work.

I don't usually take big steps alone. I need encouragement from my family to feel steady enough to move forward. Their support makes a difference. Without it, I tend to hesitate.

In public or high-pressure situations, I sometimes hold back. It's not that I don't have the ability. It's that uncertainty makes me anxious about being judged or failing in front of others. I prefer situations where expectations are clear, and the risks feel manageable.



### Behavioral Profile

Stability-seeking youth show a clear pattern in **how they make decisions**, favoring stability, predictability, and practical steps that minimized risk. Their choices are shaped by daily realities such as limited resources, long commutes, weaker school environments, and close community scrutiny. These pressures influence **what shapes their confidence**, leading them to prefer pathways that are safe, familiar, and easy to navigate. This is not a sign of low ambition but a protective strategy to avoid mistakes that could have financial or social consequences. As a result, **what work pathways feel right** for them are those that offer security, clarity, and manageable expectations.

Their behavioral orientation is also strongly shaped by **who influences them**, as trusted relationships play a key role in activating engagement. Many youth in this segment feel more comfortable taking action when encouraged by a family member or someone they trust, reflecting a relational rather than independent approach to decision-making. This dynamic also appears in **how they deal with stress** and challenges, where emotional pressure and fear of judgement lead them to avoid public visibility and keep their ambitions private. Their small but trusted support circles help them manage stress, and because they worry about being judged, they approach new opportunities slowly and thoughtfully.

Stability-seeking youth are guided by a sense of responsibility and a desire for steady progress, which influences **how they think about the future**. Financial strain, family obligations, and uncertainty about long-term prospects reinforce the appeal of government work and institutions seen as credible and fair. Their relationship with formal programs reflects **how they engage with opportunities** more broadly: they participate when offerings are clear, convenient, and well-structured, but withdraw when information is vague or when environments feel unpredictable.

**Overall**, this behavioral profile reflects youth who balance aspiration with realism, moving forward carefully and deliberately within the limits of their environment.

### Domain-Level Analysis

#### Assets

Stability-seeking youth value education and skills, but their ability to benefit from them is shaped by structural and emotional barriers rather than low aspiration. While factor scores place them slightly below average on educational drive, the percentage data does not show rejection. Youth in this segment

value higher education levels as much as other groups, however what weakens their relationship to education is quality and access where roughly 1 in 4 say program cost has little influence on their study choices (28.6%), and 1 in 6 say the same about job opportunities (15.7%), reflecting limited guidance rather than disinterest. Schooling experiences further impact their confidence, as a participant shared, *“If you asked [a teacher] to repeat something, he would hit you with the ruler... we kept failing with him”*. These experiences encourage youth to keep their heads down and get through school rather than engage meaningfully with it.

When it comes to skills development, this group of youth engage when conditions feel safe, close, trustworthy, and predictable. Although they score below the population average the skills factor, this reflects a weaker perceived link between skill-building and future opportunity rather than a lack of motivation. Qualitative findings show that stability seeking youth value soft skills, but logistical barriers and unclear pathways often make training feel out of reach or not immediately relevant. One participant explained that they joined a course only because *“it was in [the area I live in] and the timing was perfect,”* highlighting how proximity and clarity reduce the friction that usually holds them back. This pattern shows that they respond strongly to opportunities when the environment lowers risk and uncertainty, especially when programs offer clear information, credible facilitators, and institutional reassurance.

## Agency

Youth in this segment want to feel in control of their lives, yet the pressures of daily reality, such as uncertain school experiences, limited financial stability, and fear of making costly mistakes, often limit how confident they feel in practice. While the factor score suggests a moderate level of self-efficacy overall, the item-level responses reveal that youth feel unprepared when they are placed in formal, unfamiliar, or evaluative situations. Qualitative findings reinforce this pattern as one participant from this segment described how confidence collapsed under pressure in a job interview, recalling: *“From nervousness I messed everything up... she asked, ‘What’s your name?’ and I said, ‘What do you want?’”* This illustrates how their agency is highly situational as they feel capable in familiar settings, but exposed and unsure when the stakes are high or when expectations are unclear.

These mixed signals also appear in their financial planning. Although they value stability, four in five say that unstable job opportunities, low or irregular income, and the responsibility to support family make long-term planning difficult. This combination shows that their challenge is not low confidence, but a behavioral environment that makes it hard for their sense of control to translate into independent action.

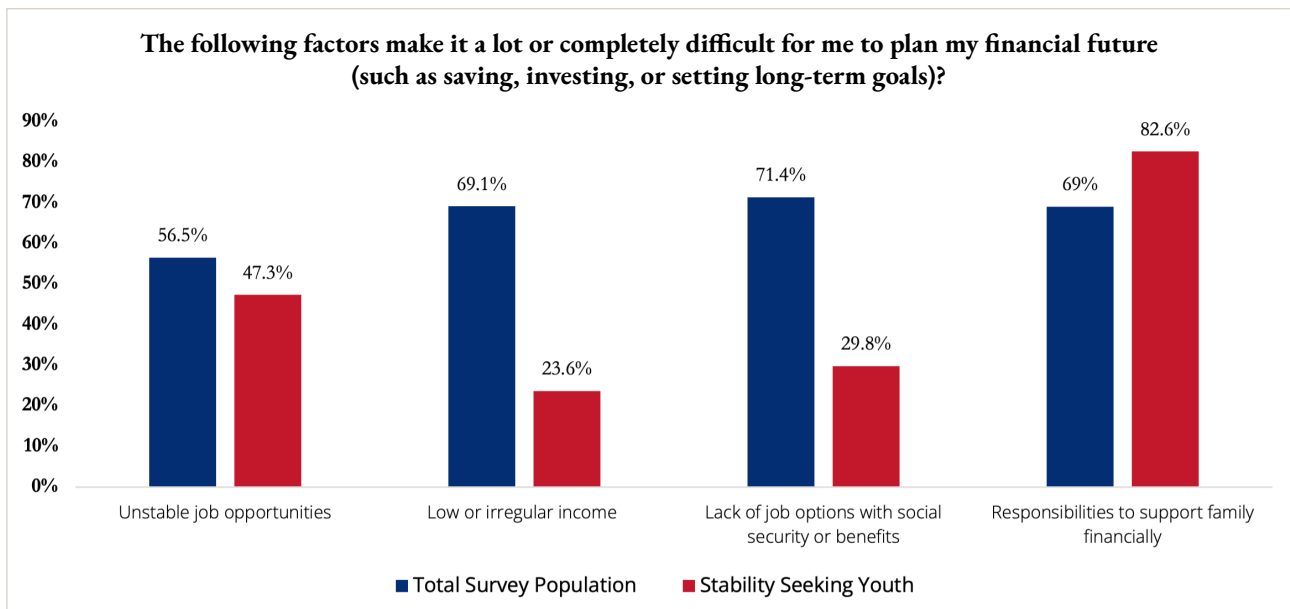


Figure 35: Factors increasing difficulty to plan financial future for Segment 1 (n=1120, Stability-Seeking Youth = 241)

## Contribution

Although stability-seeking youth tend to limit visible or high-risk forms of participation, this does not mean they are uninterested in contributing. Many youth in this segment volunteer or participate in initiatives when the environment is intimate, relational, and predictable. They express a desire to ‘help out’ or support their community but prefer forms of participation that minimize exposure and preserve dignity. Encouragement plays an important role here where youth are more willing to take part when opportunities come through trusted people or institutions and when expectations are clear. Their cautious engagement style should be understood less as withdrawal and more as a form of self-protection in settings where visibility can have social costs.

## Enabling Environment

Stability-seeking youth navigate environments with limited supportive networks and strong social pressures, which shape how they make decisions and evaluate opportunities. Quantitatively, they score below average on supportive relationships, and qualitative data confirms that many have small or fragile social circles. One participant stated this directly: *“I don’t have friends at all [at university]”*. For this reason, family plays a central role as a source of reassurance and emotional validation. Broader

community dynamics, such as gossip, comparison, and judgement discourage youth from sharing plans or experimenting publicly alongside their peers and this produces a behavioral environment where privacy and caution are key strategies for maintaining confidence.

Youth in this segment have a relationship with institutions reflecting this same stability-seeking orientation. This group reports the highest trust in government-affiliated programs, valuing clear processes, formality, and predictability. As one participant explains, *“Government institutions have more guarantee and trust”*. At the same time, procedural delays or lack of transparency in CSO-led initiatives lower their motivation to participate. Program features such as location, timing, clear content descriptions, and straightforward certification are important considerations. When these conditions align, and when youth feel personally reassured, program uptake increases significantly. These preferences are also reflected in the quantitative findings, where stability-seeking youth consistently rates program credibility, safety, clear outcomes, and convenient logistics as more important than the overall average of the study population. Their enabling environment is therefore defined not by absence of opportunity but by high thresholds for trust, safety, and reliability, which shape how and when they choose to engage.

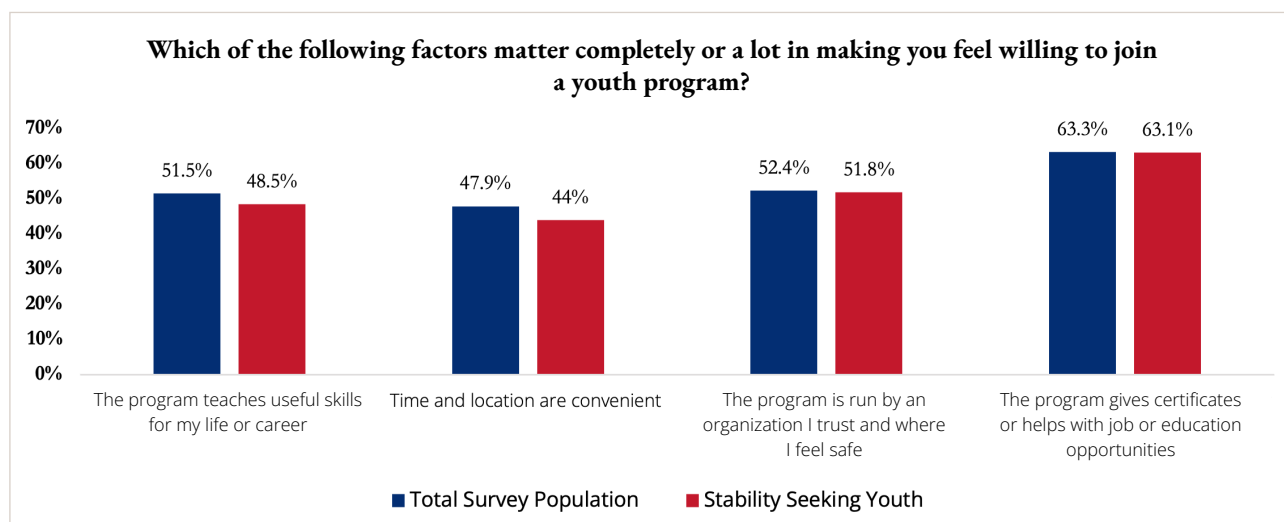


Figure 36: Factors that matter in making youth willing to join a youth program for Segment 1 (n=1120, Stability-Seeking Youth = 241)

## Stability-Seeking Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Prioritize institutional credibility and safety.** Programs delivered through well-known, reputable organizations (especially MoY centers) are a precondition for engagement compared to private or unfamiliar actors.
- **Remove logistical friction.** Bringing opportunities closer, physically (location), temporally (timing), and financially (transport subsidies), is the deciding factor between participation and non-participation.
- **Use relational activation.** Personalized outreach, mentorship, and one-to-one invitations are consistently more effective than broad public messaging for initiating engagement.
- **Provide clear, predictable pathways.** They need to know exactly what a program offers, what the steps are, and what outcome they can expect before committing as agree or open-ended or uncertain programs discourage participation.
- **Avoid designs that require early visibility or public participation.** Begin with low-exposure, small-group, supportive settings positioning visibility as optional rather than required.

## Segment 2: Community-Guided Youth

- Base decisions on what they have seen work for people around them, with a focus on short-term, immediate outcomes.

### Fictional Case Study

My name is Sarah.

I make decisions by observing what actually works for people in my own community pay attention to who found a job and the steps they took to get there, for example someone who started something small and made it grow.

I've seen many people study hard without finding good jobs, so I trust practical experience and skills I can use right away. That's why I care more about practical skills I can use right away. I want something that leads to income, not just a certificate. This will help me fulfil my family responsibilities and covering costs.

Before I decide on anything, I sit with my family and people I trust and talk it through. Their opinion matters because they help me see what's realistic and what's too risky.

I know that secure employment isn't easy to find right now, so I often look toward private sector jobs or even self-employment. When I see someone like me succeed through effort and persistence through doing their research on the market needs, I am encouraged to do the same.



## Behavioral Profile

Community-guided youth show a grounded and practical approach in **how they make decisions**, shaped by the realities they see around them. Many have observed that formal education does not always lead to strong employment outcomes, so they put more emphasis on learning that feels useful, hands-on, and connected to real opportunities. This directly informs what shapes their confidence: they trust what they can see and verify and are cautious about abstract or long-term promises that may not materialize. Their choices are also influenced by everyday pressures, such as limited finances, family responsibilities, and the need for stable income, which makes their behavior a rational response to systems they feel do not always deliver.

In their daily lives, **who influences them plays** a central role. These youth balance confidence in their ability to decide with a strong reliance on trusted people when situations feel unclear. They seek direction from parents, siblings, teachers, or others whose success comes from effort rather than credentials, and this extends to **how they deal with stress** and challenges, where talking things through with others is more common than using structured coping strategies. These advice networks act as emotional anchors, helping them manage uncertainty and reinforcing a style of decision-making that is relational rather than independent.

Their sense of direction in **how they think about the future** is heavily shaped by economic realities. They are sharply aware of rising living costs, unpredictable income, and difficulty accessing secure jobs. These pressures influence **what work pathways feel right for them**, with many seeing private-sector roles or self-employment as more flexible, merit-based, or aligned with their skills.

Finally, **how they engage with opportunities** reflects this same pragmatism. Their participation is often low, not out of disinterest, but because many opportunities feel disconnected from their goals or the realities of the labor market. When activities feel useful, concrete, and relevant, their willingness to engage increases.

**Overall**, this behavioral profile reflects youth who are practical, grounded, and guided by trusted relationships, making decisions that fit their environment while still taking steady steps toward a better future.

## Domain-Level Analysis

### Assets

Community-guided youth place low value on formal education, not because they lack ambition, but because they have grown up seeing weak links between schooling and real opportunities. This group scores the lowest across all groups on educational motivation, with only half saying education is very or extremely important for finding a good job (49%) and one third attaching high importance to obtaining a college diploma (31%) the lowest of all segments. Their views are shaped by the belief that the current system no longer matches labor-market needs, a participant in the segment-specific consultation session explained, *“College degree doesn’t have the same value as before, we are in a technological era, and we should focus more on the soft skills...a college degree has become more of a status symbol.”* This pattern appears consistently across the survey, where this group rates nearly all education motivations far lower than the total survey population.

