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Young people's psychosocial well-being and opportunities for voice and agency in Jordan

GAGE endline findings

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Introduction

Young people's mental health has gained increased visibility since the Covid-19 pandemic. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2022) reports that anxiety and depression spiked 25% in the aftermath of the public health crisis and the lockdowns that ensued, with children and adolescents especially affected (Racine et al., 2021). Young adults are also not faring well. Recent results from the Global Flourishing Study found that in most countries, young adults are less likely to be flourishing than they were in the past (VanderWeele et al., 2025).

Young people living in Jordan have not been immune to these global headwinds. Recent research found that 28% of in-school adolescents have symptoms of depression and 22% have symptoms of anxiety (Khader et al., 2024). Indeed, a study by UNICEF and the Burnet Institute (2023) reports that self-harm is the fifth leading cause of death for adolescent boys and young adult men in Jordan. Young people's emotional distress is shaped by the myriad and intersecting barriers they see between themselves and their goals. These barriers are heightened for adolescent girls and young adult women, given Jordanian laws and customs; and for refugees, who are excluded from participating in much of economic and civic life (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2023; Presler-Marshall et al., 2023a, 2023b, 2023c, 2023d). Although Jordan has a National Mental Health and Substance Use Action Plan (2022–2026) (Ministry of Health, 2022) and is working to integrate mental health and psychosocial support services into primary care, progress remains too slow to meet demand. Jordan is considered to have major challenges delivering on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) – all of which are necessary if adolescents are to transition into adulthood able to meet the challenges that await them (Ministry of Health, 2022; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Middle East and North Africa Regional Office (MINARO) et al., 2023; Sachs et al., 2024).

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in 2024 and 2025 by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme. It aims to contribute to the evidence base that the Government of Jordan and its development partners need to meet national and international goals regarding young people's psychosocial well-being and fostering youth engagement. Designed to build on baseline (2018–2019) and midline (2022–2023) research, surveys were undertaken with nearly 3,000 Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinian adolescents and young adults living in Jordan. Surveys were also completed by caregivers. In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted with over 750 young people (206 of whom have been followed since baseline), nearly 200 caregivers (77 of whom have been followed since baseline) and 63 key informants.

The report begins with an overview of the Jordanian context, focusing on the contours of the population and what is currently known about young people's mental health and voice and agency. We then describe the GAGE conceptual framework and methodology. We present our findings, including on emotional well-being; support from family and other trusted adults; support from peers; access to quality psychosocial services; physical and digital mobility; decision-making – and voice and participation in the family, community and polity – focusing on differences by gender, age, location, marital status and disability status. We conclude by setting out the key actions that are needed to accelerate progress and ensure that all young people in Jordan have access to the supports and opportunities they need to grow into well-adjusted, confident young adults who can articulate and achieve their own goals and contribute to their families and communities.

Jordan context

Population

Jordan's population, estimated at 11.7 million (up from only 6.9 million in 2010), is very young (Department of Statistics, 2024). One-fifth (20%) of residents are adolescents aged 10–19, and nearly a third (29%) are young people aged 10–24 (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2025).

Approximately one-tenth of Jordan's residents (1.3 million people) are Syrian (Department of Statistics, 2016). Of those, 611,000 were registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as of December 2024 (UNHCR, 2025). Nearly 80% of Syrians live in Jordanian host communities; most of the remainder live in formal refugee camps run by UNHCR (Zaatari and Azraq), although 15,000 are estimated to live in informal tented settlements scattered throughout the countryside (ibid.). Since the fall of the Assad regime in

Syria, in December 2024, Syrian refugees have begun returning home. As of August 2025, over 133,000 have left Jordan for Syria (UNHCR, 2025d).

There are also nearly 2.4 million Palestinian refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) living in Jordan as of 2024 (UNRWA, 2025). Of these, approximately three-quarters have Jordanian citizenship, have full access to government services and employment, and live in Jordanian communities (Amnesty International, 2019). The remainder (some 630,000 people) – who either entered the country in the 1960s or later, or are descended from those who did – lack citizenship and its attendant rights. They are concentrated in one of 10 official camps run by UNRWA, one of which is Jerash camp (Amnesty International, 2019; UNRWA, 2025).

Jordan is classed as an upper-middle-income country. However, low economic growth coupled with high population growth, alongside external shocks (such as the Covid-19 pandemic and conflict in Ukraine and Gaza, and accompanying volatility of international aid), have resulted in a sharp increase in poverty over the past decade (World Bank, 2023; Hunaiti, 2024). In 2023, it was estimated[1]that the poverty rate had reached 27% (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia; Khalid et al.,2022). Refugees, who face legal restrictions on the type of employment they can do, are far more likely to be poor than Jordanians. UNHCR (2024) reports that in 2024, 67% of all refugee households under its remit were poor, while the non-governmental organisation (NGO) American Near East Refugee Aid states that the poverty rate that same year among Syrian households was 80% (ANERA, 2024). Of Palestinians living in camps, it is estimated that 31% are poor (UNICEF, 2021). The highest poverty rate is in Jerash camp, where 53% of households live below the poverty line (ibid.)

Young people's psychosocial well-being

There is a growing body of evidence that emotional distress and mental ill health are common among Jordan's young people (AlHamawi et al., 2023). Indeed, UNICEF MINARO et al. (2023) report that mental disorders are the leading cause of poor health for adolescents. A recent school-based survey, drawing on a nationally representative sample of students in grades 3–12 and aiming to reconcile the fractured evidence base, found that 28% of adolescents (aged 12–18) had symptoms of anxiety, and that 22% had symptoms of a major depressive disorder[2] (Khader et al., 2024). Adolescent girls were much more at risk than adolescent boys of anxiety (35% versus 18%) and depression (27% versus 16%), due to discrimination, girls' exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, tighter restrictions on girls' autonomy and access to information, and pervasive preoccupation with girls' appearance, particularly on social media (ibid.). Palestinian adolescents living in camps (37%) reported slightly higher rates of anxiety than their Syrian peers living in camps (33%) or host communities (30%), and much higher rates than Jordanians (26%). The same patterning held for major depression (34%, 27%, 26% and 20% respectively) (ibid.). Refugees' greater vulnerability was attributed to their experiences of economic and social exclusion, which amplify their uncertainty about the future. Rates of problematic internet use[3] were similarly high for adolescent boys and girls (46%), with Palestinian adolescents living in camps (50%) reporting slightly higher rates than their Jordanian and Syrian peers living in host communities (46%) or those in Syrian camps (42%) (ibid.). The authors note that young people's internet use increased during pandemic-related school closures, when learning moved online and parents began to rely on screens to entertain their children, to help parents cope with their own stress. Notably, only one-fifth (20%) of adolescents reported that they would seek help if they experienced a personal problem, which the authors attributed to limited awareness about the importance of mental health and to stigma. Indeed, of those who reported that they would seek help, most said they would turn only to their parents (82%) and friends (60%).

GAGE research has also found that Jordan's young people are not faring well in terms of their psychosocial well-being. At midline, young people had high rates of mild (32%) and moderate-to-severe (18%) depression[4] and psychological distress[5] (43%), with young people with

1 The most recent Household Expenditure and Income Survey (HEIS) was conducted in 2017–2018; an update is expected in 2026.
2 The authors used the Revised Child Anxiety and Depression Scale. See: https://www.corc.uk.net/outcome-measures-guidance/directory-of-outcome-measures/revised-childrens-anxiety-and-depression-scale-rcads.
3 The authors used the Problematic Internet Use Questionnaire. See: https://www.psytoolkit.org/survey-library/addiction-internet-piuq.html.
4 Figures based on the Patient Health Questionnaire 9. See: https://www.apa.org/depression-guideline/patient-health-questionnaire.pdf.
5 Figures based on the General Health Questionnaire 12. See: https://score.awellhealth.com/calculations/ghq_12.

disabilities at elevated risk of both moderate-to-severe depression (25%) and psychological distress (59%) (Presler-Marshall et al., 2023a). Young adults (mean age of 20) were at greater risk than adolescents (mean age of 15) of depression (59% versus 42%) and of psychological distress (47% versus 40%), and adolescents (9 percentage points) and young adults (13 percentage points) were more psychological distressed at midline than at baseline. Young people, especially those from refugee communities, attributed their growing distress to increased awareness about the limits on their lives, in terms of exclusion from education and work, and deepening poverty (ibid.; see also Presler-Marshall et al., 2023b, 2023c). Girls and young women also focused on their rising risk of violence (including sexual harassment and marital violence), and the social isolation that results from their parents and husbands limiting their access to peers (ibid; see also Presler-Marshall et al., 2023c, 2023d).

Jordan has limited psychosocial support services (UNICEF MINARO et al., 2023; WHO, 2020; 2025). Only a small minority of primary health clinics offer integrated mental health services, partly because there are too few mental health care practitioners (WHO, 2020; UNICEF MINARO et al., 2023). Shortages are exacerbated by Jordan's continued reliance on specialists (such as psychiatrists and psychologists) who reactively treat problems, rather than on lay health workers and the development of community programmes that provide proactive support to young people and their families (ibid.). In addition, although school counsellors are able to evaluate children and refer them (and their families) for services, there is no specific protocol for doing this, and in practice, it happens only on an ad-hoc basis when requested by teachers (UNICEF MINARO et al., 2023). Even then, referral pathways between schools and health services are limited, and parents' concerns about stigma prevent many young people from receiving the help they need (ibid.). The Jordanian government has been working to improve access to psychosocial services, but parliament took a retrograde measure in 2022, amending the Penal Code to criminalise attempted suicide (Al Khraisha, 2023).

Young people's opportunities for voice and agency

Unlike the growing evidence base on young people's mental health in Jordan, there is scant research that addresses their voice and agency. The Arab Barometer (2024) found that a minority (39%) of Jordan's residents trust the government; and that volunteering (16%) and interest in politics (23%) are uncommon, even among young adults. Internet access has expanded rapidly in recent years, in part due to online learning during Covid-19-related school closures (Datareportal, 2024). The most recent Jordan Population and Family Health Survey (JPFHS) found that of adolescents and young adults aged 15–24, a large majority (between 80% and 90% depending on age and gender) had used the internet in the past week, with nearly all of those using it every day (Department of Statistics and ICF, 2024).

Key to understanding voice and agency in Jordan is that young females are disadvantaged compared to young males. Jordan is ranked 123rd out of 146 countries on the 2024 Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2024) and scored 58 out of 100 (higher scores denoting poorer performance) on the 2023 Social Institutions and Gender Index, primarily because of its highly discriminatory family laws, which give men control over their wives and daughters (OECD, 2023). Although the Arab Barometer (2024) found that most of Jordan's residents agree that a woman ought to be able to reject an arranged marriage (87%) and that women should have equitable access to paid work (64%), it also found that most agreed that men make better political leaders (74%) and that men should have the final say on household decisions (59%).

