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A 17-year-old student in Jordan © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

Skills-building programming for refugee and host community adolescents in Jordan: a qualitative assessment of the integrated Makani curriculum

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Introduction

The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees made ambitious commitments to provide education, health and protection services for children, adolescents and youth from refugee communities, and underscored the importance of investing in opportunities to empower and engage with young people from refugee and host communities. As such, child- and adolescent-friendly spaces are increasingly becoming mainstreamed into humanitarian assistance in conflict-affected contexts to support the development, protection and broader well-being of young people, and to provide a focal point for engaging with caregivers and the community (Hermosilla et al., 2019). UNICEF Jordan's Makani ('My Space') programme for children and adolescents from host and refugee communities, which was launched at the height of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015, is a longstanding example of such programming, offering integrated education, protection and skills-building opportunities across the Kingdom of Jordan (Banati et al., 2024a).

The Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) longitudinal research study has been evaluating the Makani programme through multiple rounds of mixed-methods research since 2016 and has identified a range of positive effects on young people's voice and agency (Banati et al., 2021; Banati et al., 2024b), psychosocial well-being (Banati et al., 2024b; Jones et al., 2024a; Presler-Marshall et al., 2024b), and education and learning (Presler-Marshall et al., 2024a). However, programming has had a more limited effect on shifting the gender norms that hinder the realisation of adolescent girls' and boys' full capabilities (Presler-Marshall et al., 2023a; 2023b).

Box 1: Makani skills-building curriculum: approach and content

Skills building programming has been part of Makani's integrated programming approach from the outset. However, the updated skills-building curriculum introduced in 2023 comprises 24 sessions over a 3-month period and combines 21st-century skills (including computer and online literacy, communication and conflict resolution, financial literacy, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership, through community (mainly online) volunteer activities) with discussions and activities around changing gender norms. Following a training of trainers' session, skills-building facilitators are provided with a structured curriculum manual that they are expected to adapt depending on the age, composition and competencies (e.g. education levels) of the group with whom they are working.

The curriculum builds on three levels and participants are placed in the appropriate level based on a pre-assessment at the beginning of each skills buidling cycle. In the case of digital literacy classes, Makani used to offer financial support to cover the fee for ICDL test for certification, however, this was halted due to continuous reduction in funding.

To more proactively catalyse the transformation of discriminatory gender norms, and following a national consultation process with a broad cross-section of stakeholders (UNICEF, 2023), UNICEF Jordan and its partners launched an updated skills-building curriculum with an emphasis on strengthening awareness about gender roles, attitudes and norms and their role in perpetuating gender inequalities in adolescence and beyond (see Box 1 for details). Drawing on qualitative research with adolescents, caregivers, Makani facilitators and community influencers, this brief synthesises GAGE findings on the strengths and weaknesses of the new skills-building programme, and provides evidence-informed recommendations on how to further strengthen the gender-responsive aspects of Makani programming.

Methods and ethics

This study involved a total of 117 interviews with adolescents, 34 focus group discussions with parents (involving a total of 138 parents), as well as key informant interviews with 21 Makani facilitators and 35 community stakeholders (for more details, see the tables in the annexe). The research, following the implementation of the updated curriculum in September 2023, was carried out in December 2023 and January 2024 in 8 localities, spread across Amman and Irbid host communities, informal tented settlements, Azraq, Jerash and Zaatari refugee camps. Adolescents and caregivers were selected from current Makani programme lists within a sub-set of Makani centres that were identified to provide representation across implementing partners, including the Islamic Centre Charity Society (ICCS), Jordan River Foundation (JRF), Mateen and Ministry of Social Development (MOSD). The Makani facilitators and community stakeholders associated with these centres were also interviewed.

The research team used modified Most Significant Change tools for adolescents, parents and key informants to explore how the programme is being implemented, the perceptions of adolescents, parents and key informants about its effectiveness, and their insights into how the programming modalities and content could be further strengthened to fast-track gender norm change (one of the programme's stated aims) (see Jones et al., 2024b, for more details about the research tools).

The study obtained ethics approvals from the Overseas Development Institute's ethics review board, and secured permissions via the Ministry of Interior in Jordan to carry out the interviews in refugee camps. During data collection, care was exercised to ensure that the principles of research ethics were respected and strictly adhered to. Interviews were carried out by researchers of the same gender as the respondent. Assent was obtained from young people aged 17 years and under through written forms, which articulated the project goals, timeframe of the research, and contact information for researchers. Consent was obtained from young people, caregivers and key informants aged over 18 years, and from parents of all minors.

Key findings

Programming approach

In line with earlier GAGE assessments of the Makani programme (Devonald et al., 2021; Presler-Marshall et al., 2022), our findings highlight that young people value the pedagogical style of Makani sessions. Boys in particular appreciated the interactive and inclusive attitude of facilitators, and contrasted this to the more rigid style of teaching in the formal school system where they perceived that teachers prioritise the learning needs of more able students and are more narrowly focused on academics, rather than the breadth of topics that the Makani skills-building sessions cover. A 16-year-old Syrian boy in a host community noted:

I benefit a lot... At school, maybe the teacher doesn't give you your right, he only looks at high average students, he doesn't look at others to raise their average. At Makani all is equal. I love this, equality between scores, either low or high, it depends on everyone's own average... I like this a lot ... I love the diversity of information... In Makani there is everything about skills, work, life, many things, facts, and if you have a talent, they help you discover it and they show it to the world, and they improve it to benefit in the future.