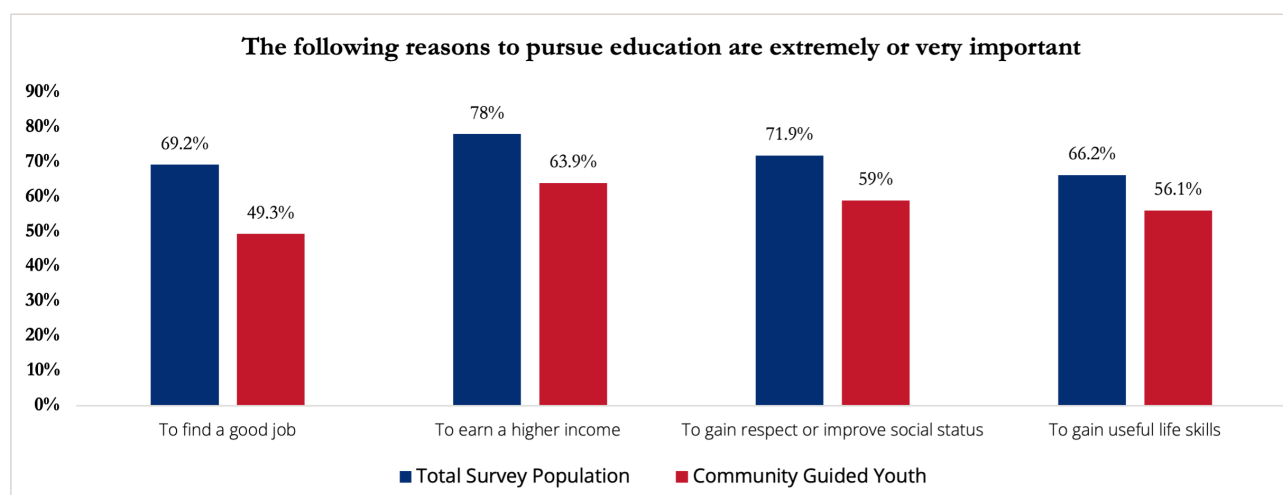


Figure 37: Reasons perceived as important for pursuing education for Segment 2 (n=1120, Community-Guided Youth = 172)

Their decisions about what and where to study are also guided more by external pressures than personal aspiration as they are the most influenced group across all dimensions. Most youth from this segment say program cost shapes their choices a lot or completely (75%), that expected job outcome drives their decisions (73%), and that they followed family advice when selecting their field of study (75%). This does not indicate passivity as these youth are confident in their abilities but rather illustrates how financial realities and social expectations carry significant weight. Many look to family members as models of perseverance and success, as one participant shared, *“My sister fought her way to get where she wants to be.”* Their educational journey is therefore shaped less by personal passion and more by what their environment signals is safe, realistic, and financially manageable. This shows that although they feel confident in their abilities, they are less motivated by formal schooling because the external cues they trust, such as cost, family expectations, and observed job outcomes, do not consistently reinforce its value. Their lower educational drive is therefore a response to environmental messages rather than a lack of ambition.

When it comes to skills development, this group shows a distinct preference for learning that is hands-on, practical, and directly tied to real work. Their low motivation for formal education reflects skepticism toward traditional systems rather than a lack of interest in learning. Many believe that practical experience offers more reliable returns, as one participant explained, *“You can learn just by practicing what you want to learn, which is more effective than the conventional way.”* Although

their scores on structured coping and soft-skill engagement are below average, this more likely reflects limited access and unclear pathways than disengagement; 63% never or rarely use mindfulness exercises and 58% avoid physical or creative outlets, this does not reflect a lack of interest in learning or improving their skills. Instead, they rely on trusted people for guidance and reassurance, as one participant shared, *“If someone close to me encourages me... I go for it; it feels easier.”* This relational approach also shapes how they learn as programs feel relevant when they offer practical skills and when someone they trust signals that the opportunity is meaningful.

## Agency

Community-guided youth show strong personal confidence, even while navigating environments that could limit their autonomy. They score above average on self-efficacy, with 92% saying they feel confident making their own decisions and 80% reporting they can adapt easily to unexpected challenges: the highest across all segments. They also demonstrate high awareness of how to seek support, with around 9 in 10 agreeing they know where to go when they need help (87%). Qualitative findings reinforce this sense of capability as participants described themselves as having partial control over their lives, noting that they can manage aspects like their education but recognize that career outcomes depend on external forces. This mix of confidence and realism shows that this group of youth believe in their abilities but also acknowledge that some outcomes are shaped by circumstances they cannot fully control.

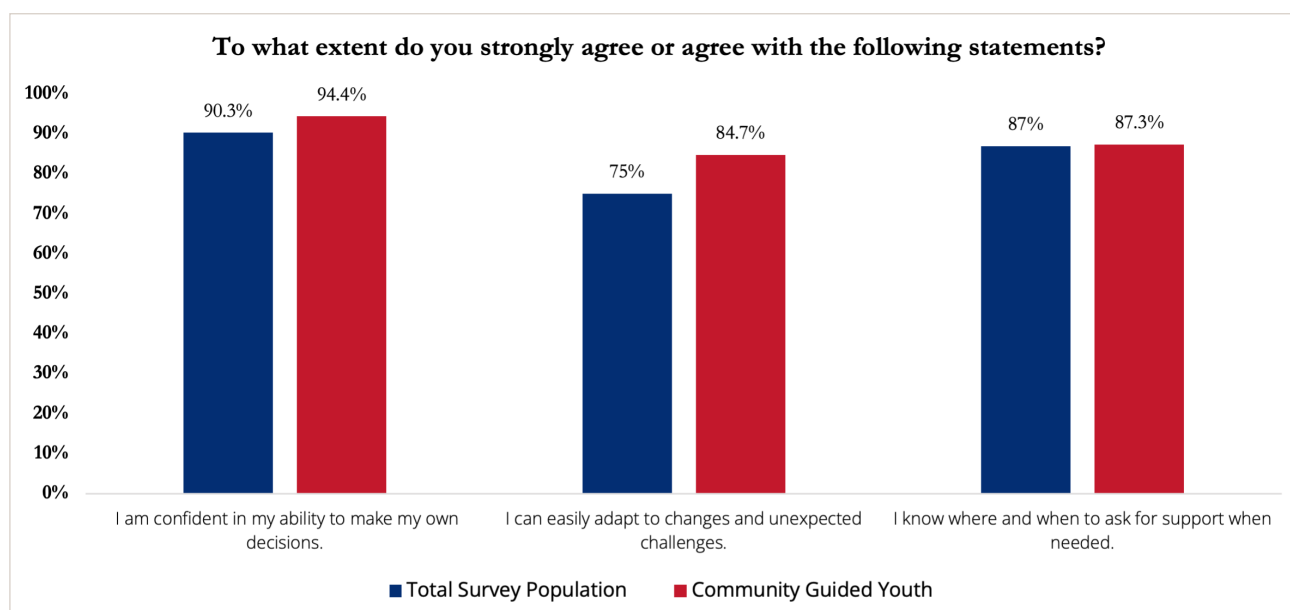


Figure 38: Confidence in ability to making decisions, adaptability to changes, and seeking support for Segment 2 (n=1120, Community-Guided Youth= 172)

Youth in this segment stand out as the most externally influenced group. Family expectations, religious values, and financial pressures shape major decisions to a greater degree here than in any other segment. For example, roughly 9 in 10 youth in this segment say their family's advice (89%), their financial situation (78%), and religious beliefs (78%) strongly influence their educational and career choices. These influences do not undermine their confidence, rather they act as trusted reference points that help them make sense of major decisions. These realities give them a clearer sense of what is safe, achievable, and socially acceptable. As one participant shared, *"My family, they encouraged me... They were always my first source of motivation. They always supported me and gave me confidence in myself, told me that I could do it,"* highlighting how close relationships guide their thinking and shape what feels possible. This encouragement is also grounded in what families see as realistic and within reach, reinforcing choices that feel secure rather than risky. This mix of personal capability and strong social influence creates a decision-making style that is confident but also highly relational where youth weigh their own judgement alongside the expectations and experiences of the people they trust most.

## Contribution

Community-guided youth participate less in community issues, such as local challenges, neighborhood concerns, or social problems not because they are disengaged, but because they rarely see clear pathways for their involvement to make a difference. This segment scores slightly below average on all indicators of civic action with roughly 1 in 6 saying they often or very often participate in

community meetings or initiatives (17%), and under half report trying to learn more or find solutions on their own (45%). At the same time, a notable 38% say they avoid getting involved because they feel their contribution will not change anything: the lowest sense of impact across all segments. These patterns suggest that participation is shaped more by perceived effectiveness than by willingness. When youth feel unsure about where to go, who to approach, or whether their voice will carry weight, disengagement becomes a rational response rather than a lack of care for their communities. As one participant explained *"Honestly, I don't know where to go unless someone tells me or encourages me"* highlighting how uncertainty and unclear entry points make it harder for them to act independently, even though they feel confident in their abilities.

A similar pattern appears in their relationship with youth programs. Youth in this segment show lower awareness of opportunities and weaker belief in their relevance, with around 6 in 10 disagreeing that they know organizations that offer programs for youth (58.5%) one of the lowest awareness rates across segments. Even though 82% agree that programs can be helpful, this is still lower than other segments, and the belief does not translate into action. Their motivations also differ as only 44% find useful skills extremely important for joining a program, and trust in the organization or family influence plays a smaller role compared to other youth. As one participant put it *"You can learn just by practicing what you want to learn,"* suggesting that formal programs feel less relevant compared to hands-on learning they already trust. These findings point to a group that does not reject participation but sees limited value in the current formats available to them.

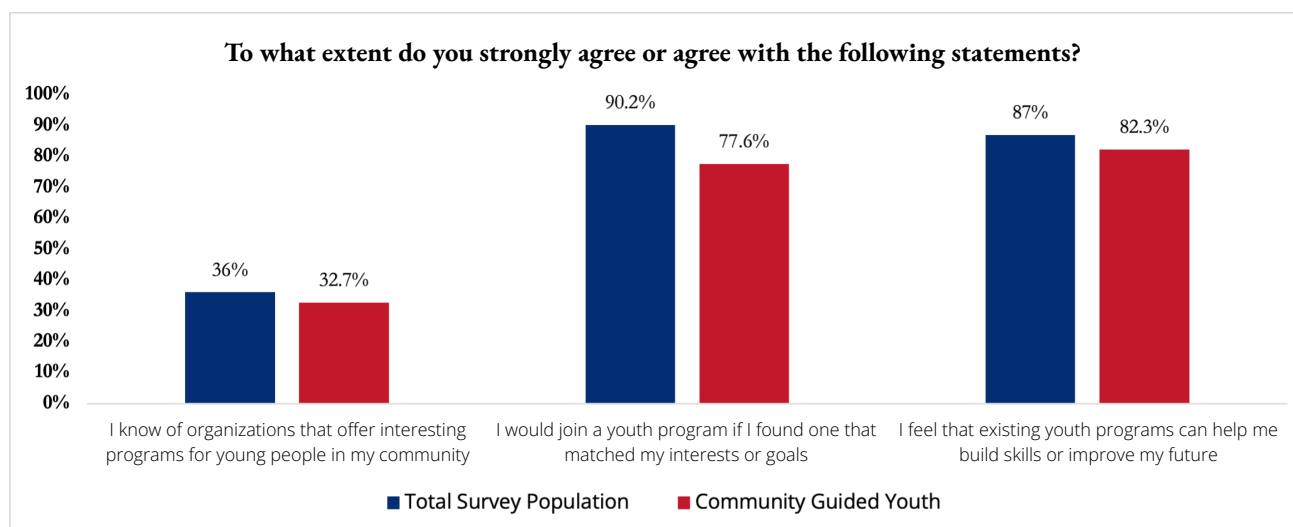


Figure 39: Knowledge, willingness to join, and perceptions of relevance of existing youth programs for Segment 2 (n=1120, Community-Guided Youth= 172)

## Enabling Environment

Youth in this segment move within social environments where expectations, advice, and family norms strongly shape their decisions. Their networks tend to be small and centered on family, who play a decisive role in guiding education and career choices. Quantitatively, this group is the most influenced group across all social dimensions, with 9 in 10 youth reporting that family expectations shape their choices a lot or completely (89%). This aligns with qualitative findings as one participant shared *“I like to talk to [my parents] ... I feel relieved when I talk [to them]”* reflecting how emotional support and guidance anchor their sense of direction. Because community-guided youth prefer to make informed and realistic decisions, wider community norms also affect their confidence in taking initiative. Many worry about choosing a path that turns out to be ineffective as 42% say they often do not know where to go or who to approach when they want to get involved in addressing community issues. This reflects uncertainty in the system rather than a lack of ability, as they hesitate when pathways feel unclear or when available support does not provide enough direction. Here, social influence functions less as pressure and more as orientation in environments where independent pathways are not always visible.

Community-guided youth also face structural pressures that shape how they interact with their environment and plan for the future. High living costs, irregular income, and limited access to secure jobs, all of which score above average for this group, make long-term planning difficult and increase reliance on familiar pathways. These constraints reduce the bandwidth for civic participation or engagement in programs that do not offer clear,

tangible benefits. As another participant noted, practical learning often feels more effective than institutional offerings, *“If I see it’s useful... even if it’s not well-known, I would apply”*. This shows how their enabling environment, therefore, is characterized by strong social influence, low institutional visibility, and economic conditions that push them toward short-term, practical decisions rather than formal participation in community or program spaces.

### Community-Guided Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Lead with practical, immediate value.** Offer hands-on, applied learning with immediate and observable links to real jobs or income related outcomes.
- **Use trusted relationships to boost engagement.** Referrals, endorsements, and personalized outreach through trusted figures are often necessary to legitimize participation, compared to broad promotional campaigns.
- **Make programs simple to understand and easy to navigate.** Provide clear explanations of what the program involves, how it works, and what youth will gain, reducing reliance on informal clarification through peers.
- **Strengthen local visibility and relevance.** Build presence through community actors and familiar spaces, Showing how the program aligns with everyday needs and locally recognized labor-market realities.



## Segment 3: Clarity-Seeking Youth

- ▶ Actively seek structure and imagine their **lives as a sequence of steps towards long-term goals**. Their sense of **self-discipline motivates them to engage when pathways show logical progression**.