GAGE midline findings are aligned with this evidence. At midline, adolescent girls (54%) and young adult women (62%) were less likely to have a say in whether they left home than adolescent boys (69%) and young adult men (76%) (Presler-Marshall et al., 2023c). Girls and young women were also less likely to have an internet-connected phone (21% of girls versus 35% of boys, 61% of young women versus 76% of young men) (ibid.). Young people and caregivers agreed that greater restrictions on females' mobility and access to technology are the result of parents' and marital families' efforts to protect family honour.

Conceptual framework

Informed by the emerging evidence base on adolescent well-being and development, GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach that pays careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the '3 Cs' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – in order to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see Figure 1). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts, though we tailor it to the specific challenges of understanding what works in improving adolescents' capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1985, 2004) and nuanced by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003) to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels, the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework exploring the kinds of assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. At its core is a sense of competence and purposive agency: it goes beyond a focus on a fixed bundle of external assets, instead emphasising investment in an individual's skills, knowledge and voice. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in children and young people with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and 'hardest to reach', such as those with disabilities or those who were married as children. Although the GAGE framework covers six core capabilities, this report focuses on psychosocial well-being and voice and agency, including: emotional well-being, support from family and other trusted adults, support from peers, access to quality psychosocial services, physical and digital mobility, decision-making, and voice and participation in the family, community and polity.

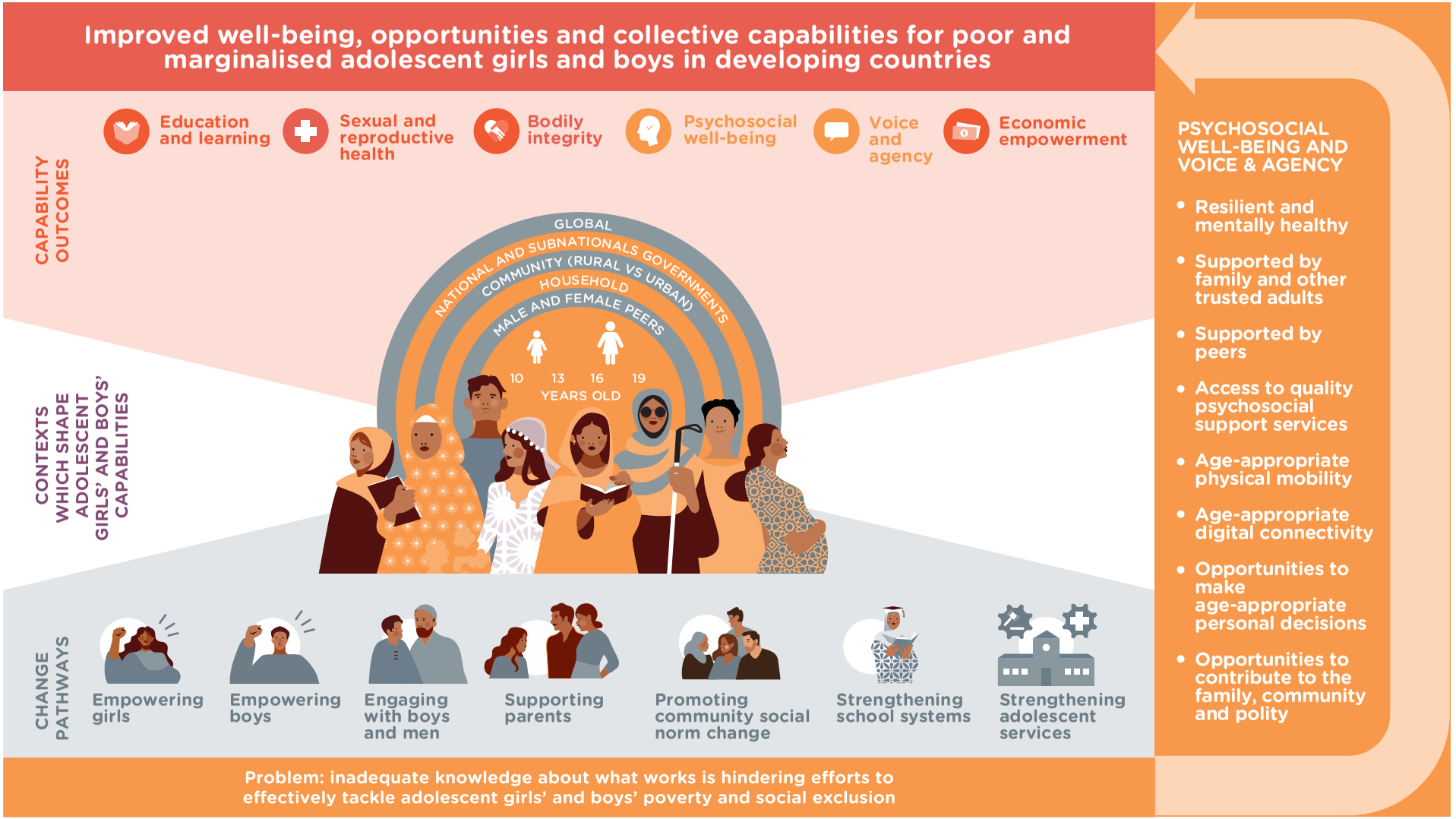
The second building block of our conceptual framework is context dependency. Our '3 Cs' framework situates young people socio-ecologically. It recognises that not only do girls and boys at different stages of the life course have different needs and constraints, but also that these are highly dependent on their context at the family/household, community, state and global levels.

The third and final building block of our conceptual framework, change strategies, acknowledges that young people's contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop their capabilities but also determine the change strategies open to them to improve their outcomes. Our socio-ecological approach emphasises that to nurture transformative change in girls' and boys' capabilities and broader well-being, potential change strategies must simultaneously invest in integrated intervention approaches at different levels, weaving together policies and programming that support young people, their families and their communities while also working to effect change at the systems level. This report concludes with our reflections on what type of package of interventions could better support the psychosocial well-being and voice and agency of young people in Jordan.



A 15-year-old Jordanian girl playing football © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2025

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework



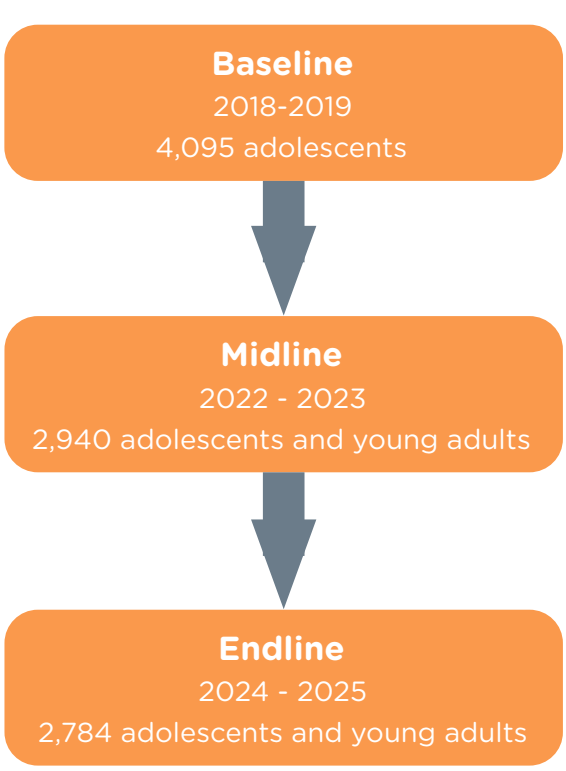
Sample and methods

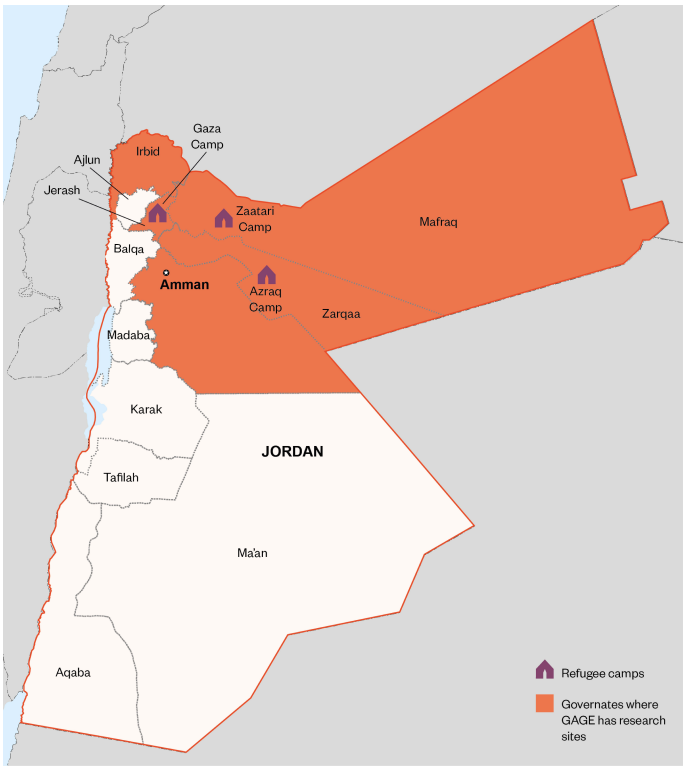
This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in Jordan in 2024 and 2025, following up on two earlier rounds of research – at baseline (2018–2019) and midline (2022–2023) (see Figure 2). At baseline, the quantitative sample included adolescents from marginalised households across two cohorts (aged 10–12 years and 15–17 years, averaging 11.3 and 16.1 years respectively), with purposeful oversampling of adolescents with disabilities and those who were married prior to age 18 – recognised as particularly vulnerable groups. The baseline sample consisted of 4,095 adolescents in five governorates: Amman, Irbid, Jerash, Mafraq and Zarqa (see Figure 2). At midline, the GAGE sample included 2,940 young people (a 71% follow-up rate), with the two cohorts then averaging 15.0 years old and 20.0 years old.

The GAGE Jordan endline sample involved 2,914 total participants. This included 2,784 young people from the original baseline sample (a 68% follow-up rate since baseline and 80% follow-up since midline, see Box 1), and 130 new participants who were not included in the baseline sample. These are: (1) 96 new young people who belong to either the Bani Murra or Turkmen ethnic minority groups[6] and (2) 34 new young people previously included only in qualitative research[7].