Given the high dropout rate among boys in secondary education (see OECD, 2023; Presler-Marshall et al., 2023c), the participatory approach of the facilitators appears to be especially important. A 17-year-old Syrian refugee explained that he had historically disliked learning because he associated school with fear and shame, but felt encouraged to engage in Makani sessions as he was listened to:

I always feel that the school style is too formal. It means that I don't give you freedom, for example, because you always talk, and I don't give you, so you feel a little restricted, while in Makani we always talked about what we wanted, so we can participate, we can talk without fear, without shame. The teaching style was definitely the best. I didn't feel a lot of pressure... and was able to enjoy it

Younger adolescents also emphasised that they appreciated their Makani facilitator's non-aggressive approach to classroom management, which they contrasted with a stricter and less interactive style in formal schools.[1] A 14-year-old Syrian refugee noted that she appreciated her facilitator's patient and calm style:

Miss Makani never yells at us and always handles everything calmly. She is good and nice, and even if you don't know the answer, it's okay. She might think you are perhaps sleepy or don't know something. But the teacher [at school]*, if she*

sees you ask a question she doesn't like, she might put you against the wall [for the duration of the class].

Young people also reported that they had better learning outcomes at Makani because they were able to ask questions when they did not understand a topic (and benefited from the smaller class sizes, compared with often overcrowded formal school classrooms), and were encouraged to support one another through peer-to-peer learning techniques. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee girl emphasised that the facilitators pitch their teaching to the adolescents' capacities and take time to explain an issue so that everyone understands:

Here [at Makani] *you will understand, and if you do not understand, then she [the facilitator] will explain so you understand... If you don't understand, she will explain more and more so you understand what this thing is. And how they treat you from the first day, I loved the teacher.*

A 13-year-old Syrian girl explained that she was given greater confidence in her abilities and felt motivated to learn because of her facilitator's encouragement to help her friends with their learning:

The learning sessions benefit me a lot... In the [maths session on] *long division, the teacher told me if you teach your friends, she will give me a bonus... I am so happy because I helped my friends, and the teacher gave me a bonus.*

Makani participants in the research sample also reported that a key message from the skills-building sessions was the importance of investing in their own education for their future, and studying hard to make the most of educational opportunities. A 14-year-old Syrian refugee girl noted that her facilitator advised her to study for her exams and to be persistent even if she faced failure on the way:

I asked if I should study for the exam or not... She told me that I must study... and that it's correct that when we fail, we'll succeed. And even if I fail, I must continue... in grade 8 [after joining Makani]*, my grades were 18/20 and 19/20...*

Young people who had dropped out before completing secondary school were also encouraged through Makani to return to education. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy explained that this messaging had resonated strongly with him:

If someone has studied and graduated, he can be a doctor, and if he wasn't educated, he can work in vegetables... The benefit returns to us to study... The teacher encouraged us to study a lot... hopefully I will go back to school.

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[1]   See Presler-Marshall et al. (2025) for a discussion on violent disciplinary approaches experienced by adolescents in the GAGE sample at midline.

Similarly, another boy of the same age noted that there was strong messaging against children working if it precluded a focus on studying: '*They told us that child labour is bad... because it makes you lose studies, and things in your childhood are lost, because of work. Also, it's wrong to leave school for wor*k.'

Another common theme among many respondents was the positive impact that the skills-building sessions had on their sense of self-confidence and empowerment. A 16-year-old Syrian boy from a host community in Mafraq reflected on how Makani had supported the development of his emotional intelligence:

> [The group learnt] *how to study your personality, how to study yourself well, and how to study the person in front of you and know how to hold yourself in a group if you are nervous, or if you applied for a job, how to behave and present yourself.*

A 15-year-old Syrian refugee girl from a host community in Amman noted that through learning critical analysis skills, she had gained confidence in her decision-making, and this had a positive spillover effect on her self-esteem:

> *I became more understanding before making any decision, I understood the negatives and pros of the decision and I knew the risks of this thing and the risks of not doing it... So I made the decision more consciously... I also developed more self-esteem – I know who I am, everyone has something* [a strength or talent].

Other young people noted that improved communication skills had helped them to interact with others more effectively and confidently. A 17-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq emphasised how transformational his Makani experience had been:

> *The thing I benefited most from is communication skills and how I can deliver information... Knowing how to present information to other people because I know how to talk to the public without any shame and with necessary confidence...*

Another 17-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a Mafraq host community similarly noted that by being exposed (during programme sessions) to success stories about others who had gone through and overcome difficulties, he had been inspired to recommit to his own aspirations:

> *There are success stories about people from the Makani centre that also took these courses. This means that there are people with special needs among them. They were able to find a job and complete their education... Once they shared with us the story of a young man who was in a position where I was and who had special needs. He*

was able to complete his education and not stop. I mean, we took from him that nothing is impossible... Never stop hoping and being optimistic and never despair because there is something wrong with you... I'm always looking for a new opportunity.

Programming content

Our findings in terms of adolescents' views on the content of the skills-building curriculum were more mixed.