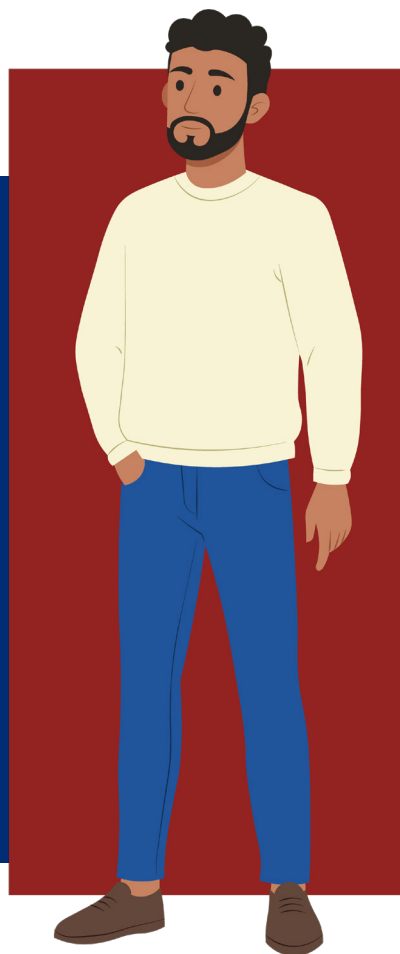
### Fictional Case Study

My name is Hamzah.

When I make decisions, I take my time. I don't want to invest effort in something unless I'm confident it will move me toward my long-term goals and lead to something meaningful. I think a lot about where a path will take me before I commit to it.

I feel most comfortable when education or work paths are clearly structured. I like knowing the steps in advance and understanding what the outcome could be. I like to know that every action I take is a step forward to the next one: obtaining a degree, getting recognized qualifications, gaining experience, and finding a secure job.

Having a clear plan toward a job gives me a sense of control and legitimacy that I struggle to feel otherwise. This makes me willing to commit and work hard.



### Behavioral Profile

Clarity-seeking youth are deliberate in **how they make decisions**, preferring options where expectations, steps, and outcomes are clearly defined. They place strong value on structured education and recognized training, especially when these pathways feel legitimate and linked to real opportunity. **What shapes their confidence** is not optimism or risk-taking, but preparedness, as their confidence grows when they understand what is required and what success looks like, while uncertainty emerges when systems feel vague, inconsistent, or open-ended. As a result, they approach choices cautiously, not out of fear, but out of a desire to ensure that effort leads somewhere meaningful.

In their daily lives, **who influences them** matters more than how many voices they hear. They rely on a small circle of trusted individuals, often parents, siblings, teachers, or close peers with lived experience, whose opinions are seen as credible and well-intentioned. Feedback from authority figures carries weight, meaning encouragement can strongly motivate them, while criticism can linger and shape hesitation. This also affects **how they deal with stress** as they tend to respond through persistence, self-discipline, and repeated effort rather than experimentation or emotional

expression. Setbacks are processed as moments to regroup and prepare better, rather than signals to change direction impulsively.

When planning ahead, **how they think about the future** is structured around progression rather than abstraction. They imagine the future as a sequence of steps including completing degrees, gaining qualifications, building experience, rather than as distant or uncertain possibilities. This directly informs **what work pathways feel right for them**, with many gravitating toward roles that offer stability, clear rules, and social legitimacy, such as government or formal institutional work. **How they engage with opportunities** reflects this same logic. Their participation is selective and conditional where they are likely to disengage when initiatives feel generic, unclear, or disconnected from their plans, but engage actively when opportunities are concrete, relevant to their field, and supported by people or institutions they trust.

**Overall**, this behavioral profile portrays youth who are careful, goal-oriented decision-makers who engage when pathways feel structured, credible, and worth the effort, and who hold back when uncertainty threatens the value of their hard work.

## Domain-Level Analysis

### Assets

For clarity-seeking youth, education functions less as a long-term investment and more as a conditional tool that is engaged with when it feels immediately useful or socially expected. Early on, youth in this segment are motivated to study because of family pressure, rewards, or peer recognition, rather than because education felt personally meaningful or future oriented. As they grow older, motivation shifts toward the hope that education might unlock better job opportunities, but this belief is fragile. one participant from this segment explained *“Before Tawjihi, I wasn’t interested in studying... there was no goal I felt I was working towards.”*

This pattern extends to skills development and emotional coping. Clarity-seeking youth tend to undervalue skills for navigating work, life, and social situations because capability-building is not clearly experienced as protective or empowering. Even though participants from this segment recognized that soft skills and education form the foundation for success, this understanding often remains abstract. Behaviorally, this results in lower engagement with training and fewer proactive steps to build competence. At the same time, this group shows limited coping capacity when facing stress or disappointment. Many youth in this group manage stress alone, and do not regularly talk to trusted people or use physical or creative outlets to regulate emotions, increasing the likelihood of withdrawal or

avoidance when challenges arise. As one participant said *“I try, I get tired, I get disappointed, then I try to pull myself back together.”*

### Agency

Clarity-seeking youth show a form of conditional agency that sits between confidence and constraint. More than 9 in 10 youth in this segment report that they are confident in their ability to make decisions (93%), and some workshop participants described themselves as having full control over their lives when they felt clear about what they were doing and why. However, this sense of control is conditional rather than stable. For many youth in this segment, feeling in control is closely tied to employment status, with paid work acting as a key source of structure, clarity, and legitimacy. When work is absent, perceived agency weakens, even if personal confidence remains. For example, one participant from this segment explained *“I feel I have partial control, because I don’t have a job.”* This helps explain why high agreement on individual confidence coexists with strong preferences for stability and security where 85% of this segment prefer public sector jobs because they offer stability and social security, and 81% say working in a place with a good reputation and family approval is important. These patterns suggest that while clarity-seeking youth believe in their ability to decide, their self-efficacy remains fragile because it is anchored in external validation and structural certainty rather than internalized confidence alone.

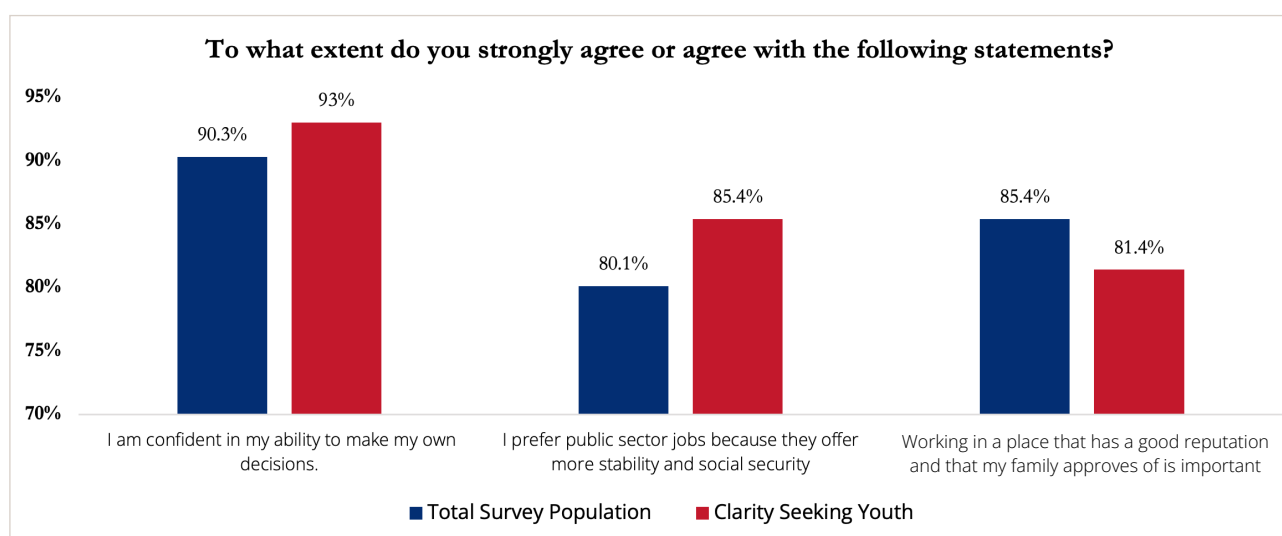


Figure 40: Confidence in ability to make decisions, preference of public sector jobs, and importance of workplace reputation and family approval for Segment 3 (n=1120, Clarity-Seeking Youth= 205)

This fragility becomes especially visible when youth think about the future. Clarity-seeking youth are among the most constrained when it comes to planning, with financial pressure, high living

costs, family responsibilities, lack of benefits, and uncertainty around career paths all strongly limiting their ability to plan. Rather than disengaging from the future, this group responds to uncertainty by

narrowing their aspirations toward options that feel safe, predictable, and socially legitimate, and their labor market preferences reflect this risk-management approach clearly. Stability, benefits, safety, income, and work-life balance are consistently prioritized, and public sector employment is widely viewed as the most viable and desirable pathway. As one participant explained, *“A government job is safer... it has security, insurance, and you’re at ease afterwards.”*

Family influence, particularly for young women, does not operate only through direct instruction, but through the anticipation of approval, concern, and responsibility. Decisions about work are often pre-filtered through questions of safety, reputation, distance, working hours, and social interaction, long before a formal choice is made. This means that some opportunities are quietly ruled out, not because youth lack interest or confidence, but because pursuing them would require negotiating family anxiety or cultural expectations. In this context, choosing stable, locally accepted work, especially in the public sector, becomes a way of exercising agency while maintaining relational security. Rather than resisting family influence, many youth integrate

it into their decision-making as a risk-management strategy that protects both personal autonomy and family trust.

## Contribution

Contribution among youth in this segment is shaped less by a lack of concern and more by uncertainty about role, impact, and relevance, a pattern consistent with their broader clarity-seeking orientation. Only half of youth in this segment talk about community issues with people they know (47%) and 1 in 5 report participating in community meetings or initiatives (21%), slightly lower than the overall average (23%). At the same time, 53% agree that they avoid getting involved because they feel they cannot make a difference, a higher share than in the total sample, reflecting uncertainty about role clarity and impact rather than reliance on external guidance or norms. As one participant explained, *“Sometimes I feel I don’t know what my role is, or whether my participation would make a difference.”* When pathways to contribution feel informal, symbolic, or poorly defined, many youth choose not to engage, holding back until they can see a clearer purpose or outcome.

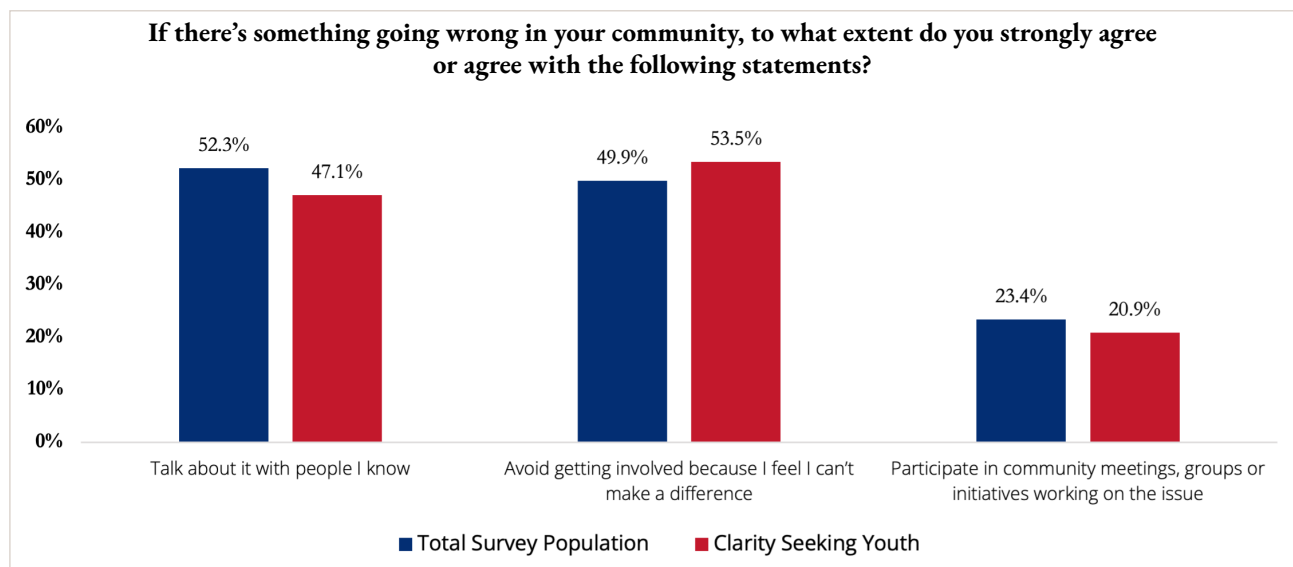


Figure 41: Coping responses to problems or events in community for Segment 3 (n= 1120, Clarity-Seeking Youth= 205)

When clarity and structure are present, discussions with youth in this segment reveal that contribution becomes both meaningful and motivating. Volunteering, in particular, is seen as an important way for youth to discover their personality, build skills, and gain confidence. As one participant noted, *“Volunteering is important because it helps you discover yourself and strengthen your skills.”* However, participants also highlighted that access to such opportunities has not always been

consistent, with one reflecting, *“Now there are more opportunities, but before they weren’t available.”* This helps explain why engagement remains selective as youth are more willing to contribute when opportunities feel meaningful, accessible, and linked to personal growth, but disengage when participation feels unclear, unsupported, or unlikely to lead to tangible value.

## Enabling Environment

Clarity-seeking youth score around the average across enabling environment factors, suggesting neither strong facilitation nor extreme constraint. Qualitative insights, however, reveal that the environment shapes behavior less through overt barriers and more through social signaling about what is acceptable, visible, and worth pursuing. Opportunities are not entirely absent, but they are perceived to be unevenly distributed and symbolically coded. Youth learn early which paths are considered legitimate and which carry social risk. As one participant explained, *“Life in Amman feels easier... there are more opportunities and less pressure from people watching you.”* In this context, geography functions behaviorally as a filter, not only limiting access to services or programs, but also shaping expectations around mobility, ambition, and acceptable forms of work.

Social norms further narrow perceived options, particularly around employment and self-expression. Informal or small-scale work, creative pursuits, and self-employment may exist in practice, but are often avoided due to concerns around reputation, family status, and social judgement. As one participant noted, *“Some jobs are not shameful in themselves, but people will talk if your family is known.”* This creates an environment where youth are not prevented from acting but are encouraged to self-regulate by choosing paths that they perceive as likely to materialize and minimize social friction. As one participant put it, *“We don’t want activities just to say something is happening, we want opportunities that actually matter.”* Behaviorally, this shows that the enabling environment does not fail by exclusion, but by offering too few pathways that feel both socially safe and genuinely worthwhile.



### Clarity-Seeking Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Design programs around clear pathways.** Youth engage when they can see a clear sequence linking activities to concrete outcomes. Programs should clearly articulate what happens next and how participation translates into real-world value.
- **Reduce uncertainty by making expectations, roles, and benefits explicit.** Ambiguity actively delays or prevents engagement, even when motivation is high. Program objectives, participant roles, time commitments, and benefits should be communicated simply and transparently, avoiding vague language about “*empowerment*” or “*participation*.”
- **Anchor opportunities in socially legitimate and trusted structures.** Initiatives gain traction when they align with family approval, community norms, or recognized institutions. Leveraging respected local actors, credible trainers, or recognized certifications signals legitimacy and reduces hesitation.
- **Offer structured, skill-building entry points rather than open-ended engagement.** Volunteering and participation are more appealing when framed as structured developmental steps, not open-ended contribution.