This report focuses on the 2,838 participants who were living in Jordan at the time of the endline survey and surveyed after the pilot (see Table 1). This omits the 43 young people surveyed as part of the pilot and the 33 young people who had moved internationally at endline but completed an abbreviated survey over the phone. Of these 2,838 participants, nearly three-quarters (72%) are Syrian refugees (2,021), just over half of whom (51%) have lived in host communities consistently since baseline (1,031). Approximately 26% of Syrian respondents (522) have lived in refugee camps (Zaatari or Azraq) run by UNHCR since baseline, and 14% (293) have lived in informal tented

Figure 2: Timeline of GAGE research in Jordan, with the distribution of the original baseline sample





6 Turkmen and Bani Murra young people typically have Jordanian citizenship. Because the new Bani Murra and Turkmen participants were identified through a different sampling strategy and have fundamentally different lived experiences, they are presented separately and not included where overall averages are presented. There were 23 individuals in the original baseline sample who self-identifying as ethnic minorities at endline, the majority of whom were classified as Jordanian at baseline.

7 These 34 individuals were included in the quantitative baseline sampling frame but were unable to be surveyed at baseline due to a variety of reasons, namely difficulties locating and scheduling interviews with the household within the baseline study period. They were intended to be surveyed at midline but due to an error were not.

Table 1: Quantitative sample

	Nationality				Sub-sample of Bani Murra and Turkmen	Sub-sample of those with disability	Sub-sample of those married <18	Total
	Syrian	Jordanian	Palestinian	Other				
Females	1043	263	150	9	46	149	307	1515
Males	978	162	123	14	50	135	3	1323
Younger cohort	1119	252	174	14	27	173	93	1626
Older cohort	902	170	99	9	69	111	217	1212
Total	2021	425	273	23	96	284	310	2838

settlements (ITS) at any point since baseline.[8] A minority of Syrian refugees (170, or 8%) have moved between host communities and camps in the time between the baseline and endline surveys. The remainder of the endline sample are Jordanians (425), Palestinians (273), and a small group of individuals (23) who identified as another nationality (denoted 'other', these include Iraqi and Egyptian respondents). Almost all Palestinians in the GAGE sample live in Jerash camp, which is located in Jerash governorate and is informally known as Gaza camp because most of its residents are ex-Gazans who were displaced during the 1967 Arab–Israeli war and who lack Jordanian citizenship and its attendant benefits. Due to the sample size, the 'other' nationality group is not included in comparisons by nationality, but is included in all other demographic group disaggregation, such as gender and age cohort.

Just over half (53%) of the endline sample are female. Although the baseline sample was approximately equally split between the two age cohorts (53% younger [10-12 at the time] and 47% older [15-17 at the time]), the older cohort were more likely than younger cohort to be lost to follow-up between baseline and endline (62% follow-up for the older cohort versus 73% follow-up for the younger cohort, $p<0.01$). Because of this, the younger cohort is over-represented in the endline sample. Older cohort males were especially likely to be lost to follow-up (57% follow-up), and as such are the most under-represented at endline. At endline, on average, younger cohort adolescents were aged 17.2 years, and are referred to in this paper as adolescent girls and adolescent boys; the older cohort had transitioned to young adulthood (average age of 22.1) and are referred to as young adult women and young adult men. Where both cohorts are discussed simultaneously, they are referred to as young people. Where adolescent boys and young men are discussed together, they are called young males; where adolescent girls and young women are discussed together, they are called young females.

Because GAGE's sample includes the most marginalised adolescents and young adults, about a sixth of young people in our quantitative sample have any functional disability[9] (479). Among those, 284 report having functional difficulties even if they have an assistive device (such as glasses, hearing aids, or a mobility device). Our sample also includes adolescent girls and young adult women who were married prior to age 18. Of the 527 ever-married females, 307 married prior to 18.

The qualitative sample is also large and complex. In total, it included 756 young people, 195 caregivers and 63 key informants (government officials, community and religious leaders, and service providers)(see Table 2). Of young people, 206 were selected from the larger quantitative sample, deliberately oversampling the most disadvantaged individuals in order to capture the voices of those most at risk of being 'left behind'. These young people have been followed since baseline and were interviewed individually. Of caregivers, 77 have taken part in iterative individual interviews. The remainder of young people and caregivers took part in focus group discussions and were not part of the longitudinal sample.

Quantitative survey data was collected in face-to-face interviews[10] by enumerators who were trained to communicate with marginalised populations. With the exception of never-married adolescent boys, enumerators were typically the same sex as the respondent: all female

8 In the seven years between baseline and endline, a minority of young people moved location. This was most common among Syrians (18%). The bulk of movement was between UNHCR-run camps and Jordanian host communities. Because of this movement, young people are classified as 'always camp' dwellers if they were living in a UNHCR-run camp at baseline, midline, and endline. They are classified as movers if they moved from a camp to a host community, or from a host community to a camp, in the years between baseline and endline. They are classified as 'ITS' if they were living in an informal tented settlement at either baseline, midline or endline.

9 Determined by using the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Questionnaire, which was filled out by caregivers at baseline: www.washingtongroup-disability.

10 A small number of surveys (81) were completed over the phone, because respondents were unable to be interviewed in person.

Box 1: Attrition over time

Minimising attrition, or loss-to-follow up, is a key challenge for longitudinal studies where the goal is to understand changes over time. This challenge is acutely felt with the GAGE Jordan sample because many participants are migratory, including refugees leaving Jordan to return to their country of origin (especially Syrians returning to Syria after the fall of the Assad regime in December 2024), those living in Informal Tented Settlements (ITS) moving for seasonal agricultural work, young adult males leaving their communities to seek out paid work, and newly married females leaving their natal household to move into their husband's household. Further, the mandatory secondary school exam and Ramadan fell within the endline survey timeframe, creating logistical challenges with scheduling interviews. Difficulties extending the permits needed to enter the UNHCR refugee camps created additional logistical challenges at endline.

Several mitigation strategies were implemented at endline to minimise attrition:

- Offered in-person participants incentives for their time (monetary for those in host communities, ITS, or Jerash camp and snacks for Syrians in refugee camps due to UNHCR gift restrictions).
- Offered virtual phone interviews, including outside of the typical working hours, to reach young males engaged in paid work, as well as Syrians in camps.
- Created an intensive tracking protocol that utilised the qualitative team for intensive tracking to capitalise on their rapport with participants.

With these mitigation strategies in place, 68% of the original baseline sample from 2018-2019 and 80% of those surveyed at midline in 2022-2023 were re-surveyed at endline. This attrition is in-line with another longitudinal research study on Syrian refugees conducted in a similar timeframe (2019-2024), where they retained 63% of their sample, highlighting the challenges with tracking migratory samples (Alrababah et al., 2025).

Table 2: Qualitative sample

		Syrian	Jordanian	Palestinian	Bani Murra/ Turkmen	Mixed nationality	Sub-sample of those with disability	Sub-sample married < age 18	Total
Individual interviews with young people	Girls	46	8	8	5		26	41	67
	Young women	36	8	6	1				51
	Boys	29	2	4	7		27	3	42
	Young men	26	8	7	5				46
Total		**137**	**26**	**25**	**18**		**53**	**44**	**206**
Group interviews with young people	Females	21	5	9	4	4			43 groups (306 people
	Males	18	5	6	2	5			36 groups (244 people)
Total		**313**	**62**	**65**	**42**	**9**			
									756 young people
Individual interviews with caregivers	Mothers	36	5	6	0				47
	Fathers	19	6	5	0				30
Total		**55**	**11**	**11**	**0**				**77**
Group interviews with caregivers	Mothers	3	1	3	1				8 groups (59 people)
	Fathers	5	1	2	1				9 groups (59 people)
Total		**8**	**2**	**5**	**2**				**17 groups (118 people)**
									195 care-givers
Key informants		**24**	**6**	**25**	**8**				**63 key informants**

respondents were interviewed by female enumerators, and the majority of young men/ever-married males were interviewed by male enumerators. Surveys were broad (see Luckenbill et al., 2025) and included modules reflecting the GAGE conceptual framework. Analysis of the quantitative data focused on a set of outcomes related to psychosocial well-being and voice and agency (data tables are available on request). Statistical analysis was conducted using Stata 18.0. Importantly, where we present endline survey findings, we include the 2,838 young people (2,708 from the original baseline sample who were not part of the pilot or moved internationally and 130 new participants, detailed above) who completed the endline survey. Where we present change over time, however, we restrict our sample and include only the 2,289 young people who completed baseline, midline and endline surveys[11]. These are referred to as the panel sample. For change over time for any given outcome, we also restrict to the sample who have answered that question at all rounds to ensure a consistent sample across all survey rounds.

Qualitative tools, also employed by researchers carefully trained to communicate sensitively with marginalised populations, consisted of interactive activities such as timelines, body mappings and vignettes, which were used in individual and group interviews (see Jones et al., 2025). Preliminary data analysis took place during daily and site-wide debriefings. Interviews were transcribed and translated by native speakers, and then coded thematically using the qualitative software analysis package MAXQDA.

The GAGE research design and tools were approved by ethics committees at the Overseas Development Institute and George Washington University. For research participants in refugee camps, permission was granted from the UNHCR National Protection Working Group. For research participants in host communities, approval was granted by Jordan's Ministry of Interior, the Department of Statistics and the Ministry of Education. Consent (written or verbal as appropriate) was obtained from caregivers and married adolescents; written or verbal assent was obtained for all unmarried adolescents under the age of 18. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites.



A young married Syrian man who works in farming © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

11 There are exceptions to this rule, because some questions were not asked at baseline or were asked of only adolescents over the age of 15. These exceptions are carefully noted in the text.

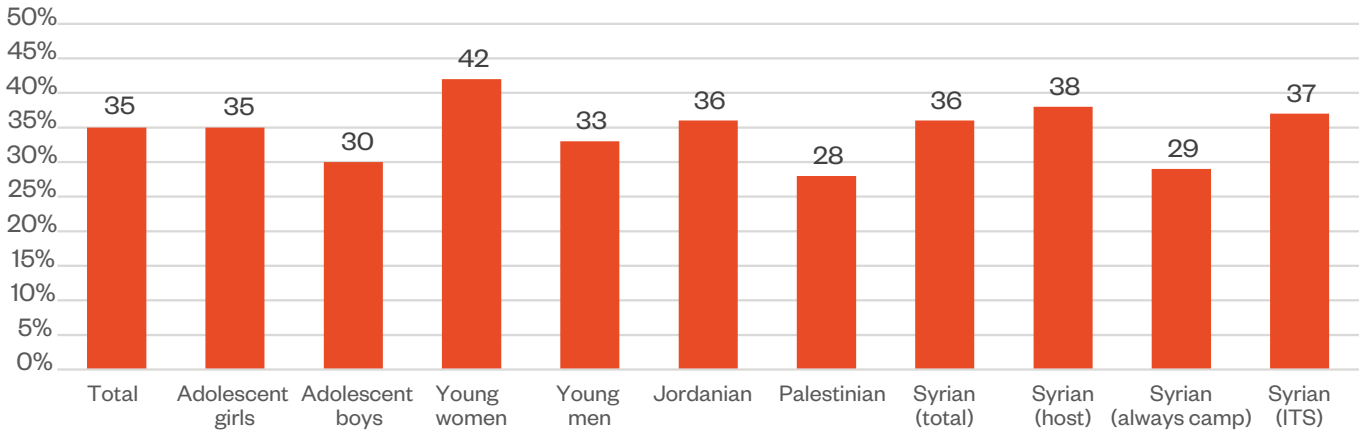
Findings

Our findings are organised in line with the GAGE conceptual framework set out earlier. We begin with emotional well-being, and then turn to support from family and other trusted adults, support from peers, access to quality psychosocial services, physical and digital mobility, decision-making and voice and participation. In each case, we first present endline survey findings, using the full endline sample, highlighting differences between groups where they are statistically significant. For some outcomes, we then present change over time, restricting the quantitative sample to only those young people who completed all three surveys at baseline, midline and endline.[12] Differences are significant at the 5% significance level unless otherwise indicated with an asterisk (*) to signify a significant difference at the 10% significance level, and when we use the word significant we are referring to statistical significance. In each section, we present qualitative findings after the survey findings.