Digital literacy classes

Many adolescents appreciated the computer skills classes as they recognised that digital literacy is a critical competency. A considerable number of respondents flagged the online safety content that they learnt in Makani sessions as being especially valuable. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy noted:

> [The group learnt] *how to protect and save your personal photos, and keep it in a special file, and if one day you face a hacker all you have to do is to turn off the internet and try to speak to an expert or any of your relatives that understand these things so that he comes and helps you.*

A 15-year-old Syrian refugee girl living in a host community in Amman similarly explained that she had learnt to identify specific online risks:

> *We learn how if we access Google and another site, how will we know if it is safe or not... If there is a closed or open lock sign at the top, indicating that the site is safe or not, and also in the link itself, if there is a sign, this indicates that it is safe... When we browse the internet, we may have any problem, whatever its type, such as blackmail, and accordingly we talked about knowing if the site is safe and if the person is safe.*

Girls especially emphasised that they benefited from the digital literacy sessions as they are less likely than boys to have access to their own device (see Luckenbill et al., 2025forthcoming). As a 17-year-old Syrian girl noted:

> *I decided to take the computer skills class because I loved Miss* [the Makani facilitator]*, her explanation is very beautiful, she is nice, secondly because I benefited a lot... To know computing, I mean that I am not studying now, but if I study, I will work and know how to use the computer.*

A 13-year-old Syrian refugee girl from an informal tented settlement community similarly explained that she had learnt to set up a social media account and how to save photos – not on her own device or in her own name but for her father – and that developing this skill had given her a

sense of pride:

> I learnt how to use the phone... Downloading and installing Facebook... using it and checking messages... for using TikTok and to store photos... I created an account for my father... He didn't say anything, but I had a good feeling... I had a beautiful feeling... that I had learnt how to use the phone.

However, there was a general sense among boys in particular that the courses were geared towards those at beginner's level only. There was considerable demand for access to more advanced courses, including to explore career options involving information technology (IT)[2]. For example, a 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy living in a host community in Mafraq explained:

> Honestly I was a beginner, they taught us the parts of the computer, what does it do, and programmes to start by, it was for beginners only... When we created the robot they gave us parts and taught us how to combine them by video, then you start making it... It's not related to computer programming... but my purpose in life is related to social media... I know how to do editing on the phone... I learnt by myself and became a good editor... but I stopped as I could not accomplish the dream that I want... I stopped to focus on studies, it needs money, till I save money... and can learn design and editing so I can be famous to the world... let the viewer be entertained, and this is also a financial goal [to earn] money...

Another 17-year-old Syrian refugee boy, also living in Mafraq, noted that, '*Most of our work is about Excel and Word, because of the basics. After the basics, I want to take an ICDL* [International Certification of Digital Literacy] *course in the Makani centre.*'

Financial literacy and social entrepreneurship classes

Adolescents valued the information and skills developed through the financial literacy and social entrepreneurship classes, and especially the emphasis placed on the importance of savings (see also Box 2 for the tailored approach used in informal tented settlements). Other key skills that participants reported included learning to set clear aspirational goals and use problem-solving skills to develop feasible plans to achieve them. A 15-year-old Syrian refugee girl from a host community in Amman explained her experience as follows:

> In financial skills, we talked about the surplus and deficit, needs and desires, investment, savings... and donating...

> We also talked about how we can make a project plan... [and time management].

A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq similarly reported that a key takeaway from the financial and entrepreneurship sessions was the importance of identifying one's own talents or skillset, and then shaping livelihood aspirations accordingly:

> We learnt where to spend money, when to keep it, when to spend, how to bring money, and insurance... They also talked about the future and jobs and how to choose a job... How to apply and what your job should be like... They discussed options... If you couldn't manage to study in college, they said anything you can make an income from, anything you are talented in you can make it your job... even working in a supermarket or decorating and painting, you have a simple work, and maybe in the future you can make a company from it. The most important thing is to love your work, and if you have a talent, to benefit from it.

Makani curriculum's Problem-solving and marketing skills were considered as key components of entrepreneurship, especially important for adolescents from refugee communities given the broader restrictions they face in the labour market. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq also linked entrepreneurial skills to future leadership roles:

> The social innovation course includes many topics, the most important of which is marketing, and technology... And we learnt how to create projects. It taught us the skills of how to talk to the public, how can I present my project to a specialised committee, how can I request funding, how can I promote my project correctly. I mean, these courses are for a young age like this. I think it is very important that they be available... for people aged 13 to 24. This teaches teenagers how to rely on themselves, how to become entrepreneurs, how to become community leaders... a lot of good things.

Nevertheless, as with the IT skills sessions, some adolescents expressed concerns that without more advanced skills-building classes and financial and mentorship support, it would be challenging to put what they had learnt into practice. As a 15-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq explained, there is a disconnect between the problem-solving ambitions that are encouraged in the classes, and the absence of any seed funding or connections to industry:

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[2]   The programme is designed to provide adolescents with referrals to more advanced courses Youth Centres and other service providers, although no one in the research sample reported on this.

One of the steps that we want to start with is a community project: The first step was that we find a problem; the second step is that we find the cause of the problem; and the third step is that we find the solution. The project was originally based on the idea that we solve problems. I, as an entrepreneurial person, want to find an idea for a project that can help people… I submitted a project [to address the problem of] *car accidents. We know that Jordan, unfortunately, has a large percentage of accidents, so… I came up with the idea of a project, but unfortunately* [the projects could not get any] *finance. The idea of the project was to focus on monitoring the driver and alerting him if any violation occurred. There was a device that could send a message to the driver and stop the car directly. That was the idea, but the application… We didn't know frankly, how we could implement it yet.*

Gender awareness sessions

Adolescent perspectives

One of the key new aspects of the skills-building curriculum launched in 2023 was the emphasis on gender norms change. It is widely recognised that Makani programming has been especially popular among adolescent girls because it offers a rare safe space for them to interact with peers outside of the school setting, in a context of limited mobility for girls on account of conservative gender norms that prioritise family honour and separation of males and females in public spaces (Presler-Marshall et al., 2023a). Nevertheless, historically, the curriculum content has had (at best) a limited focus on the gender norms that limit both adolescent girls' and boys' ability to realise their full capabilities (Presler-Marshall et al., 2019; Banati et al., 2021). Accordingly, following a national consultation process with stakeholders utilizing the Gender Transformative Accelerator Tool[3] in 2023 on priority needs to fast-track gender transformation, UNICEF launched an updated- curriculum pilot. This focused on raising young people's awareness of gender equality as a human right, identifying and tackling gender stereotypes and norms, and challenging the gender division of labour within the home and society, including through exposing young people to positive examples of gender equality champions in the community.