## Segment 4: Self-Driven Youth

- Accept uncertainty and constraints as a part of life, **staying confident in their ability to independently make the right decisions based on information available** to them and their **own hopes for the future**.

### Behavioral Snapshot of Self-Driven Youth

My name is Khaled.

I spend a lot of time thinking before I make decisions and I try not to let impulse guide me. I know that uncertainty and setbacks are part of life, but I see them as things to learn from rather than reasons to stop.

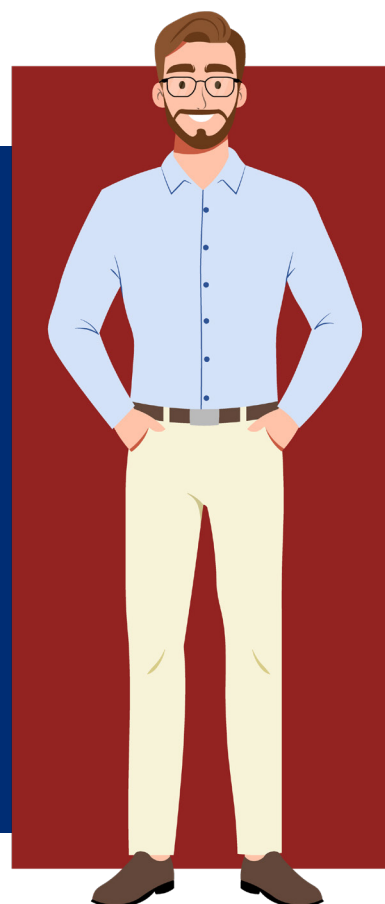
I ask for advice from people who have more experience than I do. I listen carefully, but in the end, I make the final decision myself. I think through my options, the possible consequences, and the tradeoffs before I move.

I’m aware that there are external pressures and limitations. Not everything is under my control. Still, I try to find a middle path, something that allows me to move forward without giving up on my goals. Even when conditions feel unstable, I rely on planning and consistent effort. I believe that if I stay disciplined and keep adjusting, the results will come with time.

### Behavioral Profile

Self-driven youth are intentional and informed in **how they make decisions** as they tend to approach choices through careful consideration of options, consequences, and trade-offs rather than acting impulsively. They value informed judgement and often take time to study decisions thoroughly, aiming to avoid randomness or poorly considered moves. **What shapes their confidence** is not

emotional reassurance but clarity of reasoning. Their confidence grows when decisions are grounded in evidence, logic, and a clear understanding of risks and benefits. While uncertainty still exists, it is treated as something to manage rather than avoid. **Who influences them** reflects this same logic, as they selectively seek input from peers, mentors,



teachers, or experienced individuals when they believe it will strengthen their thinking, without fully delegating responsibility for the final decision.

In moments of pressure or setback, **how they deal with stress** is characterized by adaptive, forward-looking coping. Self-driven youth rely on motivation, self-development, and perseverance as protective strategies, drawing strength from having clear goals and a sense of direction. They tend to view effort, learning, and consistency as ways to move through difficulty rather than signals to withdraw. **How they think about the future** is therefore optimistic yet realistic. They are strongly future-oriented, confident that their goals are achievable, and aware of constraints such as financial conditions, health concerns, or family expectations without feeling defined by them. Instead of abandoning aspirations, they often seek pragmatic ‘middle paths’ that allow progress while navigating real-world conditions.

These orientations directly shape **what work pathways feel right for them** as they are highly active in pursuing employment through multiple channels, including networks, mentors, volunteering, internships, and independent initiatives. They view structured opportunities as steppingstones for skill-building, credibility, and access rather than as final destinations. This also informs **how they engage with opportunities**, as engagement is strongest when initiatives offer tangible learning, professional growth, or clear pathways toward longer-term goals. While they may feel limited in their ability to influence community decision-making directly, their participation remains purposeful and strategic, focused on building capacity, experience, and readiness for future independence rather than symbolic involvement.

**Overall**, this behavioral profile portrays youth who are proactive, future-oriented, and intentional in how they shape their lives, drawing confidence from planning, learning, and sustained effort rather than certainty or status. They navigate constraints strategically, engaging with opportunities that build skills, credibility, and long-term readiness while steadily working toward greater independence.

## Domain-Level Analysis

### Assets

For self-driven youth, education functions as an active platform for agency rather than a passive credential. Around 9 in 10 youth from this segment report having clear career goals (94.5%) and feel confident that these goals are realistic (88.7%), reflecting a strong sense of direction anchored in planning rather than aspiration alone. This orientation is reinforced by how education is experienced behaviorally. University is described as the first space where responsibility becomes real and self-managed. As one participant explained, *“University teaches you that you are responsible for yourself... you choose whether you attend, whether you study, and later you start connecting grades, work, and the future together.”* Education is therefore not only valued, but actively used to rehearse decision-making, self-discipline, and future preparation, with 80.2% rating a university degree as very or extremely important. Even when initial study paths are imperfect, self-driven youth demonstrate adaptive persistence, reframing challenges as part of a longer trajectory rather than signs of failure.

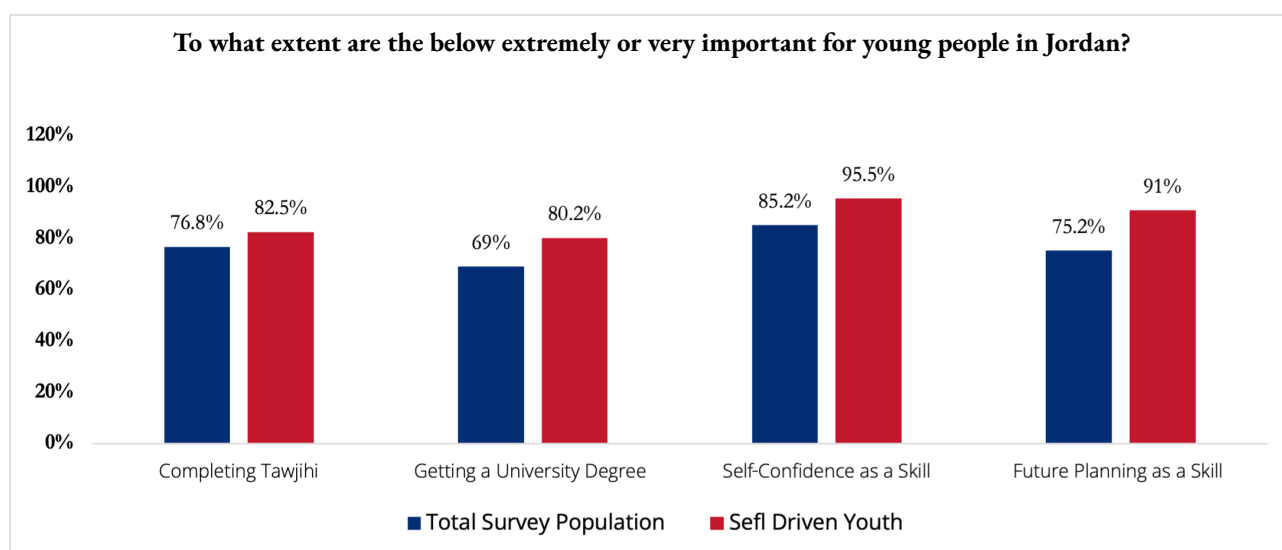


Figure 42: Importance of Tawjihi, getting a university degree, and self-confidence and future planning as skills for Segment 4 (n=1120, Self-Driven Youth= 177)

Self-driven youth also show strong capability assets through how they approach skills development. Over 8 in 10 youth from this segment rate all proposed future skills as very or extremely important, with self-confidence (95.5%) and planning (91%) emerging as the most critical. Discussions with youth from this group show that skills are valued when they are practical, applicable, and clearly linked to employability. Youth describe actively preparing in advance, such as learning Excel, Word, programming, or technical tools before graduation, rather than waiting for formal transitions. As one participant noted, *“I prepare myself before finishing so that when I graduate, I’m ready to look for work.”* Here, skills acquisition is not dependent on institutional pathways alone, as self-driven youth demonstrate high digital self-reliance, using online platforms, YouTube, Facebook groups, and even ChatGPT to identify learning opportunities, assess relevance, and guide next steps. This reflects both strong digital access and the confidence to self-navigate fragmented opportunity landscapes.

Coping mechanisms further distinguish this group as behaviorally resilient. Self-driven youth show the strongest adaptive coping patterns, characterized by persistence, reframing, and internal motivation rather than avoidance. Setbacks, such as academic delays, repeated exams, or missed opportunities, are processed as temporary obstacles rather than

defining failures. One participant reflected, *“Fear can be a motivator... you just don’t let it control you.”* While family encouragement, particularly from mothers, can reinforce persistence, decision-making remains internally anchored and support is consulted, but choices are owned. This combination of emotional resilience, future planning, and self-directed learning allows self-driven youth to sustain momentum even in uncertain contexts, making education, skills, and coping not just assets they possess, but tools they actively deploy.

## Agency

Self-driven youth translate their strong planning capacity into deliberate action. Rather than acting impulsively, they describe weighing options carefully, seeking clarity before committing, and avoiding random or reactive decisions. Their confidence is expressed through informed judgement: evaluating trade-offs, anticipating consequences, and choosing paths that align with long-term goals rather than short-term pressure. As one participant explained, *“Knowing the positives and negatives of the decision helps you avoid randomness.”* Agency here is expressed through thoughtfulness as decisions are treated as investments that require time, reflection, and evidence.

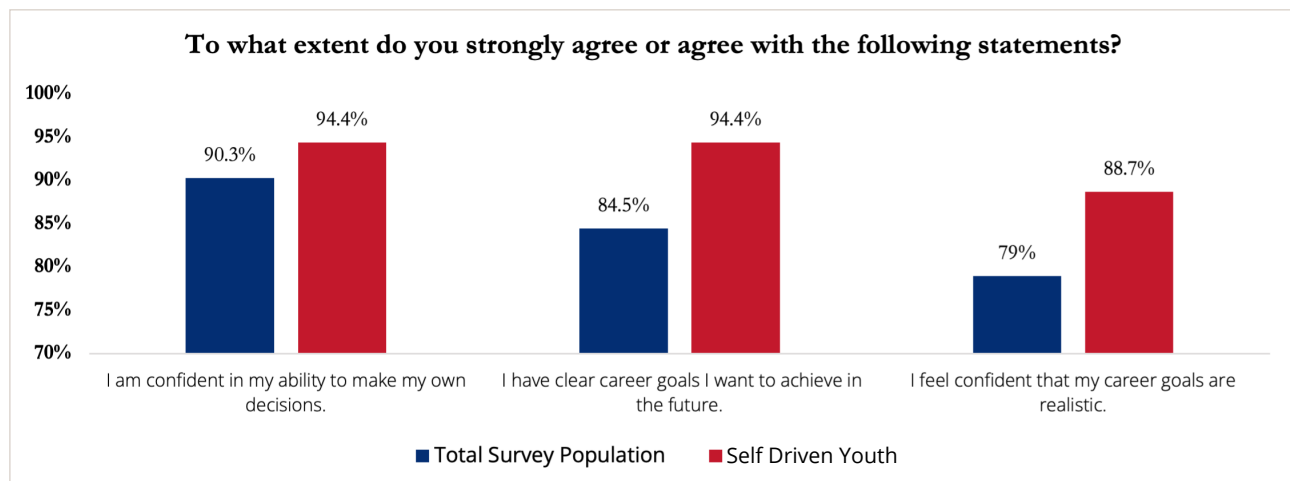


Figure 43: Confidence in ability to make decisions, clarity of career goals, and confidence in career goals being realistic for Segment 4 (n=1120, Self-Driven Youth= 177)

At the same time, this agency is pragmatic rather than absolute. While 83.6% report that their families support the career paths they want to pursue, youth remain aware of constraints linked to family expectations, finances, health, and broader context. Rather than feeling controlled by these factors, self-driven youth navigate them deliberately, often seeking what they described as a ‘middle path’ that allows progress without rupture. This balance

reflects a form of agency rooted in perseverance and adaptability. As one participant explained *“What is planned for can be achieved through planning and continuous effort, regardless of circumstances.”* This orientation is reinforced by behavior, with self-driven youth showing the highest levels of activity across job-seeking strategies (including mentor outreach, online platforms, volunteering, and internships),

indicating a pattern of proactive exploration rather than passive waiting.

## Contribution

Contribution among self-driven youth is shaped by a clear distinction between participation and influence. When something goes wrong in their community, youth in this segment are more likely than the general population to talk about it with people they know (66.1%), indicating awareness and concern. However, this engagement does not

consistently translate into participation. Many youth in this group report holding back from involvement because they do not see a clear pathway through which their actions would lead to meaningful change. As one participant explained, *“You think a lot before you act, because you don’t want your effort to be wasted.”* This pattern reflects discernment rather than disengagement where contribution is not avoided because it is unimportant, but because it is assessed for relevance, impact, and credibility before action is taken.

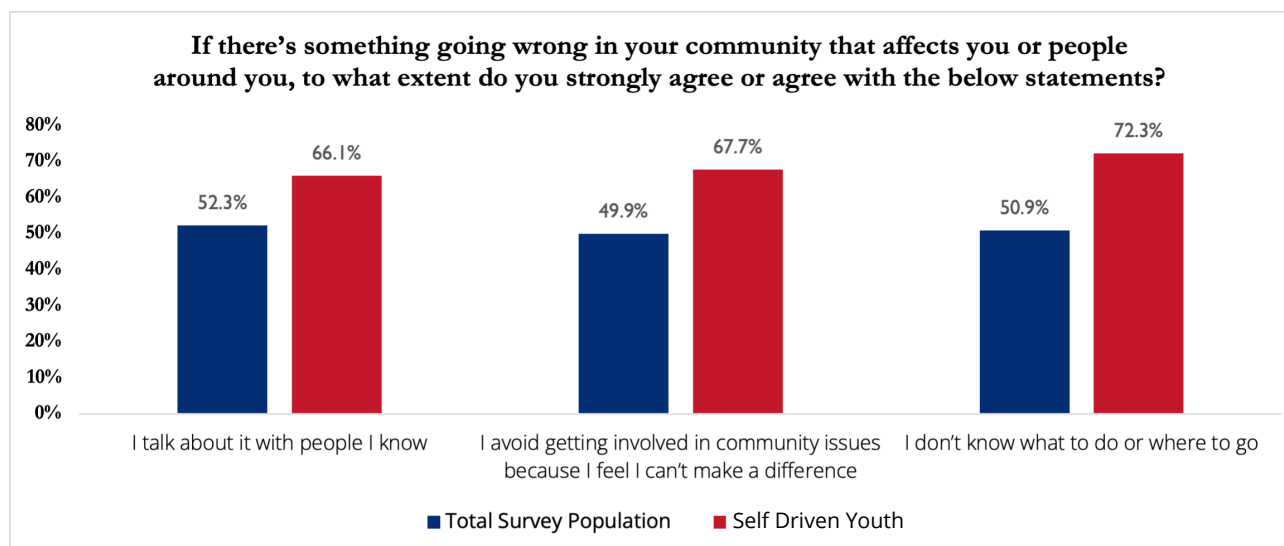


Figure 44: Coping responses to problems or events in community for Segment 4 (n=1120, Self-Driven Youth= 177)

At the same time, uncertainty around how to engage plays a central role in shaping contribution. Nearly 3 in 4 self-driven youth report that they often or very often do not know what to do or where to go when facing a community issue (72.3%), and 2 in 3 say they avoid getting involved because they feel they cannot make a difference (67.7%). Youth in this segment described the need to understand their role, the pros and cons of participation, and whether involvement would lead to tangible outcomes before committing.