Emotional well-being

The endline survey, which included the General Health Questionnaire-12[13] (GHQ-12), found that just over one-third (35%) of young people, including 51% of those with disabilities (see Box 2), had scores suggestive of psychological distress (see Figure 3). For simplicity's sake, these young people will be referred to as psychologically distressed for the remainder of this report. Gender and cohort differences were significant, with young females (38%) more likely to be distressed than young males (31%), young adults (38%) more likely to be psychologically distressed than adolescents (33%), and the gender gap growing across cohorts (9 percentage points for young

Figure 3: GHQ-12 scores suggestive of psychological distress (by cohort, gender and nationality)



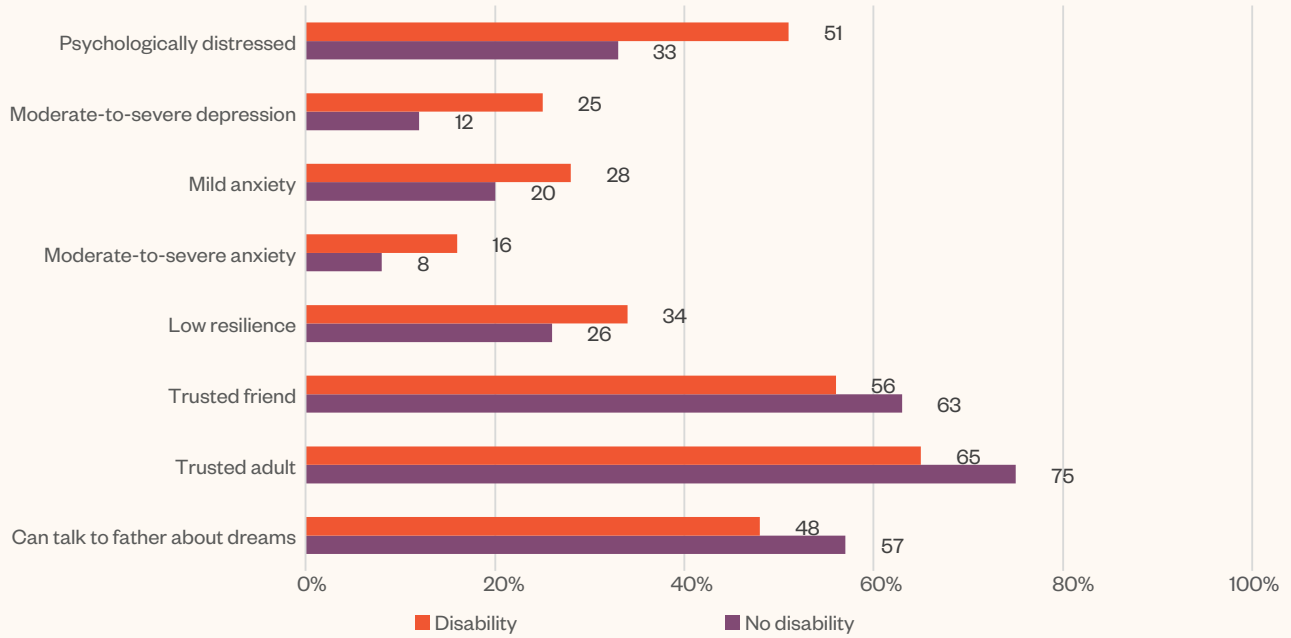
Box 2: Disability shapes young people's psychosocial well-being

GAGE's endline research, like the baseline and midline research, found that disability increases young people's risk of adverse psychosocial well-being. It also limits their access to social support. Using the GHQ-12, young people with disabilities were 18 percentage points more likely than their peers without disabilities to report symptoms of psychological distress (see Figure 4). They were also more than twice as likely to report symptoms of moderate-to-severe depression (25% versus 12%, using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)) and moderate-to-severe anxiety (16% versus 8%, using the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7)). The survey also found that young people with disabilities were more likely than their peers without disabilities to have low resilience (34% versus 26%, using the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)). This is primarily because those with disabilities have more limited access to the supportive relationships that help young people thrive. At endline, those with disabilities were less likely to have a trusted friend (56% versus 63%) or a trusted adult (65% versus 75%). In addition, while there were no differences in whether they could talk to their mother about their dreams and aspirations for the future, young people with disabilities were less likely than their peers without disabilities to be able to talk to their father about those aspirations (48% versus 57%).

12 As noted in the Methods section, there are exceptions to this rule, but they are carefully noted in the text.

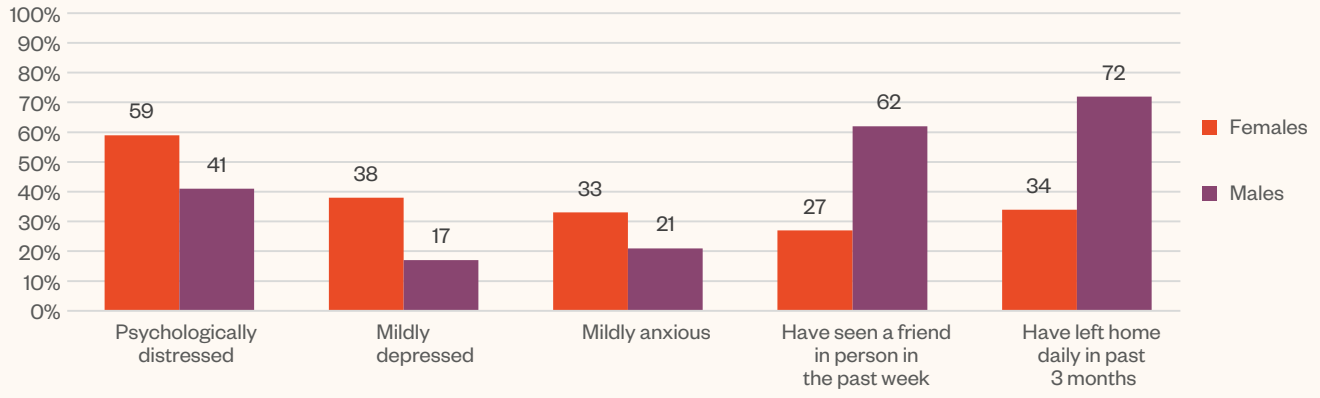
13 The GHQ-12 is an internationally validated measure of psychological distress. Scores =>3 suggest distress (Banks, 1983).

Figure 4: Psychosocial well-being indicators (by disability status)



For adolescent girls and young adult women with disabilities, disability-related stigma and gender norms interact to amplify risk of emotional distress and social isolation (see Figure 5). For example, compared to their male peers, young females with disabilities were 18 percentage points more likely to have symptoms of psychological distress (on the GHQ-12), 21 percentage points more likely to have symptoms of mild depression (using the PHQ-9), and 12 percentage points more likely to have symptoms of mild anxiety (using the GAD-7). They were also less than half as likely to have seen a friend in person in the past week (27% versus 62%), largely driven by the fact that they are half as likely to have left home on a daily basis in the past three months (34% versus 72%).

Figure 5: Psychosocial well-being indicators for young people with disabilities (by gender)



During qualitative interviews, respondents underscored that the added burden of distress, depression and anxiety experienced by young people with disabilities is due to the fact that many are socially isolated from, and indeed actively bullied by, their peers (Presler et al. , 2025b). A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl with a mobility impairment explained that she used to have friends when she was a child and '*didn't understand much*', but has no friends now because '*they* [the girl's peers] *started making fun of me when I walked*'. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult man with a vision impairment similarly reported that his peers started making fun of him in early adolescence, saying that '*The other boys started calling me "four eyes" and things like that.*' However, young people's narratives about exclusion and bullying paled compared to their parents' narratives of their children's experiences. A Jordanian mother stated that students avoid interacting with her daughter, who has a speech and hearing impairment: '*Girls don't accept her, they don't accept her to join their outings, their side conversations, as friends, because she has difficulty in*

pronunciation and understanding speech, so they avoid her, and she gets very upset…' A Syrian mother whose son has a mobility impairment reported that the other students not only exclude, but actively humiliate, her son: '*The boys would lock him in the classroom, and he would be on his chair, and then try to reach the door crawling, and they would laugh at him, trying to get out of the classroom crawling.*'

With the caveat that the GAGE disability sample was largely recruited through disability-focused NGOs (which means that the young people in our sample have caregivers who had at least at one point actively sought out services for their children), several respondents reported that caregivers' treatment of young people with disabilities also contributes to their emotional distress. Key informants noted that because disability is highly stigmatised in Jordanian society, parents often see children with disabilities '*as an extra burden on the family… and don't pay attention to these children*.' Indeed, one key informant reported that children with disabilities are sometimes still hidden at home, to protect the family's reputation. A 25-year-old Jordanian young adult man with a vision impairment agreed that those with disabilities are disadvantaged both inside and outside the home, and added that even well-meaning, educated parents often do harm because they do not see children with disabilities as capable: '*They [families] ignore the disabled people… it affects their personalities… He is denied socially, inside and outside the house. He has no place… It could be deliberate or non-deliberate. You can write that. Deliberate, when the parents are educated, but they don't want him to participate due to the lack of faith in his capabilities. Non-deliberate is due to lack of education.*'

In the seven years between GAGE's baseline and endline research, it has become more common for young people with disabilities to retreat into family spaces. In part, this is because young people are ageing out of school and organised recreational activities. In part, this is because disability-focused programming has not recovered from Covid-19 shutdowns and has been affected by the wider recent decline in aid. It is also, however, because caregivers are actively trying to mitigate exclusion and bullying by allowing, and even encouraging, their children with disabilities (especially girl children) to stay home. A Syrian mother whose daughter has a hearing impairment acknowledged this tension. After first stating that she does not treat this daughter any differently from her other children, she then admitted, '*One must be a little compassionate towards her.*' Although reasons for young people's retreat into family spaces vary, a 19-year-old Jordanian young adult man with cerebral palsy noted that the end result is the same, stating that: '*I feel lonely.*'

adults versus 5 percentage points for adolescents) (not shown). Young adult women (42%) were most likely to report feeling psychologically distressed; adolescent boys were least likely to (30%). Nationality differences show lower rates among Palestinians (28%) compared to Jordanians (36%) and Syrians (36%). For Syrians, location differences were also significant, with Syrian young people living in formal camps (29%) (where there has been more NGO programming) less likely to be psychologically distressed than their peers in host communities (38%) and informal tented settlements (37%).