Our findings from the early implementation of the curriculum underscore that while the sessions appear to have strengthened young people's ability to identify gender roles and stereotypes, they full effect of the programme will take longer time to be materialized–– especially among adolescent boys[4]. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a Mafraq host community emphasised that he supported the principle of equality but that he supported distinct gender roles, especially in the workplace:

Honestly, I'm with the education, society should be equal, but everyone [should] *know his place. As a man, know your place; as a woman, know your place. A woman shouldn't do the work of a man…*

Another 15-year-old Syrian refugee boy, also from a Mafraq host community, emphasised that he saw his role as the future breadwinner of the family, only conceding that he might tolerate his future wife working in a professional role if she was university educated, but that he would find a livelihood option involving her doing physical labour unacceptable:

We learnt about as a man, the right, and role in society, and as a woman, what are her rights and duties in society… It was general, like, as a man, you should marry and have a family, and work for your family. There are many duties for the man… I think it's good, you are showing the individual his role in society and how to develop it… But honestly I would not like my future wife to work… I will bring her anything she wants… If the woman I marry has a college degree, I don't mind her working… because it is light work…

Box 2: **Tailored skills-building programme content for young people in informal tented settlements**

For young people living in informal tented settlements in Jordan, Makani Programme tailored the curriculum to focus on horticultural skills and the principles of environmental protection, which was reportedly appreciated by participants. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee girl explained: *'UNICEF got us seeds. We planted them… We always pick them when watering them… We planted them at the teacher's backyard… We planted onions, common sage, beans, mint….'* A 13-year-old Syrian boy, also living in an informal tented settlement, emphasised that the gardening initiative also contributed to the development of teamwork skills: *'When I first saw the seeds growing up, I was glad… because it was my first time to plant with them and they grew… I took care of the plants… My cousin and I used to cover them whenever we felt it was cold in early morning or at night… We covered them with a piece of cloth, and we removed it when the sun rose… We did this with six of us… The community is wonderful! The fact that we were working together. We cooperated and planted together…'*

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3   UNICEF. Gender Transformative Accelerator Tool. 2023.
4   The data collection took place during the first cycle of the implementation of the updated skills building curriculum.

But if I marry a woman that doesn't work, and she wants to work in an exhausting job, that doesn't bring a lot of profit, I will not accept [her doing that work]. *If she loved a thing a lot, I will bring it to her, I will try to... pamper her...*

These responses suggest that while these young people have acquired some awareness about changing attitudes towards working women, social acceptability is not premised on the principle of gender equality but rather gradual (but still limited) shifts in notions of gender-appropriate roles.

Among girls in the research sample, there appeared to be greater awareness that gender roles are socially constructed. A 14-year-old Syrian refugee girl living in a host community in Mafraq explained the focus of the gender sessions as follows:

We learnt that women don't always have a say in society, and they have rights, the right to work and the right to housing. Some people say that a woman's place is only in the kitchen, and she shouldn't be anywhere but, in the kitchen, and cleaning the house and just that... And that some people think that the military is only for men, and the police, and that a woman can't carry a weapon... But women have the same rights as men in society... I definitely believe this.

Another 15-year-old Syrian refugee girl, also living in a host community in Mafraq, emphasised that social belief systems surrounding gender limit girls' potential:

We took sessions on gender-based roles... [The facilitator told us] *that they are beliefs developed by society, gender is gender, male or female, there is no difference between them except with physical things... She told us that it is beliefs developed by society, that a girl may not do such and such work...*

However, not all adolescent girls took away from the sessions that an understanding of gender roles should lead to social change. A 15-year-old girl from the same host community in Mafraq commented on the importance of complementary roles between the sexes:

We discussed the role of a woman in society, and it is an active one, as well as the man's role being an active one. There should be a balance. The woman should have them as the men do. For example, a woman gives birth to new generations and the man is responsible for raising these new generations so that... each one of them has a part... There is a male teacher and a female teacher, but is there a male and a female mechanic? No. A woman cannot do such things or construct a house using stones, etc.

Such attitudes appeared to be especially entrenched within informal tented settlement communities. A 13-year-old Syrian refugee girl in one such settlement explained her takeaway messages from the Makani gender-awareness sessions as follows: '*Women's rights and their role in society – we were taught... Women take care of the home and the kids... Women's rights at home are cooking, cleaning, washing dishes and clothes.*'

The research also explored the extent to which young people had been exposed to messages relating to gender-based violence. Our findings indicate that this was largely framed in terms of prevention, and the importance of employing clear communication skills to reduce risks of arguments escalating and spilling over into violent conflict. A 14-year-old Syrian girl from a host community in Irbid noted that:

The teacher asked us to do a role play. 'Let's assume a girl hit another girl, so one of us must change the situation'... So, a girl stood up and made them reconcile and apologise to each other... I benefited from this... If I see people quarrelling, I can go and solve the problem... I can solve it with very minor change and without violence.