## Enabling Environment

Self-driven youth operate in an environment marked by real economic uncertainty, but they do not internalize these constraints as personal failure or loss of direction. Quantitative data shows that 63.8% of self-driven youth agree that economic uncertainty makes it harder for them to plan their future, reflecting a clear awareness of structural instability. At the same time, they are significantly less likely than the overall youth population to feel caught between what they want and what others expect of them (37.3% compared to 52.3%), indicating lower emotional conflict and stronger internal and

rational decision making when navigating competing pressures.



This pattern suggests a form of grounded resilience where self-driven youth recognize that external conditions complicate planning, however, they do not emotionally collapse into uncertainty or become dominated by social expectations. For example, one participant from this segment explained, *“I am convinced of what I want, so everyone can do what they want... Honestly, I might ask my mother, and then in the end I decide.”* Instead, they appear to compartmentalize constraints, treating economic

instability as a problem to be managed rather than a force that dictates their identity or choices. This allows them to continue planning, adjusting, and pursuing their goals even in unstable conditions. Here, context could increase the difficulty of planning and progression, but it does not undermine motivation or decision-making. Self-driven youth acknowledge external constraints while continuing to act, adapt, and move forward, maintaining a sense of agency even within a constrained enabling environment.

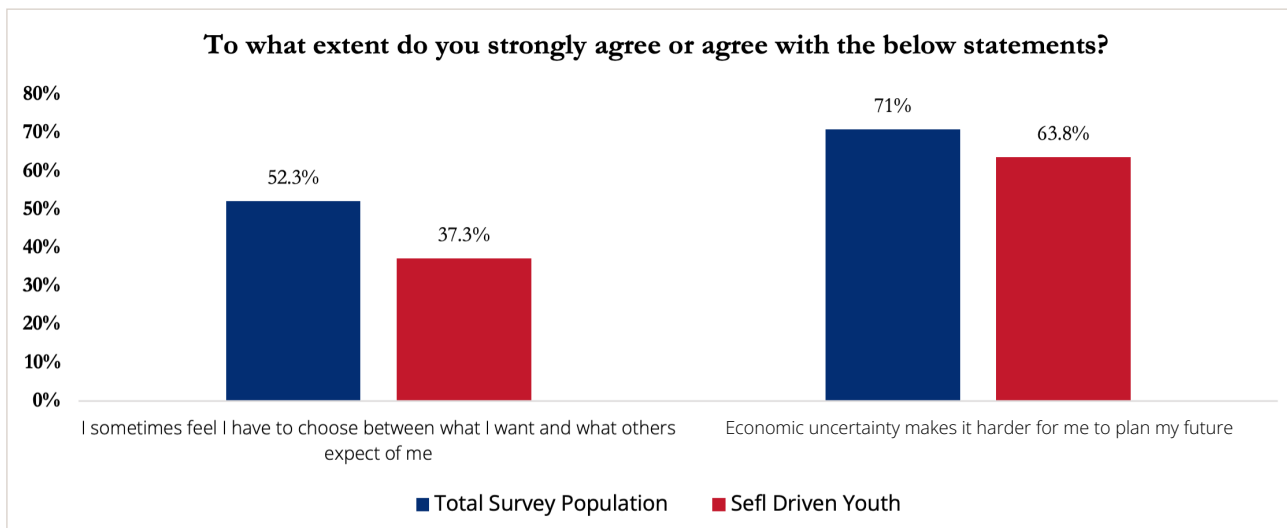


Figure 45: Tensions between external expectations and aspirations, and role of economic uncertainty in future planning for Segment 4 (n=1120, Self-Driven Youth= 177)

### Self-Driven Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Design programs that respect autonomy while offering structure.** Self-driven youth value ownership over their choices and engage more when programs support decision-making without directing it.
- **Position programs as tools for strategic advancement, not remediation.** This segment engages when opportunities are framed as ways to sharpen judgement, build credibility, and accelerate progress toward long-term goals. Messaging should emphasize how participation strengthens decision-making, professional identity, and future readiness, rather than focusing on gaps or deficits.
- **Leverage mentorship and informed guidance as core design features.** Self-driven youth actively seek advice from experienced individuals to validate and refine their choices. Programs should intentionally integrate mentors who help participants weigh options without substituting their judgement.
- **Acknowledge constraints without centering them.** While economic uncertainty and contextual instability are real, programs should avoid overemphasizing barriers in ways that inhibit agency. Instead, interventions should recognize constraints upfront, then pivot quickly to actionable strategies, reinforcing forward momentum.
- **Frame engagement as a step toward independence, not an endpoint.** Volunteering, internships, and training are most effective when presented as strategic transitional steps toward self-reliance, employment, or independent projects.

## Segment 5: Value-Driven Youth

- Make choices **based on purpose, ethics, and alignment with personal values**. They engage deeply when opportunities feel meaningful and disengage from those that feel hollow.

### Fictional Case Study

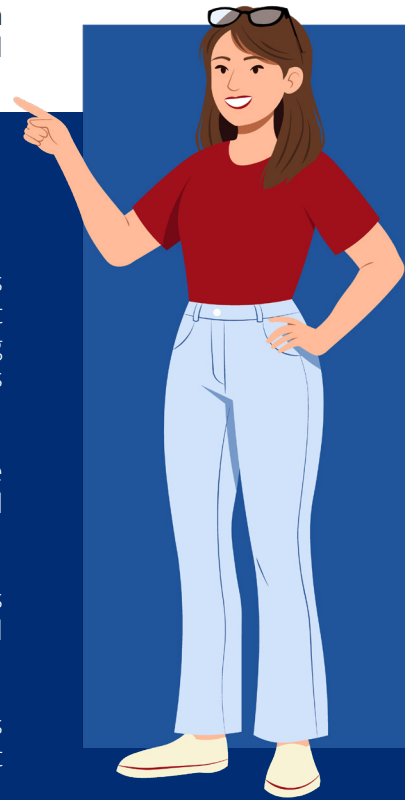
My name is Zaina.

I usually choose my path based on what feels right to me, even if it's not the fastest way to move ahead. I don't automatically believe that effort will always be rewarded, but I still keep learning and pushing forward because persistence matters to me. Self-respect matters more than quick success.

I listen to advice from others, but I don't act just because someone tells me to. I move when something feels useful, meaningful, and aligned with who I am. I need to feel convinced, not pressured.

I'm willing to give my time to volunteering or community activities without expecting something in return. At the same time, if I feel that participation won't lead to real change or impact, I step back.

I'm open to trying new things, but I won't compromise my principles just to fit in or be accepted. Staying true to myself is more important than following the crowd.



### Behavioral Profile

Value-driven youth tend to make decisions based on what they believe is right, rather than what brings the fastest reward. In **how they make decisions**, they rely on personal values, ethics, and principles to judge options, especially when systems feel unreliable or unfair. This shapes **what gives them confidence** and what creates uncertainty: they feel more confident when their actions align with their values, and more uncertain when opportunities require compromise or feel misaligned with those values. Their behavior reflects consistency rather than optimization, even when effort does not immediately lead to tangible outcomes.

In their daily lives, **who influences them** plays a supporting but not decisive role. Family members, teachers, or community figures are often consulted, but they are not the final decision-makers. This same orientation shapes **how they deal with stress and challenges**. When faced with setbacks, value-driven youth tend to rely on patience, self-discipline, faith, or a sense of personal responsibility rather than seeking external validation or withdrawing. Challenges are accepted as part of life, and coping is focused on endurance and staying true to one's principles rather than avoiding difficulty.

When it comes to **how they think about the future**, value-driven youth show commitment rather than certainty. They recognize that opportunities may be limited and that effort does not always lead to immediate results, yet they continue to invest time and energy because they see persistence as the right thing to do. This affects **what work pathways feel right** for them, with greater preference for roles that allow them to contribute, help others, or act ethically, even if these roles are less secure or slower to pay off. **How they engage with opportunities** depends strongly on perceived purpose. They are more likely to engage when initiatives feel meaningful, sincere, and aligned with their values, and less likely to participate in programs that rely mainly on incentives or feel disconnected from real impact.

**Overall**, this behavioral profile reflects youth who are guided by values rather than short-term gains, continuing to act, contribute, and persevere not because they anticipate a reward, but because acting with integrity and purpose matters to them.

### Domain-Level Analysis

#### Assets

For value-driven youth, education and skills function primarily as sources of meaning and personal

development, rather than as purely economic tools. Item level data does not show this segment as uniquely prioritizing education or skills for labor market advantage compared to other segments; however, qualitative evidence consistently highlights that learning is valued when it aligns with personal ethics, contribution, and self-respect. In interviews and workshops, youth described education as important and necessary even when outcomes were uncertain and emphasized effort and learning as standalone motivators. For example, a participant from this segment explained *“You gain experience from the company. It’s fine. If the opportunity is good and I can benefit from it someday, or it could lead to a better role or change my perspective, I don’t mind... So even if it’s free, it doesn’t matter to you because in the end you gain experience.”* This suggests that education is approached less as a guaranteed pathway to mobility and more as a moral investment, something that builds character, understanding, and the ability to contribute meaningfully, regardless of immediate payoff.

Skills development follows a similar pattern. Value-driven youth show openness to workshops, courses, and training, particularly when learning environments feel respectful, trustworthy, and aligned with their principles. While the quantitative data does not distinguish this segment as more digitally skilled or digitally constrained than others, qualitative insights indicate that digital tools are treated pragmatically, or as means to access information, learning, or opportunities, rather than as ends in themselves. For example, a participant from this segment explained *“The internet helps you know what exists, but in the end you need to work on yourself.”*

Social and emotional resilience emerges as a key asset for this group of youth as well. Rather than relying heavily on external support structures, they draw on internal resources such as patience, faith, endurance, and personal responsibility to cope with stress and setbacks. Value-driven youth acknowledge challenges openly but frame them as something to persist through rather than withdraw from, as one participant shared *“Even if the result is not guaranteed, you still have to try... there are obstacles, but you continue step by step.”* This reflects a pattern where instead of disengaging when faced with difficulty, these youth manage pressure by returning to their values and sense of purpose, which helps them stay engaged and continue taking action.

## Agency

Value-driven youth demonstrate agency through direction and commitment rather than confidence that outcomes are guaranteed. While they are less overtly optimistic than the average study population, they are far from aimless. 81.7% report having clear career goals, and 77.4% believe these goals are realistic, figures that sit below the most confident segments but well above less-engaged groups. This pattern points to an agency grounded in responsibility rather than ambition alone. Value-driven youth do not assume that effort will automatically be rewarded, yet they continue to plan and invest energy because persistence is seen as the right course of action. As one participant reflected, acting without expectation of return is a moral stance rather than a strategic one, *“Since 2019 I’ve been volunteering, and we have never taken anything in return. We never went to a place to give a workshop or training or, for example, an iftar for orphans or whatever it was, and took something in return, or expected anything, or waited for someone to say, ‘they went and did this.’ No, we never waited for that. It’s something that comes from the heart.”*

This form of agency is supported by strong internal self-efficacy, even when trust in systems is limited. Value-driven youth report high confidence in their ability to act where 90.4% feel confident making their own decisions, 85.1% feel able to communicate with others, 75.5% feel able to adapt when circumstances change, and 71.2% feel capable of resolving challenges. In addition, 86.5% report knowing when and where to seek support. These show that lower engagement with formal opportunities is not driven by uncertainty, indecision, or lack of skill. Instead, agency is exercised through judgement and carefully choosing when to engage and when to hold back. A participant in this segment explained this logic *“I listen, no problem, but I don’t act on it unless I find it useful or appropriate.”*

## Contribution

Value-driven youth show a clear desire to contribute, but their engagement is selective and conditional rather than highly visible or routine. The survey findings show they are slightly more likely than the overall youth population to engage in informal and self-directed forms of contribution, such as talking about issues with people they know (54.3%) and trying to learn more or find solutions on their own (55.3%). They also show higher engagement in sharing or commenting on issues on social media (32.2%). This could reflect that contribution for this segment is understood primarily as personal

responsibility, reflection, and expression, rather than as public leadership or formal civic participation. For example, one participant shared *“Honestly, for me, there isn’t a workshop, course, or place I attend where I don’t always go, even if it doesn’t benefit me, I just attend. In the end, it won’t harm me. Surely, even if I gain just one piece of information from it, it’s a big achievement for me.”*

At the same time, participation drops when contribution feels unlikely to matter. Although 1 in 3 of value-driven youth report participating in community meetings or initiatives (31.8%), a substantial proportion actively avoid engagement because they feel they cannot make a difference (43.3%). This tension reflects a strong internal motivation paired with skepticism toward existing

platforms. This logic is reinforced by perceptions of exclusion where 40.9% of value-driven youth say they often feel excluded from community decision-making, compared to 31.7% of youth overall. One participant from this segment explained *“I listen to what people say, I listen to organizations, no problem. But I don’t just act because someone is talking. If I feel this thing has no value, or it’s just words, or it won’t change anything, I stop. I don’t like to waste my energy. I only continue if I feel it is useful and appropriate for me.”* This pattern shows how withdrawal becomes a deliberate choice, not disengagement youth step back when participation feels symbolic, unresponsive, or misaligned with their values.