The endline survey also included the Patient Health Questionnaire-9[14] (PHQ-9), which found that in aggregate, 44% of young people had scores suggestive of mild or moderate-to-severe depression (see Figure 6). For simplicity's sake, these young people are referred to as depressed for the remainder of the report. Mild depression was more than twice as common as moderate-to-severe depression (30% versus 14%). Patterning was similar to that for psychological distress (described earlier), with young females (50%) more likely to be depressed than young males (37%), and young adults (49%) more likely to be depressed than adolescents (40%) (not shown). Young adult women (56%) were the most likely to be depressed; adolescent boys (34%) were least likely to. Notably, the gender gap in moderate-to-severe depression doubles across cohorts: 6 percentage points for young adults versus 3 for adolescents. Nationality differences show lower rates of depression among Palestinians (34%) compared to Jordanians (47%) and Syrians (44%). For Syrians, location differences were also significant. Young people living in formal camps (36%) were less likely to be depressed than their peers in informal tented settlements (41%) and host communities (49%).

14 The PHQ-9 is an internationally validated measure of depressive symptoms. Scores between 5 and 9 indicate mild depression. Scores between 10 and 14 indicate moderate depression. Scores >=15 indicate severe depression (Kroenke et al., 2001).

The endline survey also included the Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7[15] (GAD-7), which found that in aggregate, 29% of young people had scores suggestive of suffering from anxiety (see Figure 7). For simplicity's sake, these young people are referred to as anxious for the remainder of the report. Mild anxiety was more than twice as common as moderate-to-severe anxiety (21% versus 9%). Patterning was similar to that for psychological distress and depression (described earlier), with young females (35%) more likely to be anxious than young males (23%), and young adults (33%) more likely to be anxious than adolescents (26%) (not shown). Young adult women (38%) were most likely to be anxious; adolescent boys (20%) were least likely to. Nationality differences show lowest rates among Palestinians (18%) compared to Jordanians (32%) and Syrians (30%). Palestinian males, only 2% of whom reported moderate-to-severe anxiety, had the lowest rate. For Syrians, location differences were also significant, with young people living in host communities (35%) more likely to be anxious than their peers in formal camps (27%) and informal tented settlements (20%).

The endline survey asked young people whether they had thought about committing suicide in the past two weeks. In aggregate, 6% of young people answered yes (see Figure 8). Gender and cohort differences were not significant, but nationality and location differences were. Jordanians (9%) were more likely to have engaged in suicidal ideation than their Syrian (6%) and Palestinian (4%) peers. Syrian young people living in formal camps were the least likely to have had suicidal thoughts (3%).

Although the baseline survey did not include the PHQ-9 or the GAD-7, it did include the GHQ-12, and this allows us to compare psychological distress levels over time. In aggregate and including only the young people who completed all three surveys, the proportion of respondents reporting psychological distress climbed from 32% at baseline to 44% at midline (for which data was collected after the Covid-19 pandemic) – and then fell to 34% at endline. Psychological distress levels at baseline and endline were not significantly different; however, there was a significant reduction in young people's distress between midline and endline, as the psychosocial effects

Figure 6: PHQ-9 scores suggestive of depression (by cohort, gender and nationality)

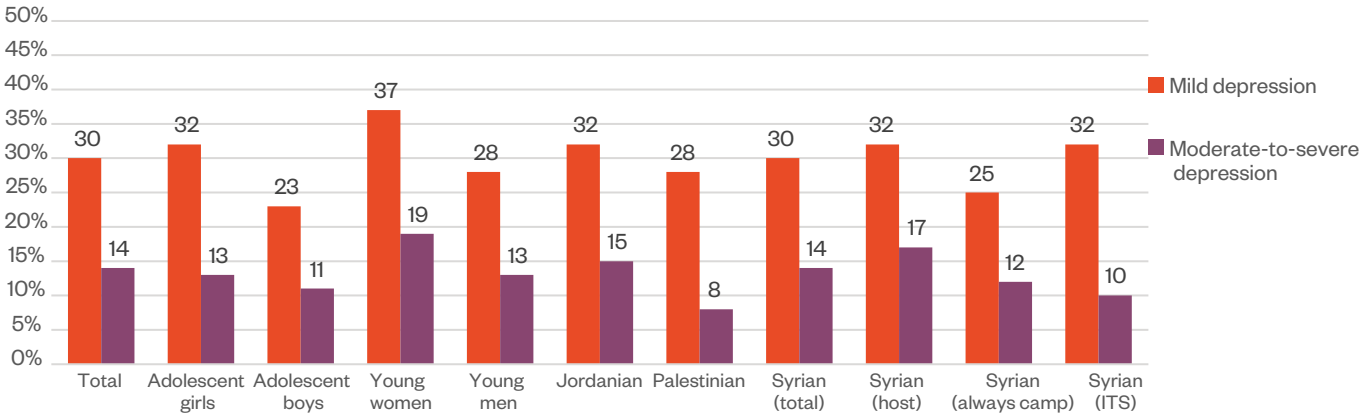
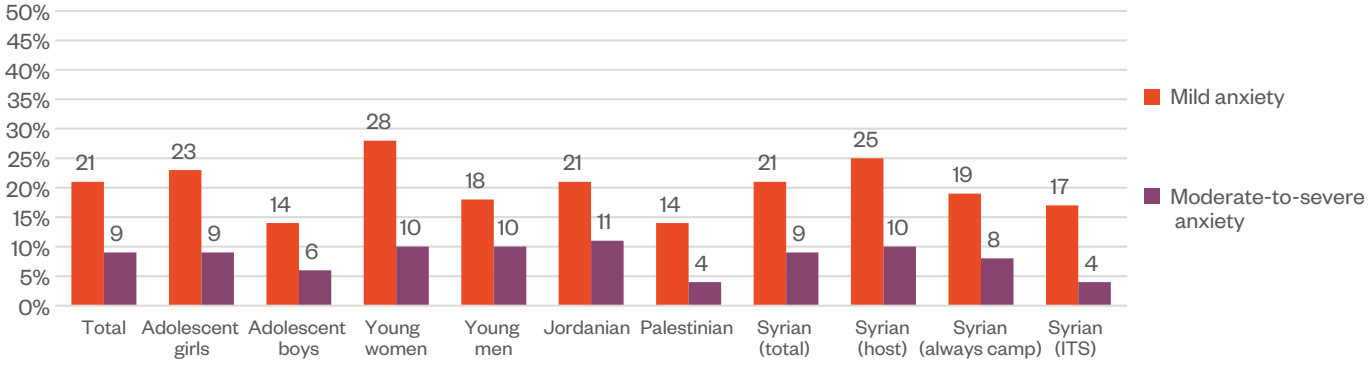
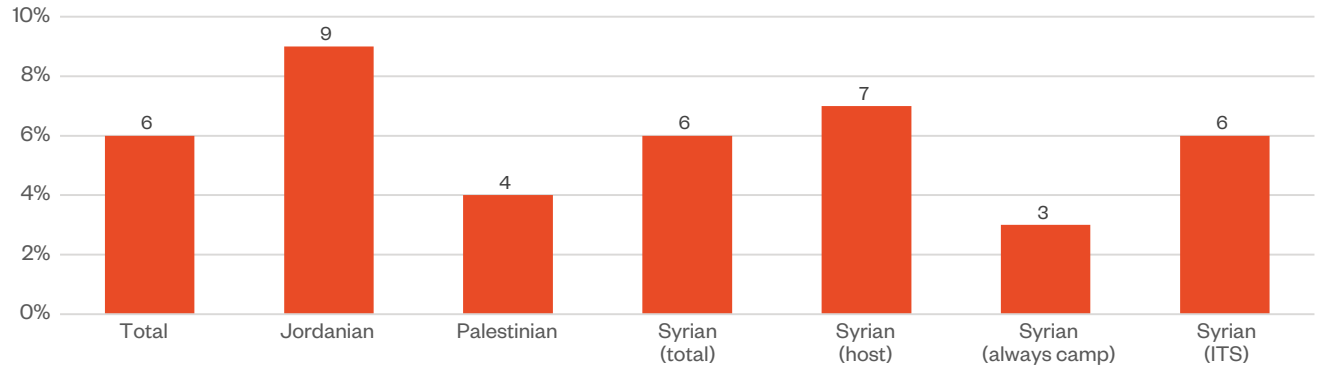


Figure 7: GAD-7 scores suggestive of anxiety (by cohort, gender and nationality)



15 The GAD-7 is an internationally validated measure of symptoms of anxiety. Scores between 5 and 9 are indicative of mild anxiety. Scores over 10 indicate moderate-to-severe anxiety.

Figure 8: Proportion of young people reporting suicidal thoughts in the past two weeks (by nationality/location)



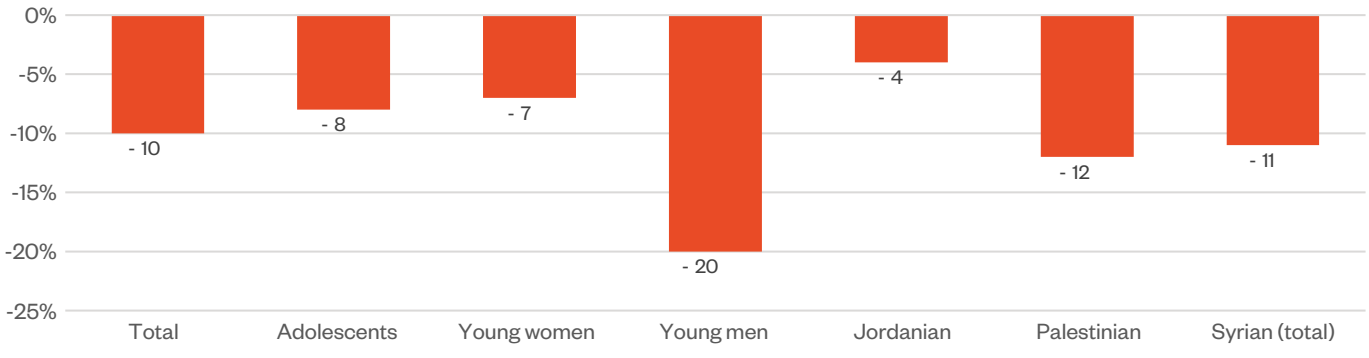
of the Covid-19 pandemic began to subside (Luckenbill et al., 2025). In aggregate, young people were 10 percentage points less likely to be distressed at endline than they were at midline (see Figure 9). Gender, cohort and nationality differences were significant, with young adult men (20 percentage points) seeing steeper declines in distress levels than young adult women (7 percentage points) and adolescents (8 percentage points), and Syrians (11 percentage points) and Palestinians (12 percentage points) seeing steeper declines than Jordanians (4 percentage points).

The Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM),[16] which measures young people's resilience and ability to overcome obstacles from a socio-ecological perspective, was also included in the endline survey. It asks individuals whether they agree with statements such as '*I have people I want to be like*' (see also Box 3) and '*I know where to go to get help*'. For the purposes of analysis, we divided the entire sample into four quartiles. Those with scores below the 25th percentile were categorised as having low resilience, and those with scores above the 75th percentile were categorised as having high resilience. The proportions of young people with low and high resilience varied across groups, and the results again highlight young adult women's disadvantage. Compared to adolescents and young adult men, young adult women were much less likely to have high resilience (12%) and much more likely to have low resilience (33%) (see Figure 10). As we discuss subsequently (see Box 3), this is primarily due to young adult women's greater odds of being married. Nationality differences largely reflect marriage patterning and are not shown.

Qualitative research suggests that, despite survey findings showing high levels of psychological distress, rates may in fact be even higher. During individual interviews, most young people reported sadness and worry about the future – their own and that of the world – and many reported that they feel genuinely hopeless. Reasons for this varied depending on the respondent's age, gender, nationality and individual life circumstances, but on the whole suggest that the root driver of most distress is young people's limited agency over their own lives and future trajectories. A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from an informal tented settlement summarised this best: '*My ambition for the things I wanted to do in my life is gone.*'

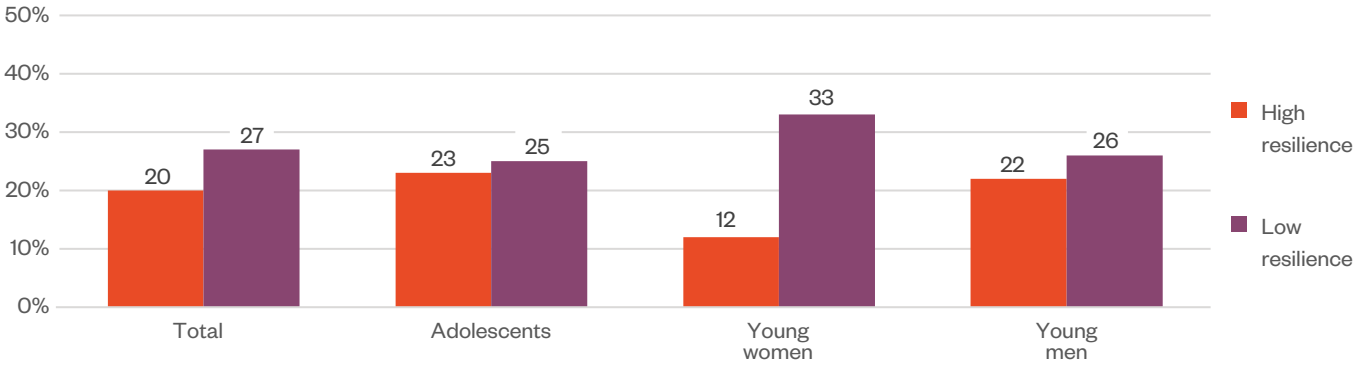
At endline, young people were asked to reflect back on the high and low points of adolescence, identifying

Figure 9: Change between midline and endline in the proportion of young people reporting psychological distress (by cohort, gender and nationality)



16 See 'Child and Youth Resilience Measure' (https://cyrm.resilienceresearch.org).

Figure 10: Resilience (by cohort and for young adults by gender)



rewarding and joyful experiences as well as challenging, stressful events. They were far more likely to focus on the latter. When asked why, it was fairly common for them to observe that growing up is emotionally painful, because with maturation comes responsibility and awareness of the myriad ways in which their lives are constrained by outside forces. A 21-year-old Jordanian young adult woman, who was forced to leave university because she lost her scholarship, explained that there are stark differences between age 10 and age 20: '*One starts thinking more, carrying the burden of the future… at the age of 10, one's only concern was to have fun.*' A 22-year-old Syrian young adult man from a host community agreed. When asked what had been good about his adolescence, he replied, '*Nothing was good… Life was good only when I was a child and did not know work, and all my time was for school and playing.*'

For young females, psychological distress is primarily related to gender norms that prioritise girls' marriageability and family honour, and which leave adolescent girls and young adult women confined to the home, socially isolated, and in near constant fear of community censure. As we discuss in greater detail below, young female refugees are especially likely to be physically confined to the home, sometimes under threat of violence from their caregivers and older brothers (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b). An 18-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Azraq camp stated, '*Here the girl's only place is at home… she is locked up.*' Young females added that once they are made to leave school – which for some comes as early as menarche but for most is during middle or late adolescence – maintaining friends becomes very difficult (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025a). An 18-year-old Palestinian young adult woman, who left school in sixth grade because her father was concerned about her walking home in the gloom of late afternoon, recalled, '*We weren't allowed to leave the house at night-time… School hours ended too late… When I left school, I couldn't see my friends anymore.*'

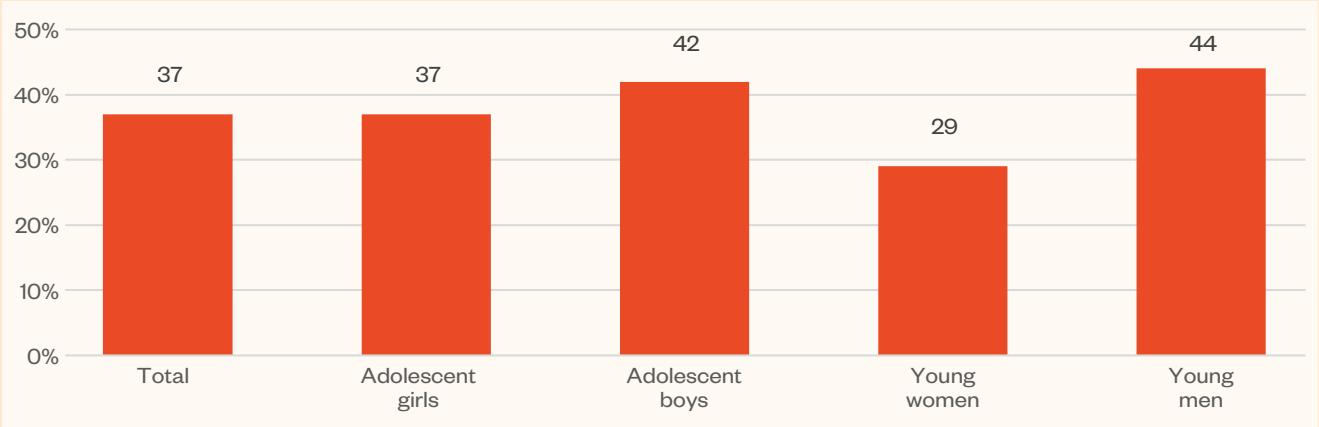
Young females who were still enrolled in school noted that social isolation can be a problem even for those whose physical mobility is not yet restricted, because so many parents inculcate fear of friendship in their daughters. An 18-year-old Jordanian young adult woman explained that she stopped having close friends when she began secondary school, saying that, '*I stay surface-level with everyone… My mom was very strict… She stopped letting me have many friends.*' Respondents agreed that caregivers' concerns, which become young females' concerns, are centred around community gossip and the way in which it can damage the reputation of a girl and her family. A 19-year-old Palestinian young adult woman, who was supported by her family to pursue post-secondary training, recalled her anxiety that she would accidentally violate social norms and shame her parents: '*I was terrified… that I am wrong and I would do something wrong.*'

Gender norms also shape young males' emotional distress, because although adolescent boys and young adult men feel obligated to work and help support their families, the labour market provides too few opportunities for them to do so (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025a). A key informant explained, '*Because males are the ones who suffer and go out to work… there's a lot of pressure on them, a huge psychological burden.*' A 20-year-old Turkmen young adult man agreed, saying, '*Staying like this is hard and sad… We need money for expenses and food. Who will bring us these?*' Most respondents agreed that refugee young males are at elevated risk of distress related to the transition into productive manhood. This is, they added, because refugees are more likely to be excluded from post-secondary education due to higher fees and limited scholarships, and face tight restrictions on the types of work they may do. An 18-year-old Syrian young

Box 3: Most young people do not have a role model

The endline survey found that only a minority (37%) of young people have a role model outside of the home (see Figure 11). Nationality/location and cohort differences were not significant, but gender differences were. Young adult men (44%) were far more likely to have a role model outside of the home than young adult women (29%), with this pattern again heavily shaped by young women's greater odds of having been married (38% of the never married versus 24% of the ever married). For adolescents, adolescent boys (42%) were more likely to have a role model outside the home than adolescent girls (37%). Of young people with a role model outside of the home, the largest proportion (21%) reported that they chose their role model because that person has a positive personality. Other common responses included strength/bravery (13%, and disproportionately males), respectful of others (13%), smart (11%), successful in life (9%), and devout (8%).

Figure 11: Proportion of young people with a role model outside of the home (by cohort and for young adults, by gender)



Qualitative research suggests that survey findings may in part reflect young people's confusion about what a role model is. Many conflated the concept with support. A 19-year-old Bani Murra young adult woman, for example, stated that her mother is her role model because, '*She solves any problem for me without anyone knowing, helps me in everything, and stands with me in all things*.' A 21-year-old Syrian young woman from an informal tented settlement similarly chose her mother because, 'She raised us when we were little. She was both the mother and the father.'

When asked to identify a role model other than a caregiver, young males were more likely than young females to have an answer. Some identified sports heroes or social media influencers. A 14-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from a host community said that the Argentinian footballer Lionel Messi is his role model, because of Messi's '*great respect for his teammates*'. A 19-year-old Palestinian young adult man chose Joe Hattab, a Jordanian documentary filmmaker and YouTuber, '*who started from scratch and now has 20 million followers on YouTube*'. Other young males chose more proximate role models. A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from Azraq camp, for example, identified his former math teacher because '*his style in mathematics made you love the subject*'.