A 16-year-old Syrian boy from a host community in Mafraq similarly explained what they had learnt:

Suppose there is a disagreement between someone and me... I try to solve the problem and not hit him. I take my time to relax and think. I try to resolve and talk to him calmly... So, we can solve the problem in peace... not by hitting... but in peace... That's how we solve problems in peace... or I should complain to someone older, like the teacher... or call the [child protection] *hotline.*

There was also a strong focus on reporting abuse and disrupting the culture of silence surrounding violence. A 17-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq explained that:

We talked a lot [in the sessions] *about bullying... If you faced bullying, go and speak to someone older than you, he can deal with it and solve it as soon as possible. Don't be silent or it will happen to you always... They said act quickly, and don't be silent.*

Messaging on preventing and reporting abuse also extended to in-person and online sexual harassment – and the risks to which girls in particular (but also boys) are subject. A 17-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Irbid shared detailed knowledge he had gained from Makani sessions, and the importance of taking responsibility to stop and report these practices:

We talked about issues of harassment... Males may suffer from harassment, but most people who are always exposed to harassment are females. You can't afford not to go to school. You can't go out and get anything (...). How much can they [girls] suffer... If harassment happens in the first place, you must stop this issue, you must set boundaries... Second, if you see this issue, even if it does not happen to you, you must intervene... Harassment causes great suffering. I must intervene and inform the competent authorities... The children must inform their families, inform anyone who is aware and knows about this issue, instead of remaining silent.

Some young people also explained that the Makani gender-awareness sessions also included information about the appropriate authorities to whom they could report concerns, especially regarding online abuse. A 16-year-old Syrian refugee boy from a host community in Mafraq explained:

We talked about sexual harassment and blackmail, like if someone uses your photos, and how we can protect ourselves and don't give your pictures to anyone... We were told to call or visit the Anti-Corruption Commission or Family Protection Service.

Interestingly, very few adolescents spoke about awareness of how to report any type of abuse by parents or teachers. Only one 13-year-old girl living in an informal tented settlement highlighted that in the case of physical violence by parents or older brothers, they had been taught to report such experiences to a hotline number: '*Girls face physical violence like beating... by their parents... and their brothers... by hand or stick... They can complain to a hotline... The teacher in Makani explained this.*'

Makani awareness-raising about gender-based violence also included messaging about the risks of child marriage. Rather than simply focusing on the legal age of marriage, adolescents reported that facilitators had explained in some detail why delaying marriage to adulthood was important for the development and well-being of girls and boys alike. A 13-year-old Syrian refugee girl from a host community in Irbid reported that:

The teacher talked to us about early marriage, saying that it's wrong to marry early and give up our studies, future, and dreams... I benefited by knowing that I should not marry early, like at the age of 16, for example... Previously, I thought marriage at this age was normal... even to marry at 13... But now I think I will get married when I'm over 18 or 20 years... Because if a woman marries at a young age, she faces difficulties in life and doesn't know how to raise children and manage the household... I also told my mother about this... She told me that is correct.

In a similar vein, a 14-year-old refugee boy from the same community said:

The worst thing is getting married at an early age. I am totally against that... When you are little, you are not mature enough, you haven't experienced anything in life yet, you can't spend money either on yourself or on someone else, like your wife if you get married. You won't be able to build a happy life, you won't continue your education. You won't get a certificate [Tawjihi]. *You won't get a good job that will help you to build your children's, your wife's, and your own future. Your parents will spend money on you. I am against it... I learnt about this at Makani in life-skills class...*

Makani facilitator perspectives

Before delivering sessions, Makani facilitators received training of between 1 and 3 days on the gender-awareness component, provided by Generation for Peace, online (via Zoom). Many facilitators had long-standing experience with Makani programming, and so the focus was less on the broader skills-building curriculum and more on the gender-awareness component itself. General feedback from the facilitators interviewed for this study was that the training was too short, and was insufficiently detailed. Although they appreciated that the online training was due to budget constraints, the format was less conducive to an exchange of ideas and sharing of experience across Makani centres and implementing partners. As one facilitator working with Syrian refugees in an informal tented settlement noted:

The training should be 10 days or more, because on Zoom, you do not take your time with everything. There are times when the sound is disconnected, or the internet is disconnected, or the connection is weak, and there are some of us who are [able to join only] halfway through the session because of poor connectivity, but as for logistical matters and equipment, now we do not have electricity... This meant that the training was not 100% clear.

Another facilitator working at a Makani centre in Zaatari refugee camp explained their dissatisfaction with the training approach:

We don't want online trainings. Online training doesn't do justice to some of the facilitators... We have bad or weak internet in the camp... The place where you train isn't comfortable. The students come in and leave, the administration might call you for some work, maybe you have some commitments or maybe the message [about the training] *doesn't reach you... So, the last training, from*

the corona[virus] *crisis till this day, all the trainings are being conducted online.*

The limitations of the training modality were also reflected in the mixed responses among some of the facilitators regarding the distinction between sex and gender. Some facilitators were able to eloquently explain both concepts and provide examples, with one facilitator in Zaatari camp explaining:

Yes, we understood that gender is about the roles imposed on you by society, but we have to consider these roles. Like, I will come to the camp, launch a bicycle marathon, is it possible for me to say that I want to hold a bicycle marathon for the girls, who are 18 years old, without studying the situation? No, I cannot. I need to think, to consider the gender dynamics, the way they [the community] *think. Will they accept it or not? Will my idea succeed here or not?*

However, other facilitators appeared to be confused about the two concepts of sex and gender. This was evident from the explanation given by one facilitator, working in an informal tented settlement:

I mean, we say that a woman can give birth and a man is unable to, so this is considered gender. For example, when driving a car, a man drives a car, and a woman drives a car. This is considered a social type. A teenage boy's voice becomes harsh, while a girl's voice remains soft. This is considered gender. I mean, what is sex and what is gender?