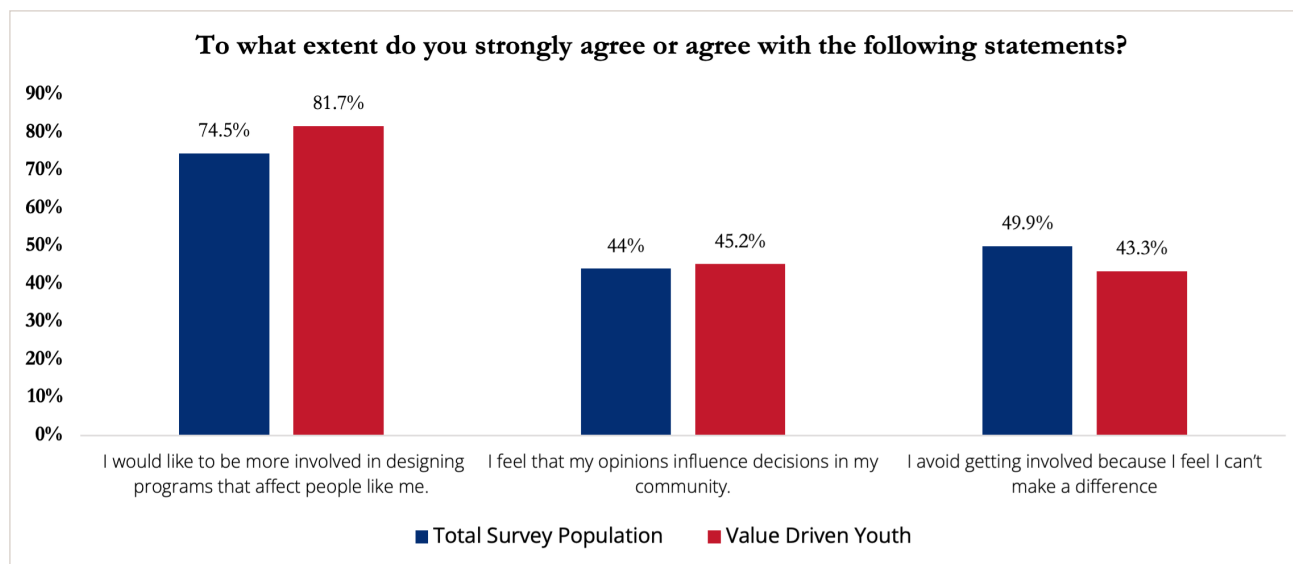


Figure 46: Desire to be involved in youth program design, perceived influence on community decision-making, and avoidance of community engagement for Segment 5 (n=1120, Value-Driven Youth=208)

Despite this restraint, the desire for meaningful inclusion is high. Almost 8 in 10 of value-driven youth say they would like to be more involved in designing programs that affect people like them (81.7%), however, less than half feel that their opinions currently influence decisions in their community (45.2%). These patterns show a clear contribution gap where value-driven youth want to engage and shape outcomes, but only when platforms feel fair, credible, and genuinely open to influence. Their contribution style is therefore quiet, principled, and impact-driven, prioritizing integrity and relevance over visibility or frequency of participation.

## Enabling Environment

For value-driven youth, the enabling environment is experienced as structurally constrained yet socially navigable. On the one hand, macro-level

conditions are widely perceived as limiting. Large majorities of youth in this segment report that rising living costs (86.1%), economic uncertainty (72.1%), and regional instability (63.0%) affect their lives a lot or completely, and around 6 in 10 report that limited trust in public institutions significantly affects them (62.5%). These pressures create a constant sense of uncertainty. As a result, youth tend to be careful about which opportunities they engage with, choosing only those that feel worthwhile, safe, and aligned with their priorities rather than participating broadly or automatically.

### To what extent do the following factors make it harder for you to plan for your future?

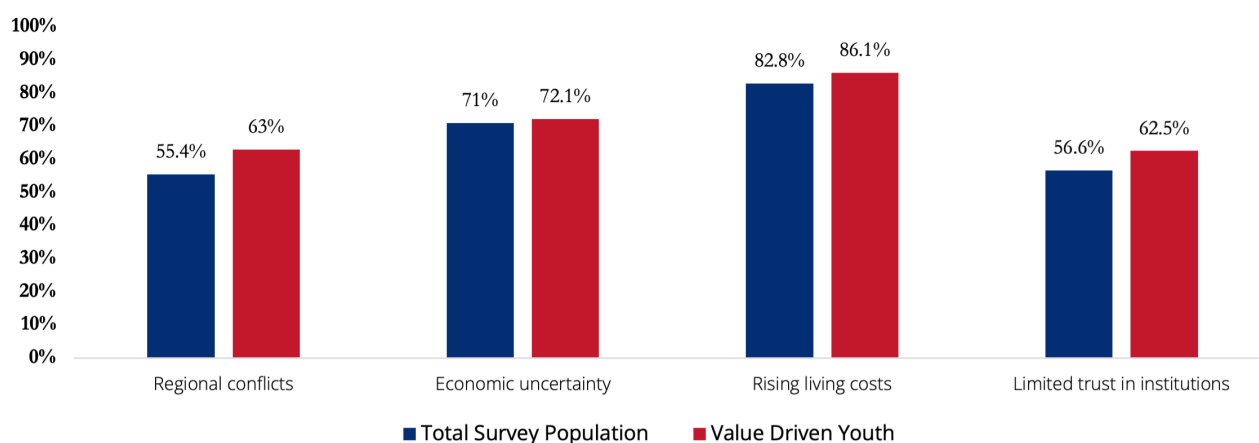


Figure 47: Factors increasing difficulty of planning the future for Segment 5 (n=1120, Value-Driven Youth=208)

Social norms further shape this environment in subtle but powerful ways. A strong majority consider how their choices reflect on their family's reputation (85.6%), and over half feel tension between personal goals and others' expectations (52.4%). Yet this does not translate into conformity alone. Nearly 9 in 10 youth feel encouraged to try new things even if they are uncommon in their community (78.8%), and 6 in 10 agree that people in their community tend to follow similar life paths (62.0%), suggesting awareness of norms without full internalization. One participant from this segment shared from their lived experience *"Once we got into it [work], it*

*turned out to be very good. It changed our perspective. At first, we were afraid, but then we said, 'It's okay, we'll try it.' We had never done it before, and we didn't know anything about it, but we tried anyway. Even if we didn't succeed or master it 100%, we tried. Life is all about experiences, you have to try things."*

Behaviorally, this points to an enabling environment that allows for quiet deviation where youth pursue aligned opportunities when risk feels manageable and legitimacy is preserved, but withdraw when participation threatens credibility, dignity, or purpose.

#### Value-Driven Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Anchor engagement in values and purpose.** Value-driven youth engage when programs clearly align with their personal ethics, beliefs, and sense of what is *"right,"* rather than external expectations or visibility. Programming should articulate why participation matters beyond incentives or visibility.
- **Design for selective participation, not constant involvement.** This segment does not equate contribution with continuous or public participation. Programs should allow youth to move in and out of engagement without framing withdrawal as disengagement or failure.
- **Prioritize credibility, trust, and psychological safety over scale.** Value-driven youth are more likely to participate when programs are run by organizations they trust, feel safe engaging with, and perceive as credible. Transparent objectives, respectful facilitation, and consistency in delivery matter more than scale, visibility, or peer participation.
- **Respect quiet forms of contribution and ethical leadership.** Many value-driven youth express contribution through self-development, reflection, learning, and principled action rather than public leadership roles. Programs should validate these quieter rather than privileging highly visible leadership roles.

## Segment 6: Systems-Guided Youth

- Live in **constant contradiction between desperation for long-term stability** for themselves and their families, and **a feeling of inability to plan beyond the immediate-term** when life around them seems to change constantly.

### Fictional Case Study

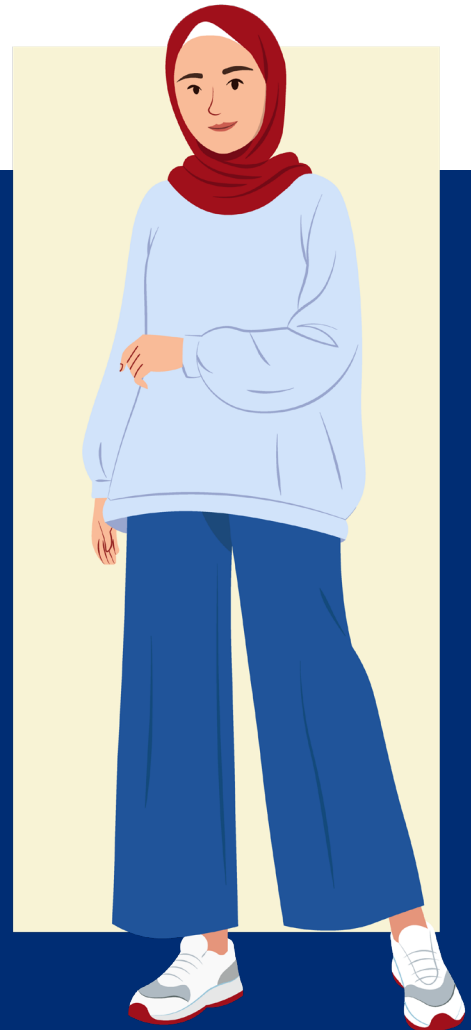
My name is Hala.

I move forward carefully. I'm always thinking about my need for long-term security, but at the same time I feel like the world around me is constantly changing. Technology shifts, the economy shifts, and even regional conditions feel unpredictable. That makes me cautious.

Because of that, I'm drawn to options that feel recognized and stable, like public sector work or jobs that seem less affected by rapid change. I'm looking for something that can last, even though I also feel that I can't plan too far ahead.

Since life feels uncertain, I tend to focus on goals that feel realistic within the networks and systems available to me right now. I know I'll probably have to adjust when conditions change again, so I try to stay flexible while still protecting my stability.

Work matters to me because I hope it can give me the security and peace of mind that I don't feel naturally in myself. It's also about responsibility. My family has always guided and supported me, and I want to choose a path that allows me to support them in return.



### Behavioral Profile

Systems-guided youth make decisions through careful judgement rather than urgency. In **how they make decisions**, they weigh options against what feels legitimate, stable, and socially recognized, often preferring to wait rather than act prematurely.

**What shapes their confidence** is influenced by pathways that are clear, protected, and endorsed by institutions or family. They are not driven by impulsive ambition, but by a belief that careful choices and moral steadiness are necessary to navigate uncertain systems without losing control or credibility.

**Who influences them** is central to how they move through life. Family, especially parents, provides emotional grounding, legitimacy, and guidance, even when youth ultimately carry the responsibility of decision-making themselves. Friends play a supportive role, particularly when family boundaries are firm, but they rarely override family judgement. This relational orientation shapes **how they deal**

**with stress** and challenges. Rather than seeking external validation or withdrawing, systems-guided youth rely on patience, willpower, faith, and perseverance. Coping is framed as endurance: setbacks, loss, or disrupted plans are absorbed through determination and emotional support from close relationships, rather than through avoidance or reactive behavior.

In **how they think about the future**, systems-guided youth plan cautiously and incrementally. They set near-term goals and adjust as conditions change, recognizing that financial constraints, family responsibilities, or regional instability may limit what is possible at any given moment. This shapes **what work pathways feel right for them**, with a strong preference for public-sector or similarly stable roles that offer job security, social insurance, and long-term protection, even when these roles are not perfectly aligned with passion or specialization. **How they engage with opportunities** is therefore highly conditional. They are more likely to participate when initiatives feel trustworthy, locally accessible,

clearly structured, and tied to real outcomes such as certification or employment. When opportunities feel symbolic, misleading, or risky, they disengage, not due to lack of motivation, but as a rational strategy to protect their future and their standing within the systems that surround them.

**Overall,** this behavioral profile reflects youth who navigate uncertainty not by withdrawing or rushing forward, but by moving deliberately within trusted systems, prioritizing stability, legitimacy, and endurance as the most reliable way to protect their future and fulfil their responsibilities.

## Domain-Level Analysis

### Assets

For systems-guided youth, education, skills, and work are valued when they reduce uncertainty and provide long-term security. This is reflected in very high emphasis on job stability (88.9%), social security or health insurance (94.0%), safe and supportive work environments (95.7%), and employment that is socially respected and approved by family (96.6%). Public sector work stands out as the clearest example of this logic where 84.6% prefer government jobs for their stability, and 81.2% believe these jobs carry greater respect in their communities. Qualitative accounts confirm that this preference is driven by practical concerns such as insurance, protection during crises, and future security for children, rather than status or passion. As a result, systems-guided youth are more likely to accept work that feels secure and legitimate, even if it does not fully match their interests or specialization.

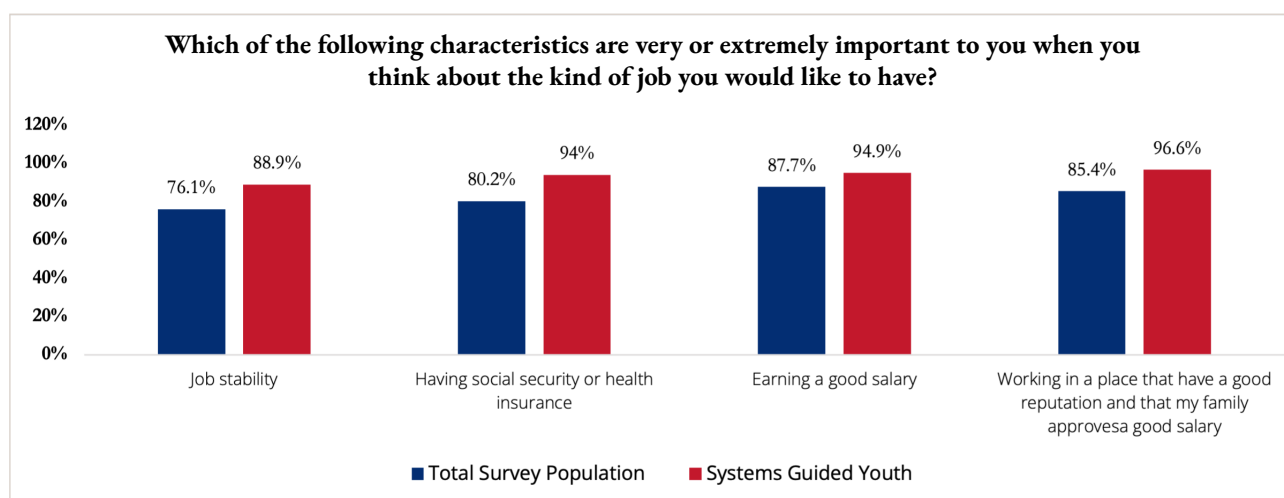


Figure 48: Important characteristics when choosing job type for Segment 6 (n=1120, Systems-Guided Youth=117)

Systems-guided youth report high levels of self-confidence (91.5%), planning ability (86.3%), leadership (73.5%), and financial management skills (80.3%). However, these capabilities are used cautiously and incrementally, not to pursue rapid change. Youth described success as the ability to endure, plan carefully, and make decisions based on what is currently possible rather than what is ideal. For example, a participant from this segment said *“When I started to get used to the major and really began studying it... I said, ‘Why not continue in this major and see what happens... even if I fail, I will try again and keep going.’* This shows how for this group of youth, educational pathways often involve compromise, choosing a less-preferred specialization due to cost, admission rules, or family decisions, with the intention to adjust later if conditions allow. This helps explain why aspirations are stronger for completing Tawjihi (54.1%) than for university degrees (48.9%), as progression is pursued when it feels achievable and protective, not

when it increases exposure to risk.