With the caveat that for some young females, their mother does appear to be a formidable role model – including a Jordanian mother who broke a plate over her husband's head when he deigned to criticise her cooking in public, permanently silencing his disapproval – young females were less likely than young males to be able to identify a role model outside the home. A 16-year-old Jordanian adolescent girl stated, '*I do not consider anyone as a role model. I do not have any person who I want to be like in the future*.' A 23-year-old Palestinian young woman similarly reported, '*I feel there is no particular person.*' Highlighting the need for Jordan to invest in supporting women's public roles, of adolescent girls and adult young women who did report having a role model outside the home, most reported having a male role model. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from Zaatari camp chose a Syrian military leader, because '*He sacrificed himself for his country.*' A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from the same camp chose a taekwondo grandmaster, because he introduced the sport to the world. Only a very few young females were able to identify a female role model other than their mother. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from a host community reported that a local woman who runs a salon is her role model, because '*She works, and she didn't wait for a man to financially provide for her.*'

adult man from Zaatari camp stated that he wishes he had never been born, as he knows that his high aspirations are pointless: '*I shouldn't have come into this world… because the things I want don't happen.*' A Palestinian mother noted that for young people from Jerash camp, even moderate aspirations often result in nothing but disappointment:

> *My sister married a Palestinian man from 1948 who holds a national ID* [Jordanian citizenship]*, while I married someone like me* [without citizenship]*. Our kids studied and trained together. Both are trained in hospitality. My sister's son got a job at the Holiday Inn, while my son got a job at a small restaurant in Jerash. This caused a psychological burden on my son.*

At baseline and midline, Palestinian young people spoke at length about their despair about being socially and economically excluded from Jordanian society. This was not the case at endline. Indeed, in line with survey findings, at endline, Palestinian young people were less likely to discuss exclusion and despair than their Syrian peers, who increasingly feel they are not welcome in Jordan. A Palestinian key informant explained that young Palestinians' silence is due to their being '*so neglected it is a wonder they have their minds*'. A 25-year-old Palestinian young adult woman stated that she has just disengaged: '*I don't care about anything.*' Syrian young females, who 'think about emotions more' (18-year-old young adult woman, host community) and are less likely than their male peers to self-medicate for anxiety and depression (see Box 4), were the most expressive about their exclusion from Jordanian society. A 16-year-old adolescent girl from Zaatari camp stated, '*There is no future here.*' An 18-year-old young adult woman from a host community agreed, saying, 'I *lost hope.*' For all that they despair about living in a 'country where there is nothing' (22-year-old young adult woman, host community), and with the caveat that many young

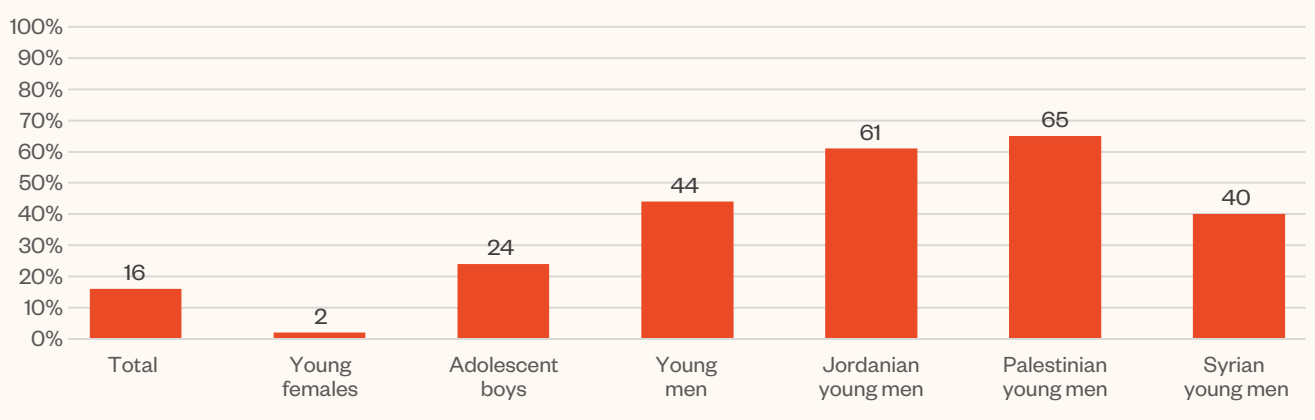
Box 4: Tobacco and drugs as self-medication for distress

Qualitative research found that young people use tobacco and drugs to cope with their anxiety and depression (see also forthcoming health report). A key informant from a host community reported, '*There's a lot of pressure from society due to the lack of jobs and such, so they vent through smoking.*' A key informant from Jerash camp, where substance use appears to be especially common, similarly stated, 'They say, "*I'll take a pill and forget all my worries*"'. Young people did not gainsay adults' reporting. An 18-year-old Palestinian young adult man said, '*If there were job opportunities, one would not resort to drugs.*' A 19-year-old Syrian young adult man similarly reported, '*They* [unemployed young males] *take hashish… Due to excess pressures and so, they become addicts.*'

Although substance use is less common among young females, some did report self-medicating for stress. For example, an 18-year-old Jordanian young adult woman explained that she had taken up smoking while she was studying for the Tawjihi [General Secondary Education Certificate], saying, '*I was smoking during a period when I was really under stress from everything around me.*'

The endline survey found that tobacco use is common, especially among young males (see Figure 12). Nearly a quarter (24%) of adolescent boys and half (44%) of young adult men reported being daily smokers. Jordanian (61%) and Palestinian (65%) young adult men were far more likely to be daily smokers than their Syrian peers (40%), presumably because they were better able to afford cigarettes (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025c).

Figure 12: Proportion of young people who are daily smokers (by cohort and gender)



people are looking forward to returning to Syria (see Box 3), many girls and young women were also clear that they are terrified of being forced to return to Syria. A 16-year-old adolescent girl from Zaatari camp, when asked how she would feel if she and her family were asked to leave the country, replied, '*The day they will decide to go to Syria, I will commit suicide on the Jordanian border, that's it.*'

The war in Gaza, news about which is continuously watched in many homes in Jordan, has exacerbated young people's levels of distress and contributed to their broader concerns about the state of the world. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community reported, '*All the clips on TikTok have become about the people of Gaza*.' For Palestinians, the war is personal. A 16-year-old adolescent boy stated, '*I am not comfortable… the people in Gaza are dying.*' A 21-year-old Palestinian young adult woman agreed: *'It makes me sad*.' A Palestinian key informant added that most Palestinians are depressed because '*today you hear my brother was martyred, and yesterday my cousin was martyred, and today my uncle was martyred… Today, my whole family is gone*.' The extreme level of violence and loss in Gaza may also, in part, explain the lower level of psychological distress among Palestinian young people in Jordan at endline because whilst life in Jerash camp is very challenging, the difficulties are manifold less severe than those experienced by their relatives in Gaza. Jordanian and Syrian young people also find the war in Gaza to be distressing. A 22-year-old Jordanian young adult man reported that the imagery haunts him day and night: '*The Gaza war affected everything psychologically… I mean, when you see children's carnage in front of you…'*

Respondents added that the war is exacting an added toll on young people because, although online and in-person protests were allowed by the Jordanian government early in the war, now young people are effectively prohibited from discussing it – in their community, at school, and sometimes even at home. A Palestinian mother explained, '*The students' mental state deteriorated… They want to do something but can't… even just expressing themselves. In UNRWA schools, they're not allowed to talk about the war.'* When asked if she allows her son to express his feelings about the war at home, she then admitted, '*No, he's still too young. Not yet*.' Syrian young people, many of whom reported that they are still scarred from their own experiences of conflict, also discussed their emotional angst about being denied an opportunity to voice their support for Gaza. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from Zaatari camp stated, '*The people in Gaza are our people… Talking about Gaza is forbidden. Even in the schoolyard, we're not allowed to mention Gaza*.'

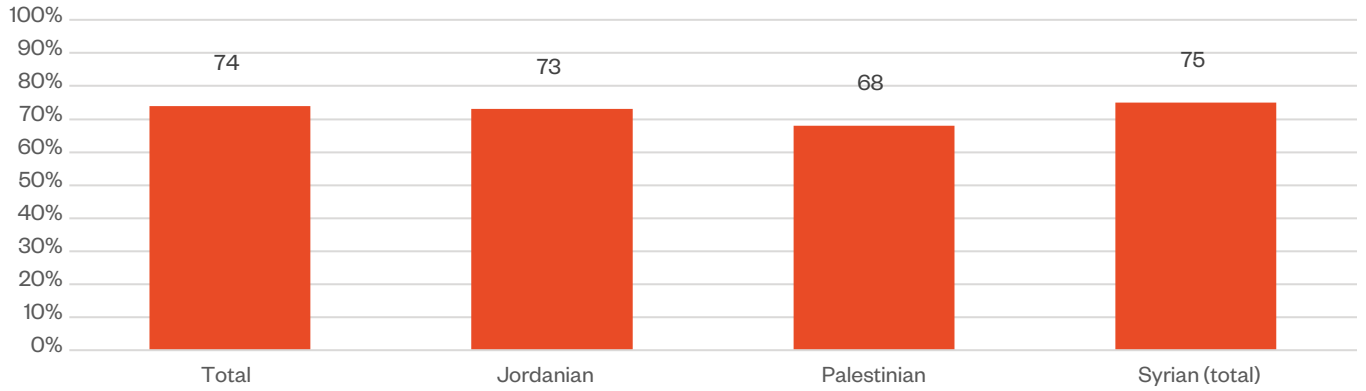
Reports of self-harm were not uncommon at endline. Several adolescent girls and young adult women reported having attempted suicide, by cutting their wrists or overdosing on medication, primarily because they could no longer tolerate the violence meted out by their husbands and caregivers, but also because they found the lack of agency over their own lives to be intolerable. An 18-year-old Turkmen young adult woman reported that her marriage had been unbearably violent, saying, *'I ask God to let me die… because I was young when I married and I have seen every torment*.' A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from an informal tented settlement explained that isolation, coupled with community gossip, had pushed her to the brink: '*I was suffocated by life… no going out and on top of all of that, they were talking about me… I tried to commit suicide more than once.*' Quite a few young people – females and males – reported having cut themselves as a way of coping with stress and emotional pain. Sometimes this was over a lost love, other times it was due to the stress of exams or unemployment. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from Zaatari camp explained that, '*A guy will be having mental pressures, he goes home and slashes himself with a blade, this is what they do the most…'*

Critically, and as we discuss in greater detail below, a growing number of young people, females and males alike, reported during endline qualitative interviews that they feel left completely on their own to cope with their distress. A 21-year-old Palestinian young adult man, when asked who provides him with support when he faces challenges, replied: '*It is very rare for me to receive support from anyone.*' A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl living in an informal tented settlement reported the same, saying, '*I don't go to anyone, but I sit in a corner and keep crying*.'