This underscores the importance of post-training mentoring and monitoring to ensure that Makani facilitators are providing clear and accurate messaging, and have sufficiently mastered the content so as to be able to provide contextually relevant examples to adolescent participants. Another facilitator at a Makani centre in Amman, a host community, also acknowledged that their retention of the training content on gender and leadership was limited:

There is discrimination in society based on gender. There is a discrimination risk with males and might be faced by females too. We also learnt... let me try to remember... The training was very simple and we went through the issues so quickly... I want more training and to train so that I understand the details...

There was also varied viewpoints among the implementing partners as to when and how the content related to gender was introduced into the skills-building curriculum cycle. Some facilitators expressed concern that without broader awareness about rights and self-awareness, young people may not be sufficiently receptive to the gender-related messaging, and this could risk backlash from parents and the wider community. Accordingly, implementing partners reported that they took varied approaches to integrating the gender-awareness component into the curriculum. For example, one facilitator noted that in their Makani centre, they introduced the content towards the latter half of the cycle of sessions, because of the cultural sensitivity associated with promoting gender equality:

When we first meet the programme participants, they don't have any awareness. However, by the time they reach the 17th session, they develop an understanding. There's an activity called 'Realising moment'. It is based on the gender component and presents examples that raise questions: Do you feel that you have been treated unjustly because you are a boy and not allowed to move outside at night? Does a girl feel the same? It focuses on awareness of limitations, mobility, and everything else... [One of the facilitators] *touched on the potential issues this could cause with customs and traditions. She spoke up, expressing her disapproval and suggested that it could lead to conflict with religion. And then, she expressed her worry that if a girl was given the same freedom, she might go back to her mother and assert her own independence, wanting to go out like a boy does. This fear stems from the potential family backlash. She asked if there was any advice about resistance, pointing out that it* [gender awareness] *was not discussed widely...*

Because the topic of gender awareness is new to the Makani curriculum, several facilitators suggested the need for more sharing of experiences so that they could improve how they tailor examples and responses to diverse groups of young people. For example, a facilitator working in a Makani centre in an Irbid host community commented that:

It would be great to make a liaison between all the facilitators or every person who is trained to leadership so that we can exchange experiences... I mean, as a facilitator, I faced a range of situations... Yes it could be a WhatsApp group or, for example, frequent meetings or in the form of videos – for example, when you face life situations, and how you as a facilitator can deal with it and what did you replace the idea with? You know how?

A second facilitator working in an informal tented settlement recommended having more training on how to respond when adolescents voice discriminatory stereotypes:

There were discussions between me and them – for example, about cooking. A man can cook, and a woman can cook. One of them said, 'I do not agree to cook. If you grow up and get married and your wife is not around, how

would you like to eat?' He says 'I buy, and I don't cook, this work is not for me, it is for the woman...' The training provided simple examples but not how to discuss in depth with the participants...

In some centres, facilitators shared their concerns with management, and within the centre they developed an approach organically to try to unpack some gender stereotypes and to gradually bring about changes in attitudes among both adolescents and their parents:

> *The objections were due to the point of view, related to the work suggested for males and females, 'this is suitable for males and that is suitable for females'. When we used to have sessions with the adolescents, we used to have strong arguments with them, that 'some jobs are right and some aren't', 'she is a girl, and she cannot go out to work'. 'She should stay at home'... What happened is that after we discussed with the* [centre manager]*, we postponed introducing the concept of gender until adolescents reach a level of... self-awareness, know themselves more, recognise their strong and weak points, know about the society they live in... Based on this, when we start with the gender concept, this will help a lot to connect the ideas altogether and to understand the concept of gender... Thank God, we have reached the stage where some of the adolescents' ideas have changed. It is also due to the effect of the parents... Due to discussions with them, through phone calls, we meet them here in the centre, they come to see us. So this made a lot of difference, in a positive manner.*

Community stakeholder linkages

An additional component of the updated curriculum were linkages with community stakeholders with the aim of ensuring that the gender norms within the enabling environment in which adolescents are living are also shifting. There was, however, limited clarity among the community stakeholders who participated in the research as to their exact mandate regarding the Makani centres. The main role that stakeholders were able to identify was support with community outreach. As a community stakeholder from an Amman host community noted:

> *They have the service of children and education and sometimes they want to link the children to the National Aid Fund but they don't know names from a specific area, so we are able to give them names* [of potential beneficiaries]*... for example, from the Turkmen* [an ethnic minority community living in Jordan with historical origins in Turkey and Turkmenistan].... *For people who do not have* [Jordanian] *dinars.*

Several also noted that they discussed how to support young people interested in volunteering and how seek out relevant information online and in the community to facilitate this.