Systems-guided youth rely heavily on faith, with 93.2% reporting prayer or connection with God as a key coping mechanism, alongside moderate use of staying busy or engaging in physical or creative activities. Qualitative accounts explain that stress and setbacks such as COVID-19 disruptions, loss of loved ones, or interrupted education are managed through patience, perseverance, and emotional support from family, especially mothers. A participant from this segment explained *“there’s still something inside you saying, ‘If I do it, I’ll lose,’ or ‘Something bad will happen,’ and so on. When you actually go and start, at first you feel weak. Then, as you go deeper into the task and practice it more than once, you start to feel improvement.”* Rather than trying to overcome challenges quickly or reframe them as opportunities, these youth focus on maintaining stability and continuing forward without losing control or credibility.

Taken together, their assets function less as tools for upward mobility and more as buffers that help them withstand uncertainty, make careful choices, and remain anchored within systems they believe will eventually provide security.

## Agency

Systems-guided youth show strong internal agency, but they exercise it selectively. Findings from the survey indicate very high confidence in their ability to make decisions (94%), adapt to change (77.8%), communicate with others (93.2%), and resolve conflicts (89.7%). They also report clear and realistic career goals (87.2%), with strong family support for

their chosen paths (92.3%). This reflects youth who believe in their own judgement and capacity to act. A participant in this segment explained *“Honestly, when I want something and I’ve set my mind on it, even if people tell me, it’s wrong, I won’t believe them unless I try it myself.”* However, this confidence does not translate into constant action. Instead, agency is expressed through careful timing and restraint. This shows how systems-guided youth are more likely to pause, wait, or reassess when pathways feel unclear, informal, or poorly protected, using their agency to maintain control and avoid decisions that could close future options.

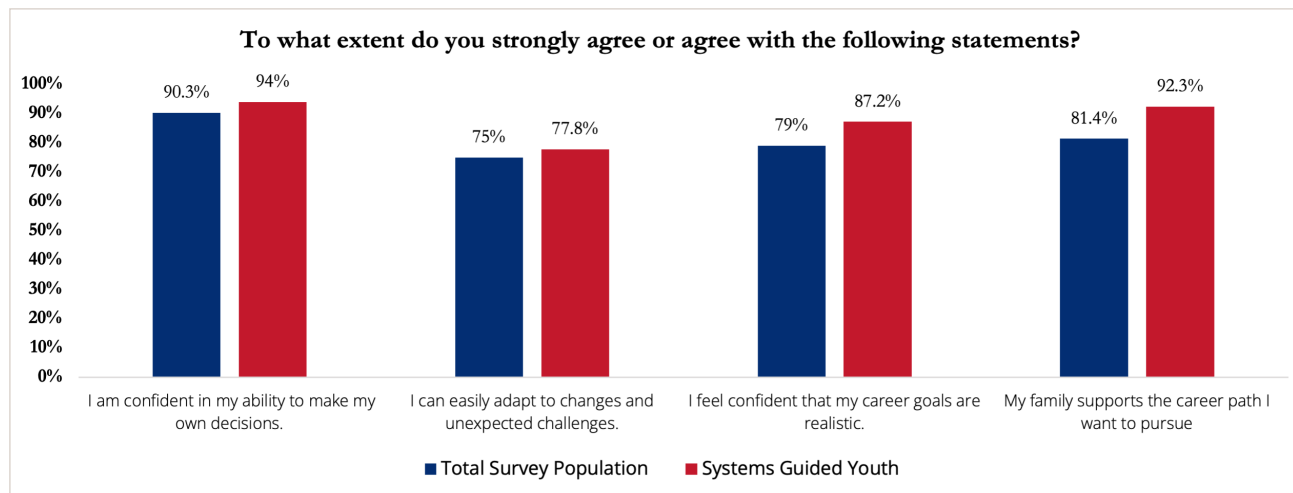


Figure 49: Confidence in ability to make decisions, adaptability to change, confidence in career goals being realistic, and family support of chosen career path for Segment 6 (n=1120, Systems-Guided Youth=117)

## Contribution

For systems-guided youth, contribution is collective, practical, and grounded in real spaces, rather than expressive or symbolic. Quantitative data shows that they are significantly more likely than other youth to participate in community meetings, groups, or initiatives (70.9% compared to 52.3% overall). At the same time, their engagement is less visible online, with only moderate levels of discussion within close networks and limited use of social media to express opinions or mobilize around issues that they think are important in their communities. This pattern indicates that contribution for this group is not about being seen, broadcasting views, or signaling identity, but about being physically present and involved where action feels legitimate and shared.

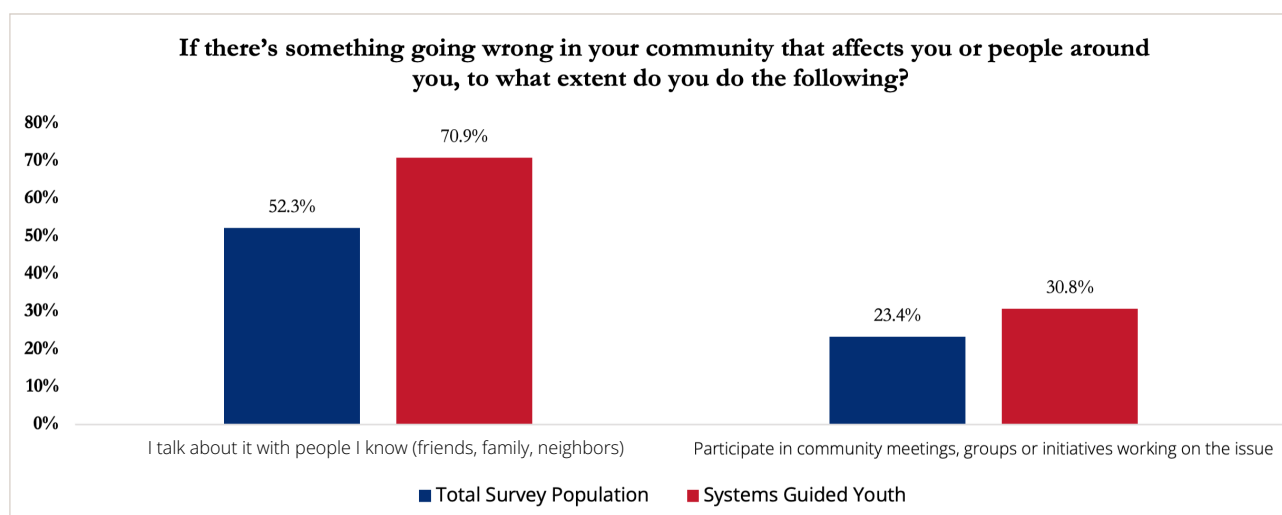


Figure 50: Coping responses to problems or events in community for Segment 6 (n=1120, Systems-Guided Youth=117)

In workshops and discussions, youth in this group highlighted how leadership manifests in collective terms, such as teamwork, giving, patience, and working for the benefit of others rather than personal recognition. Youth emphasized the importance of dialogue, cooperation, and sustained group effort, calling for dialogue workshops and greater support for volunteer teams rather than individual-focused initiatives. This clarifies why systems-guided youth prioritize face-to-face participation over digital or performative engagement, as they trust contribution that is embedded in relationships, shared responsibility, and tangible action. As a result, they are more likely to invest time and energy in community-based efforts where roles are clear and impact is collective, and less likely to engage in forms of participation that feel symbolic, fragmented, or disconnected from real outcomes.

## Enabling Environment

is defined by social norms, collective expectations, and the availability of recognized pathways that signal what is a 'safe', legitimate, and realistically achievable. Quantitative data shows that many perceive their communities as following similar life paths and placing importance on being seen as doing the 'right' thing, even while fewer feel actively encouraged to try new or unconventional options. This creates an environment where deviation carries social risk, and where decisions are shaped less by personal preference than by what is visible, established, and known to work within the system. Qualitative discussions reinforce this pattern where youth repeatedly described how family norms, community reputation, and social judgement shape which choices feel legitimate. For example, a participant from this segment shared *"I went to my mother and father and asked them whether I should change my major or stay in it... They told me, 'You're*

*still at the beginning, so be patient for a bit... but if I wanted to change my academic plan or path, I would consult someone who studied that major and has a lot of experience practicing in it."* While youth may hold personal aspirations, these are formed and evaluated through what is socially recognized, institutionally available, and likely to be accepted.

At the same time, broader economic and structural conditions amplify this narrowing effect. Systems-guided youth are highly aware of structural barriers, including rising living costs (92.3%), low or irregular income (83.8%), and the lack of jobs with social security or benefits (79.5%). Qualitative insights show that uncertainty grows when youth anticipate that plans may not be feasible within their local context, whether due to financial constraints, lack of nearby opportunities, or life events such as marriage that may reorient priorities. For example, a participant from this segment explained *"Security means a safe job, one that has stability and consistency. For example, health insurance, housing benefits, and so on"*. In this environment, networks function more as sources of validation and constraint than as channels for opportunity discovery. Youth tend to rely on family and close community ties to interpret what is realistic, while distancing themselves from informal networks, mentors, or platforms that feel speculative or unreliable.

## Systems-Guided Youth: Implications for Programming

- **Design for security and predictable outcomes.** Systems-guided youth engage when programs reduce risk and clearly signal protection, continuity, and legitimacy. Programming should prioritize recognized certification, clear progression pathways as signals of protection and legitimacy.
- **Work with existing social norms and trusted networks, not against them.** Decisions for this segment are filtered through family expectations, community approval, and what is socially understood as a safe path. Programs should intentionally involve parents, respected community figures, or institutionally trusted actors, to legitimize participation and reduce social risk.
- **Prioritize accessibility and locality over novelty or scale.** Systems-guided youth are willing to participate, but are constrained by distance, cost, and feasibility. Programs delivered locally, at manageable times and costs, are far more likely to sustain engagement. than high-profile initiatives concentrated in urban centers or requiring significant personal sacrifice.
- **Support collective contribution without forcing visibility.** Systems-guided youth contribute through embedded, face-to-face action and shared responsibility rather than public or performative roles. Programs should create spaces for teamwork and peer-to-peer support without requiring public visibility or individual leadership.

## Comparative Analysis of Youth Segments

The segmentation analysis shows that youth in Jordan are divided by how they navigate decisions, risk, and opportunity within the same structural conditions. Across segments, youth demonstrate agency, adaptability, and a strong desire to move forward. What differs is how that agency is expressed, or the signals youth rely on to decide, the sources of confidence they draw from, the level of uncertainty they are willing to tolerate, and the conditions under which engagement feels legitimate and worthwhile.

These differences reflect strategic responses to lived constraints rather than deficits, revealing how youth actively manage exposure, effort, and social risk while pursuing education, work, and contribution.

The table below compares these behavioral patterns across segments, highlighting how shared aspirations translate into different decision-making logics, sources of confidence, and engagement conditions:

| Behavioral Anchor                 | Stability-Seeking                                                                           | Community-Guided                                                                                             | Clarity-Seeking                                                                                                                   | Self-Driven                                                                                                                                               | Values-Driven                                                                  | Systems-Guided                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>How do they make decisions</b> | Choose familiar options to avoid failure, exposure, and social judgement (avoid risk)       | Follow what they have seen work in their immediate environment (social proof)                                | Require clear steps, defined outcomes, and progression toward long-term goals (long term trade-offs)                              | Weigh trade-offs and accept uncertainty as part of progress (navigate ongoing risks)                                                                      | Guided by personal values and principles (purpose driven)                      | Choose pathways that are recognized, stable, and socially or institutionally validated (legitimize risk)     |
| <b>What gives them confidence</b> | Confidence increases when environments feel safe, familiar, and low-risk (emotional safety) | Confidence increases when outcomes are visible, verifiable, and guaranteed in the short-term (visible proof) | Confidence increases when understanding what success looks like long-term, but also at every milestone towards it (clear pathway) | Confidence increases from evidence-based reasoning and big picture understanding of risks and benefits associated to every choice (independent judgement) | Confidence increases when actions align with personal values (value alignment) | Confidence increases when pathways are institutionally endorsed and socially validated (external validation) |

|                                           |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Family and peers' influence</b>        | Influence provides reassurance, reducing fear and enabling action in safe conditions (emotional activation) | Seeing peers succeed legitimizes decisions (social validation)                                                                         | Credible authority figures strongly influences choices (authority guidance)                                                          | Influence is used selectively to inform, not determine, decisions (selective input)                              | Influence is used selectively to inform, not determine, decisions (value filter)                    | Influence legitimizes decisions through confirmation / awareness of family expectations and social norms (normative validation) |
| <b>How they deal with stress</b>          | Stress is managed through withdrawal, caution, and small trusted support circles (avoidance)                | Stress is managed through discussion and collective sense-making (shared processing)                                                   | Stress is managed through increased effort (persistence)                                                                             | Stress is managed through adaptive coping (endurance through information-seeking)                                | Stress is managed through patience, faith, and commitment to principles (endurance through meaning) | Stress is managed through collective sense-making of options that might provide stability (endurance through forward-thinking)  |
| <b>How they think about the future</b>    | The future is approached cautiously, avoiding choices that could create instability (avoids risk)           | The future is planned pragmatically, focusing on near-term security. (adapt within risk)                                               | Approach the future as a planned sequence of steps toward long-term goals (structured progression)                                   | The future is approached with optimism, balancing ambition with constraints (adaptive ambition)                  | The future is shaped by commitment to purpose (purpose-led)                                         | The future is planned pragmatically, focusing on near-term security (adapt within risk)                                         |
| <b>What work pathways feel right</b>      | Stable, protected pathways with long-term security are favored (e.g., public sector)                        | Flexible, skill-based, and merit-oriented pathways (e.g., private sector or self-employment)                                           | Stable, protected pathways with long-term security are favored (e.g., public sector)                                                 | Flexible, diverse pathways that allow exploration and growth (e.g., entrepreneurship, freelance, private sector) | Contribution and purpose-oriented pathways (e.g., social enterprises, teaching, development sector) | Stable, protected pathways with long-term security are favored (e.g., public sector)                                            |
| <b>How they engage with opportunities</b> | Engage when opportunities feel safe, predictable, and low-exposure (safety)                                 | Engagement occurs when opportunities feel immediately useful and clearly linked to their realities (labor market, economic conditions) | Engagement is high when aligned with long-term goals, or at least with the identified steps towards those end goals (goal alignment) | Engagement is strongest when learning and progression are tangible (learning-driven)                             | Engagement occurs when opportunities feel impactful (meaning-driven)                                | Engage when opportunities are trusted, structured, and clearly linked to real outcomes (credibility)                            |
| <b>Segment summary</b>                    | Stability-seeking youth avoid risk                                                                          | Community-guided youth follow what works, or has worked, for others                                                                    | Clarity-seeking require clear, step-by-step pathways before acting                                                                   | Self-driven youth navigate uncertainty through independent judgement                                             | Values-driven youth prioritize purpose over speed of professional/ career growth or personal reward | Systems-guided youth seek legitimacy and stability in the face of perceived external unpredictability                           |

## Key Behavioral Differences Across Segments

The comparative analysis highlights that differences between youth segments are driven by how youth assess risk, interpret legitimacy, and determine whether effort will lead to meaningful outcomes.