In terms of the content of the community stakeholder sessions is to discuss a wide range of issues of importance to adolescents in the community, including gender and leadership issues. Some participants said (for example) that they discussed issues around the risks of substance use, and the need to raise awareness among young people and their families about prevention approaches. Others noted that they also discussed the safety risks facing young people in terms of sexual harassment in their community. As such, community stakeholders emphasised the importance of providing transportation to Makani centres so that many more older adolescent girls (who are subject to the strictest mobility constraints) could be supported to attend sessions. As a community stakeholder working at a Makani centre in Amman (supporting Bani Murra and Turkmen communities) explained:

> *We need a bus to transport the older girls and young women to bring them to take up places in the centre. Now we are facing* [funding] *difficulties ... We are trying to find a solution for it.*

In one stakeholder group, in an Amman host community, participants commented that the issue of how to support women and girls to report sexual violence within families (and especially in the case of incest) was raised, including how best to follow up with the Family Protection Department.

> *For me, the discussion on how to educate mothers on harassment for children and also on drugs is critical... For example, there was a problem in* [name of community] *whereby a father harassed his daughter... We discussed that mothers need more awareness on how to work with Family Protection and not to be afraid of society... This mother was silent. I mean she didn't do anything... She was afraid because her husband threatened her with divorce so she wouldn't tell... and allowed him to continue... I am emphasising this topic as the husband really won her over...*

Another key issue that had been discussed in community stakeholder groups was youth employability, with concerns that the skills-building course – despite providing important practical skills – was not able to be translated into tangible employment gains, given the constraints of the labour market and its limited opportunities for young people, especially those from refugee commmunities. As a key informant from a community stakeholder group in an Amman host community highlighted, skills building classes

are an important first step but longer-term partnerships with the private sector will be key to tackle youth unemployment:

The UNICEF programme is reaching its end. The trust and credibility among the youth is gone... This course doesn't lead to employment. I have an older son. My older son couldn't find a job, he's 19 years old. He just finished a course but he's still not working... There are no jobs, even if they do, they work a month for their money. With all these hardships, there still aren't enough jobs... The idea is, after the course, the trainee should go to the local market and find potential employers... Looking for employers who need employees. We need someone willing to hire youth. The trainee should go to any place that offers them work, keep trying until they find something...

It is also worth noting that when the issue of gender differences and employability emerged during focus group discussions, several community stakeholders promoted gender-stereotypical options for girls and young women, including home-based embroidery, as one Mafraq-based key informant noted:

They can also turn to what ladies prefer: embroidery. Any woman at home can embroider, even during holidays, even if you have a machine that can embroider items... Or a beauty course... We can also look at the direction of the guys. I mean, their direction and the lack of opportunity.

The community stakeholder key informants did not report discussions on supporting girls and young women to enter into non-stereotypical roles, which could be seen as an important part of broader programming efforts to facilitate changes in gender norms and attitudes in the wider socio-ecological environment in which young people in Jordan are growing up.

▶▶ We need a bus to transport the older girls and young women to bring them to take up places in the centre. Now we are facing [funding] difficulties ... We are trying to find a solution for it.

(A community stakeholder working at a Makani centre)

A 15-year-old Syrian refugree girl in Jordan
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Conclusion and programming recommendations

Overall, our findings underscore that the pedagogical approach underpinning the new Makani skills-building curriculum is highly valued by adolescent girls and boys alike, across settings. It also highlights the importance of having institutionalised this approach across multiple partners and centres should not be underestimated. This is particularly the case given the pedagogical challenges identified in the formal school system and how these can undermine learning outcomes (OECD, 2023; Presler-Marshall et al., 2023c).

Our findings on the content of the new curriculum and its delivery were more mixed, especially on the gender-awareness components. This is arguably not surprising given deeply entrenched conservative gender norms across Jordan, and especially so (again, arguably) in some refugee communities (UNICEF Jordan, 2023). It should also be noted that the programme had only been rolled out for one or a maximum of two cycles at the time of this qualitative assessment.

In order to build on the strengths of the programme and to fast-track progress to ensure that all adolescent girls and boys are able to realise their full capabilities, irrespective of socio-economic and gender differences, our findings point to the following priority actions:

Strengthening support for adolescents

Programme modalities
- **Continue to invest in the Makani pedagogical approach** based on non-violent, interactive and inclusive teaching approaches and peer-to-peer learning components, which are highly valued by adolescents and motivational. Having access to safe spaces with supportive facilitators is especially valuable in the most disadvantaged communities and, where possible, access should be maintained or increased, budget permitting.
- **Ensure sessions are offered over weekends and school holidays**, when young people are out of school, to ensure that students in double-shift schools can interact with peers of other nationalities, and/or consider offering hybrid in-person and online sessions so that boys (and girls) juggling working hours can participate throughout a full cycle. This would also facilitate participation for young people with some types of disabilities.
- **Expand the scale and scope of programming for older adolescents**, to keep more young people participating for longer, by providing them with age-segregated classes and age- and experience-tailored

content, especially regarding digital literacy, including referrals to more advanced courses
- **Strengthen tailored outreach to young people with disabilities and provide tailored support** (including transportation and adapted materials) for young people with disabilities who attend sessions.
- Consider introducing **incentives attached to Makani programming such as a graduation celebration at the end of the cycle and/or a certificate of participation** so that young people are able to feel they have accomplished a certain set of skills.