Across all segments, youth express a desire to move forward, but they differ in the conditions under which they feel able to act. These differences shape how youth respond to opportunities, how they evaluate pathways, and how they manage uncertainty.

One of the most salient distinctions across segments relates to **risk tolerance and predictability**.

Stability-seeking and systems-guided youth prioritize protection, legitimacy, and social recognition, and are more likely to disengage when pathways feel uncertain or expose them to reputational or economic risk. In contrast, self-driven and values-driven youth are more willing to tolerate uncertainty

when they believe effort will lead to growth, learning, or purpose. This suggests that disengagement often reflects cautious judgement rather than lack of ambition, and that program design must account for varying thresholds of acceptable risk.

## Recommendations and Engagement Entry Points

The matrix below translates the behavioral differences into engagement approaches relevant to YGA- programming. It focuses on how youth across segments engage with education-to-work pathways,

labor market information, skills development, and economic participation initiatives, and highlights the types of YGA entry points that are most likely to resonate with each group.

| Youth Segment            | Aim (What YGA should enable)                                                                                                                                                                                             | Why (Behavioral Trigger)                                                                                    | Entry Point (Programmatic)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Delivery (How to operationalize)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Stability-Seeking</b> | Increase uptake into structured training pathways by reducing perceived personal, financial, and social risk, and gradually building confidence to engage in structured pathways                                         | Action is constrained by fear of failure, social exposure, and instability                                  | <b>Soft skills development</b><br><br>(confidence, stress management, readiness)                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering through existing public or semi-public infrastructure. (e.g., MoY centers, or municipal spaces).</li> <li>Reducing logistical barriers (provide transport stipends, local delivery points, and sessions outside peak work/family hours).</li> <li>Starting with low-visibility formats. Begin in small groups or closed sessions.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Community-Guided</b>  | Increase uptake into income-generating pathways (apprenticeships, digital freelancing, and entrepreneurship) by embedding opportunities within trusted social networks and ensuring visible, short-term economic returns | Decisions depend on what has worked for others; trust is built through lived experience and peer validation | <b>Apprenticeships with peer-to-peer learning</b><br><br>(hands-on knowledge and skill-building)                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading with applied learning tied to real outcomes. Design apprenticeships or job-matching services that visibly connect skills to local jobs, income, or self-employment.</li> <li>Activating through trusted community relationships.</li> </ul>                                                                                                     |
| <b>Clarity-Seeking</b>   | Increase uptake and sustained engagement in career planning and training pathways by providing clearly sequenced pathways linked to recognized outcomes and employment opportunities                                     | Engagement depends on predictability and legitimacy of pathways                                             | <b>Career planning and pathway navigation support</b><br><br>(support youth identifying their long-term goals and employment interests, and then crafting step-by-step plans of action towards them, including academic, vocational, and experience-gaining opportunities available to them) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use visual roadmaps (entry → skill development → certification/progression).</li> <li>Position volunteering, internships, or civic activities as skill-building and career-relevant experiences.</li> <li>Highlight certifications or formal recognition.</li> <li>Partner with accredited institutions</li> </ul>                                      |

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Self-Driven</b>    | Increase progression into diverse economic pathways (digital freelancing and entrepreneurship) by enabling informed decision-making through exposure, experimentation, and skill accumulation | Motivation is driven by autonomy, learning, and informed choice toward longer-term economic goals     | <b>Multi-path exposure to apprenticeships, internships, and volunteer opportunities</b><br><br>(helping youth identify their areas of interest through multiple short-term placements allowing them to experience different areas of work, role types, and team structures. Allows youth hands-on skill building, insights and feedback, while protecting autonomy to ultimately make decisions themselves) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Framing participation as strategic investment.</li> <li>• Present programs (training, volunteering or internships) as ways to strengthen judgement, professional identity, and long-term positioning.</li> <li>• Offer flexible, modular opportunities (integrate project-based learning, multiple internships, freelancing, and entrepreneurship to allow comparison and informed choice).</li> <li>• Pair participants with mentors, practitioners, or alumni who exchange knowledge and feedback without directing decisions.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Values-Driven</b>  | Increase sustained participation in employment and entrepreneurship pathways by aligning economic engagement with contribution, values, and meaningful impact                                 | Engagement depends on perceived meaning and alignment with values                                     | <b>Social entrepreneurship and volunteering pathways</b><br><br>(connecting youth with opportunities that align with their values, e.g., social entrepreneurship, teaching, volunteering)                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frame programs around clear social impact (why the program exists, who it serves, and what meaningful contribution looks like).</li> <li>• Recognize learning, self-development, principled decision-making, and behind-the-scenes work as legitimate pathways to contribution.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Systems-Guided</b> | Increase uptake into vocational training and formal employment by reinforcing institutional legitimacy, social acceptance, and perceived long-term security                                   | Decisions are shaped by institutional trust, family expectations, and the need for immediate outcomes | <b>Career counselling and accredited vocational training</b><br><br>(short-term career counselling of current opportunities and job market demands. Formally recognized vocational training)                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver through government or accredited institutions</li> <li>• Emphasize certification and immediate job security</li> <li>• Involve family/authority figures in outreach and validation to reinforce social acceptance</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

# Annex (1): Lines of Inquiry

This annex presents the full set of behavioral Lines of Inquiry (LOIs) that guided the design of the qualitative tools, the survey instrument, and the interpretation of findings. These LOIs translate the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework into concrete behavioral questions that examine how youth understand their options, form expectations, weigh risks, and navigate opportunities across different life domains.

The LOIs reflect the specific mechanisms the study sought to explore how youth perceive their own capabilities, how they exercise control and plan ahead, how they engage with and contribute to their communities, and how the systems and contexts around them shape what feels possible or worthwhile. These guiding questions formed the analytical backbone of the research process. They ensured coherence across methods, supported the development of relevant survey constructs, and provided a consistent lens through which qualitative and quantitative evidence could be interpreted.

## Assets

This domain examines the foundational resources that youth draw on when making decisions about education, work, and their futures. It covers four subdomains: (1) education, (2) skills development, (3) social and emotional resilience, and (4) digital literacy and access. Through a behavioral lens, assets are not simply “what youth have,” rather they are what youth believe they have, their perceived quality of education, confidence in their skills, access to information, and sense of preparedness. These perceptions shape how youth evaluate opportunities, respond to challenges, and decide where to invest their effort. The understanding of assets through the evidence in this report helps identify why certain pathways feel attainable or out of reach, and where structural or psychological constraints limit participation in education and economic life. The lines of inquiry that shaped the design of research instruments around assets are:

- How do youth perceive the relevance and quality of the education and training they receive in preparing them for the future they envision?
- Which skills do youth consider most important for success, and how do they access or build confidence in these skills?
- What enables or hinders youth in coping with emotional and academic challenges, and where do they turn for support?

## Agency

This domain explores the psychological and motivational processes that shape how youth set goals, make decisions, and navigate constraints in their daily lives. It covers three subdomains: (1) self-efficacy, (2) future aspirations, and (3) planning ahead and pathways to work. Through a behavioral lens, agency reflects not only a young person's ambitions, but their belief in their ability to act on those ambitions, their perception of control, and the mental models they use to interpret risk, opportunity, and failure. These cognitive and emotional processes shape how youth prioritize actions, persist through obstacles, and balance short-term needs with long-term goals. Understanding agency through the evidence in this report helps explain why some youth move proactively toward their aspirations while others disengage or defer decisions when faced with uncertainty. The lines of inquiry that shaped the design of research instruments around agency are:

- To what extent do youth feel they have control over decisions shaping their lives, and in what spaces do they feel heard or dismissed?
- What are youth's career and life aspirations, and what influences their optimism or disillusionment about achieving them?
- How do youth balance short-term needs with long-term planning, and what informs their decision-making processes?

## Contribution

This domain examines how youth participate in, connect to, and feel valued within their communities and wider social environments. It covers two subdomains: (1) youth engagement, and (2) economic contribution. Through a behavioral lens, contribution is not only about what youth do in their communities, but how participation reinforces identity, recognition, and collective efficacy, which are key drivers of motivation and inclusion. Experiences of meaningful engagement can strengthen agency, broaden networks, and create positive feedback loops that shape future aspirations, whereas exclusion undermines trust and reduces willingness to participate. Understanding contribution in this report reveals how community connectedness influences youth confidence, opportunity-seeking behavior, and economic engagement. The lines of inquiry that shaped the design of research instruments around contribution are:

- What motivates or discourages youth from engaging in their communities or contributing to social change?
- In what ways do youth experience inclusion or exclusion in decision-making spaces, and what would make participation more meaningful?

## Enabling Environment

This domain focuses on the external conditions that shape what youth can realistically do with their resources, aspirations, and skills. It covers three subdomains: (1) social norms and networks, (2) policies and programs, and (3) contextual factors such as economic shocks, regional instability, and technological change. Through a behavioral lens, the enabling environment is not a passive backdrop, but an active system of signals, including norms, incentives, constraints, and opportunities that shape youth perceptions of what is acceptable, feasible, or worthwhile. These external forces influence how youth interpret risk, assess fairness, and decide whether to pursue education, work, or engagement. Understanding the enabling environment through the evidence in this report highlights why youth with similar aspirations behave differently depending on the constraints or enablers around them, and where system-level interventions can shift behavior at scale. The lines of inquiry that shaped the design of research instruments around the enabling environment are:

- How do family, social norms, and informal networks shape the options available to youth, and how do these expectations differ across groups?
- What makes youth programs or services feel accessible, trustworthy, and designed for real impact, and what undermines that trust?
- How have crises and uncertainty (e.g. war, pandemic) affected youth planning, resilience, and belief in systems meant to support them?

## Annex (2): Sampling Frames

This annex provides the full sampling frames for the qualitative, quantitative, and segmentation components of the study. These tables document how participants were selected across regions, age groups, gender, disability status, and education status. They are included to ensure full methodological transparency and to complement the summary provided in the main methodology section. Each table below outlines the structure of the sample for a specific research component.

The table below presents the distribution of 96 youth engaged in the 12 focus group discussions at the exploratory phase. The sampling aimed to reflect diverse youth profiles across age, gender, education status, and region, ensuring that qualitative insights captured variation in lived experience and behavioral interpretation.

| FGD Sample                    | North    | Center   | South    | Total |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Age 15-18<br>IN EDUCATION     | 1 Male   | 1 Female | 1 Male   | 3     |
| Age 19-29<br>IN EDUCATION     | 1 Female | 1 Male   | 1 Female | 3     |
| Age 15-18<br>NOT IN EDUCATION | 1 Male   | 1 Female | 1 Male   | 3     |
| Age 19-29<br>NOT IN EDUCATION | 1 Female | 1 Male   | 1 Female | 3     |
| Total                         | 4        | 4        | 4        | 12    |

The following table shows the sampling frame for the six in-depth interviews with young persons with disabilities. These interviews were designed to explore differentiated behavioral experiences related to access, support systems, and opportunity structures.

| IDI Sample                    | North    | Center   | South    | Total |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------|
| Age 15-18<br>IN EDUCATION     | 1 Male   | -        | 1 Female | 2     |
| Age 19-29<br>IN EDUCATION     | -        | 1 Female | -        | 1     |
| Age 15-18<br>NOT IN EDUCATION | -        | -        | 1 Male   | 1     |
| Age 19-29<br>NOT IN EDUCATION | 1 Female | 1 Male   | -        | 2     |
| Total                         | 2        | 2        | 2        | 6     |

The survey sample was designed to be nationally representative at a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 3%. A multi-stage stratified random sampling approach was used: regions were first stratified into North, Center, and South; proportional allocation ensured representation across governorates; and random selection of households using a grid method, and individuals using the next birthday method preserved the probabilistic integrity of the sampling frame.

| Region | Age     |         | Gender |        | Totals |
|--------|---------|---------|--------|--------|--------|
|        | 15 – 18 | 19 – 29 | Male   | Female |        |
| North  | 107     | 263     | 184    | 186    | 370    |
| Center | 107     | 270     | 189    | 188    | 377    |
| South  | 106     | 267     | 187    | 186    | 373    |
| Totals | 320     | 800     | 560    | 560    | 1120   |

The following table presents the sample for the six behavioral segmentation workshops. Participants were selected based on their assigned survey segment to enable deeper exploration and validation of each behavioral profile.

| Segment Workshops Sample | North             | Center                  | South             |
|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Youth Segment 1          | -                 | Mixed Gender<br>19 – 35 | -                 |
| Youth Segment 2          | -                 | -                       | Male<br>19 - 35   |
| Youth Segment 3          | Male<br>19 – 35   | -                       | -                 |
| Youth Segment 4          | -                 | Mixed Gender<br>19 – 24 | -                 |
| Youth Segment 5          | Female<br>19 – 35 | -                       | -                 |
| Youth Segment 6          | -                 | -                       | Female<br>19 – 35 |
| Total                    | 2                 | 2                       | 2                 |

The following table presents the sample for six in-depth interviews conducted with youth who closely represented specific behavioral segment profiles. These interviews were designed to explore the decision-making processes that shape how youth interpret opportunities, weigh risks, and respond to constraints within their everyday environments.

| Segment Interviews Sample | North    | Center | South |
|---------------------------|----------|--------|-------|
| Youth Segment 1           | 1 Male   |        |       |
| Youth Segment 2           | 1 Female |        |       |
| Youth Segment 3           | 1 Female |        |       |
| Youth Segment 4           | 1 Female |        |       |
| Youth Segment 5           | 1 Male   |        |       |
| Youth Segment 6           | 1 Male   |        |       |
| Total                     | 2        | 2      | 2     |

# Endnotes

- i. Department of Statistics. (2023). Jordan Statistical Yearbook 2023. Amman, Jordan: Department of Statistics. Retrieved from <https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/databank/yearbook/YearBook2023.pdf>
- ii. International Labor Organization. (2023). School-to-work transition of young women and men in Jordan. International Labor Office. [https://www.ilo.org/beirut/information-resources/publications/WCMS\\_874888/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/information-resources/publications/WCMS_874888/lang--en/index.htm)
- iii. UNICEF Jordan. (2022). Youth transitions to adulthood in Jordan: Understanding pathways and barriers. <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/8361/file/Youth-Transitions-to-Adulthood-in-Jordan.pdf>