Programme content
- **Build on and expand the range of digital literacy, cyber safety and computer programming classes** to attract greater uptake of Makani integrated programming. Also employ more Arabic content for computing to promote accessibility of all, and ensure adequate access to computers for all participants in centres, especially adolescents living in informal tented settlements, so that young people who do not have their own devices at home can apply their new digital literacy skills.
- **Continue to provide financial literacy and project planning sessions, and consider expanding group activities where young people can practise implementing these skills** in ways that benefit their local community.
- **Continue with the curriculum's messaging on the diverse protection risks facing adolescents**, including drug use and addiction, child marriage, bullying, peer violence and sexual harassment, all of which appears to be resonating with programme participants. However, consider placing greater emphasis and detail as to how to tackle underlying risks and reporting of all these protection issues.
- **Consider strengthening awareness-raising messages about adolescents' rights to non-violent treatment by parents and teachers**, and how young people can report any abuse they experience in safe and effective ways.
- **Reflect on early lessons about the mixed effects of the gender-awareness components of the updated curriculum, especially with adolescent boys, and take steps to revise and strengthen both the content and delivery of those components.**
  » Because part of the challenge appears to be that some facilitators subscribe to discriminatory gender norms, greater efforts should be taken to **clarify the values of the facilitators conducting the sessions** and to provide additional capacity-building sessions as well as ongoing mentoring and monitoring.
  » Based on feedback from some adolescents that the gender-awareness sessions were overly theoretical and not actionable, there is also a need to **devote**

more time to these sessions to ensure that young people have understood the key messages and have opportunities to participate in more practical sessions to help them implement the ideas presented about tackling gender inequality in their daily life.

» Because young people in the study struggled to identify strong local champions of gender equality, sessions should consider **integrating more case studies of gender champions from Jordan and the wider Arab region** who have managed to promote gender-egalitarian attitudes and behaviours in culturally responsive ways.

Further investments in facilitators

- Invest in **more in-depth training on how to promote gender norm change and providing examples of how this is applicable to young people's lives in the Jordanian context.**
- **Consider organising in-person training and experience-sharing sessions** within and across implementing partners.
- Develop **case studies that profile the experiences of adolescents from refugee and ethnic minority communities** (e.g. Bani Murra, Turkmen), **and young people with disabilities as part of the skills building curriculum.**
- **Invest in additional capacity-strengthening and support for centres that include young people from Bani Murra and Turkmen communities to ensure effective and inclusive engagement**, and to avoid reinforcing stereotypes and stigma. Promising practices from specific centres could be highlighted in experience-sharing workshops.
- **Consider expanding the proportion of the skills-building cycle dedicated to gender-related content** given deep-seated conservative gender norms in the communities.

Further support for community stakeholders

- **Provide clear guidance to Makani centre partners on how to select appropriate community stakeholders** – e.g. given the influential role of *mukhtars* [traditional community leaders] in these communities, they could serve as positive role models, but only if they are able to champion gender-equitable attitudes and practices.
- **Communicate effectively with the selected individuals so that they are clear about their mandate as community stakeholders** – i.e. their potentially pivotal role within the socio-ecological framework in supporting shifts in gender norms.
- **Ensure that community stakeholder meetings have a more formal and guided approach** to maximise the inputs and time of those taking part.
- **Focus on topics that community stakeholders themselves have identified as priorities for their community**, including youth employability, prevention and reporting of sexual harassment and violence, and prevention of substance use risks among young people.
- **Facilitate more direct engagement between community stakeholders and the adolescents and young people participating in the skills-building programming** so that discussions can be synergistic and reinforcing.

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Annexe: Research sample

Table 1: Sample for the UNICEF Makani skills-building curriculum study – adolescent interviews in 7 localities encompassing camps, host communities and informal tented settlements (ITS)

Location	Girls		Boys		Disability		Dom[5]		Totals
	Young 10-14	Old 15-19	Young 10-14	Old 15-19	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	
Host – Amman	3	4	7	3	3	2	6	1	**29**
Host – Irbid	1	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	**7**
Host– Mafraq	3	3	3	3	0	2	0	0	**14**
Zaatari	3	3	4	4	2	0	0	0	**16**
Azraq	4	5	4	4	0	1	0	0	**18**
Jerash	3	4	2	4	3	2	0	0	**18**
ITS	4	2	4	3	0	0	0	2	**15**
Totals	**21**	**22**	**27**	**22**	**8**	**8**	**6**	**3**	**117**

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[5]   Dom is an umbrella term for Bani Mura and Turkmen ethnic minority communities found in Jordan.

Table 2: Sample for the UNICEF Makani skills-building curriculum study – parents in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs)

Location	In-depth interviews		Focus group discussions				Total
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers' FGD interviews	Number of participants	Fathers' FGD interviews	Number of participants	
Host – Amman	2	2	2	15	1	7	26
Host - Irbid	2	0	0	0	1	6	8
Host – Mafraq	1	0	1	11	1	7	19
Jerash	1	0	1	8	1	8	17
ITS	0	0	1	6	1	7	13
Zaatari	2	2	2	9	2	13	26
Azraq	2	2	2	12	2	13	29
Total interviews	10	6	9		9		**34**
Total participants	10	6		61		61	138

Table 3: Makani facilitator key informant interviews

Location	In-depth interviews		Focus group discussions		Total participants
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Host – Amman	0	4	0	1	10
Host - Irbid	0	2	0	0	2
Host – Mafraq	1	1	0	0	2
Jerash	0	1	0	0	1
ITS	1	1	0	0	2
Zaatari	1	1	0	0	2
Azraq	1	1	0	0	2
Totals	4	11	0	1	**21**

Table 4: Community stakeholder focus group discussions

Location	Focus group discussions	Total participants
Host – Amman	2	16
Host – Mafraq	1	4
Host - Irbid	0	
Jerash	2	15
ITS	0	
Zaatari	0	
Azraq	0	
Totals	**5**	**35**