Support from family and other trusted adults

In aggregate, nearly three-quarters (74%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they have a trusted adult in their lives (see Figure 13). Gender and cohort differences were not significant, but nationality differences were. Syrians (75%) were more likely than Jordanians (73%) and Palestinians (68%) to report having a trusted adult, in large part because families appear to be trauma-bonded due to their experiences of conflict and displacement. Within the panel sample, young people's access to a

Figure 13: Has a trusted adult (by nationality)

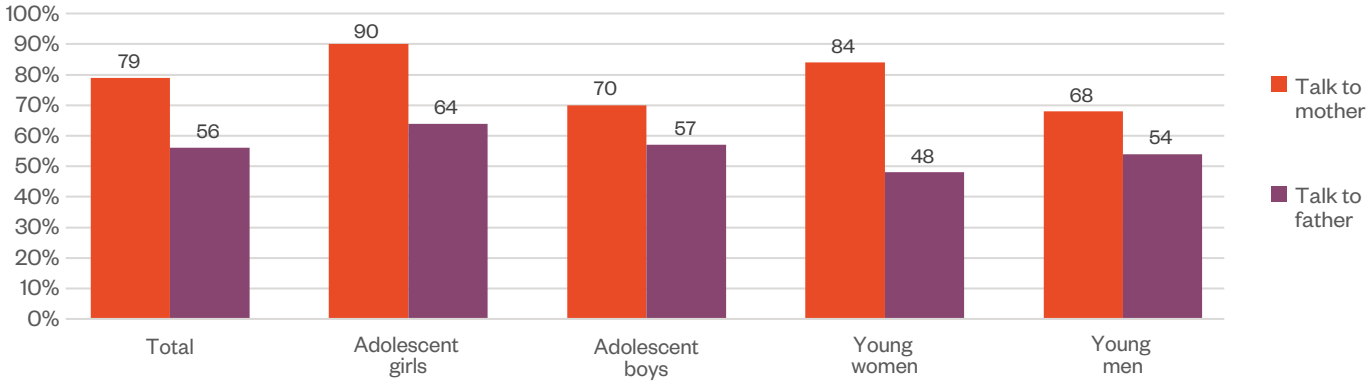


trusted adult was barely changed (1 percentage point) compared with midline.[17] Some groups of young people, however, have experienced significant change. Adolescent girls were 7 percentage points more likely to have a trusted adult at endline than they were at midline (76% versus 69%); Syrians were 3 percentage points more likely (75% versus 72%). Adding to the evidence that Palestinian young people are disadvantaged on myriad fronts, Palestinian young people were 10 percentage points less likely to have a trusted adult at endline than at midline (68% versus 78%).

The endline survey found that a large majority (79%) of young people feel that they can talk to their mother about their dreams and aspirations for the future (see Figure 14). Reflecting child-rearing norms, a much smaller proportion (56%) feel that they can talk to their father. Adolescent girls (90%) and young adult women (84%) reported being significantly more able than adolescent boys (70%) and young adult men (68%) to talk to their mother. Interestingly, adolescent girls (64%) were also significantly more able than adolescent boys (57%) to talk to their father. Conversely, young adult women (48%) were significantly less likely to talk to their father than young adult men (54%). Nationality differences were complex, and highlight that Palestinians and Syrians living in informal tented settlements feel less able to talk to their parents about their dreams and aspirations than their peers in other settings. For example, only 74% of Palestinians reported that they feel they can talk to their mother, and only 44% of Syrians living in informal tented settlements reported feeling that they can talk to their father.

During qualitative interviews, most young people agreed that family is their most important source of support. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community captured the prevailing sentiment, saying, '*My family supports me… Psychologically and everything.*' A 16-year-old Palestinian adolescent boy expressed the same view; when asked who provides him with the most support, he replied, '*I have two people – my mother and my father.*' That said, parent–child relationships were usually discussed as being strongly bounded by age hierarchies, with 'support' often limited to academic encouragement and top-down directives about how to behave. A 20-year-old Syrian young adult man from Zaatari camp reported that his relationship with his mother is very close, but then

Figure 14: Can talk to mother or father about dreams and aspirations for the future (by cohort and gender)



17 This question was not asked at baseline.

added that this mostly consisted of her telling him what to do: '*My mom guided me, advised me, told me what's right and what's wrong*.' A Syrian father from Azraq camp explained that this is simply the nature of parent–child relationships in the Arab world: '*I am 59 years old and if our fathers were alive, they would solve all the problems for us even when we are at this age*.' Key informants observed that these parenting traditions tend to limit parent–child communication, as few parents – to quote the title of a well-known book – '*Talk so that children will listen and listen so that children will talk*' (Faber and Mazlish, 2012). One stated, '*The most prominent issues facing adolescents in society are parents not listening to their adolescent children and* [not] *talking to them*.' A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from an informal tented settlement, who never divulged to her mother the sexual harassment that she faced while working on a local farm, echoed that view. When asked what advice she would give parents of adolescent children, she replied, '*Pay attention to your children… I wished I could sit and talk with her* [the girl's mother].' Of respondents who did report genuine parent–child dialogue, several stated that parenting education courses had been important to developing this. Indeed, a 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from a host community singled out a course provided by a UNICEF-supported Makani ('My Space') centre (see Box 5) as having changed her mother's life, and therefore her own:

> *She started sitting with us and listening to our thoughts. I would like to thank everyone who supported my mother, especially Makani centre for their efforts with my mother, it was so useful for her and us.*

Nearly all respondents agreed that mothers are more supportive of young people's emotional needs than fathers, because caregiving is women's work and breadwinning is men's work. A 21-year-old Bani Murra young adult man explained that he feels more loved by his mother than his father: '*My mom is the one who provides everything for us. If I leave the house, she prays for me. And, for example, if I go far away, she keeps checking on me.*' A 24-year-old Palestinian young adult woman, when asked who in her life is most important to her, similarly replied, '*My mother is the closest person to me.*' A 17-year-old Jordanian adolescent boy clarified that he turns to his father for help with practical problems, but to his mother for emotional support: '*If I have any problems in the street or at school, I tell my father, but for other things that require affection, I tell my mother*.'

Box 5: Makani centres change lives

UNICEF-supported Makani ('My Space') (ماكاني) centres, which reach more than 100,000 children and adolescents each year, provide vulnerable young people and their families with an age-appropriate integrated package of services throughout the Kingdom of Jordan. Very young children (3–5 years) are offered courses to help prepare them for starting school. For school-aged children (6–13 years), centres offer learning support classes and community-based child protection support. For those in early adolescence (10–13 years), the programme provides courses in transferable life skills such as communication, critical thinking and negotiation. In mid-adolescence (14 years plus), the courses on offer are expanded to include financial and computer skills, and leadership opportunities. Makani centres also provide parenting education courses and make referrals to other services as needed.

At endline, virtually none of the young people in the GAGE sample reported that they were attending a Makani centre at the time of survey (fewer than 1%); but the majority (69%) of the endline sample had attended at some point. This was primarily because they had aged out – or, more accurately, because they felt they had aged out. That said, it was common for adolescents and young adults to recall previous engagement with Makani programming in glowing terms. A 19-year-old Syrian young adult man from an informal tented settlement summed it up: '*Everything about the programme was beautiful*.' Young people reported that Makani lessons had taught them how to make friends, how to talk to their parents, how to solve problems creatively, and to believe in themselves. They also reported that Makani facilitators had provided psychosocial support when they were afraid to approach their parents. A Syrian adolescent boy in a group discussion recalled, '*We learned how to discharge tension when you feel tension. We learned that if you have a problem, to think to find another solution*.' A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from Azraq camp stated that, '*You are not ashamed to talk to him* [the Makani facilitator]. *There may be things that I am ashamed to say if I want to talk to my father*.' Young females were especially likely to report that Makani programming had improved their lives, because many were allowed no other contact with peers. A 21-year-old Jordanian young adult woman recalled, '*I didn't meet people. I only saw my family and relatives. I didn't go out… so I liked going to see new people, meet the girls and see the young men and women studying together… Makani changed my life a lot*.' An 18-year-old Syrian young adult woman echoed this view, saying, '*It helped my mental health a lot*.'

Caregivers concurred that mother–child relationships tend to be closer than father–child relationships. A Syrian father from a host community admitted that he sends his children to their mother, because he is too tired to deal with their problems: '*I have pressures at work, and when I'm upset, I ask them to stay away from me. That's why they talk to their mother.*' A Syrian mother from Zaatari camp added that her husband not only discourages their children from speaking up, but hits them when they do: '*They talk in front of me, but not in front of their father… he doesn't give them a chance… to speak. They stay cautious… He hits them.*' (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b).

Despite widespread cultural preferences for sons over daughters, so strong that '*if their wife gives birth to a girl, they might want to divorce her*' (key informant, host community), respondents in qualitative research also tended to report that fathers are more likely to dote on their daughters than their sons. A Syrian father from an informal tented settlement stated that he treats his daughters more affectionately than his sons: 'I *spoil the girls in everything… but if my sons behave well, I do not praise them.*' A Palestinian mother, when asked if her husband treats their children differently because of their gender, replied, '*My husband doesn't differentiate between boys and girls. In fact, he loves the girls more.*' Young people also reported that some fathers disproportionately favour daughters over sons – praising girls and bringing them small trinkets and treats, while inculcating stoicism and independence in their sons on account of dominant gender norms whereby boys are socialised to be future protectors of sisters, wives and daughters. A 21-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community, whose father had taken a second wife explicitly because he wanted sons, explained that she and her sisters are treated better than her half-brothers, noting that, '*Although he wants boys, he prefers girls over boys.*'

A key theme to emerge about parent–child relationships at endline, as adolescents are approaching or have transitioned into young adulthood, is that while young females are too often denied any independence, and consequently feel incapable much of the time, young males are too often denied boundaries (by their mothers) and affection (by their fathers), and consequently feel unloved much of the time. Adults reported that gendered parenting begins in early childhood. A 23-year-old Syrian mother of three from Zaatari camp reported that although she leaves her sons with family, she is never separated from her daughter: '*My daughter stays with me… If I go out somewhere, I only take her, not the boys. She must always be with me wherever I go.*' A Jordanian key informant from a host community observed that it is not unusual to see very young boys (perhaps only seven or eight years old) playing in the neighbourhood without adult supervision. Respondents added that supervision of boys relaxes further as they grow up. A Palestinian mother stated, '*Parents don't pay attention to their sons. They just let them go out, stay out late, and come and go as they please.*' Mothers who reported that they allow their sons great physical freedom often explained that they do this to keep their sons emotionally close. A Syrian mother from Azraq camp stated that, '*I never pressure him because he would hate me. I need my son to always love me.*' Although most young males relish their freedom, a 22-year-old Jordanian young man observed that it comes at a cost, because when juxtaposed against the attention given to girls, boys feel unloved: '*Some parents give more attention to girls than to boys… This creates a lack – some boys feel neglected… Emotional neglect – it's mainly about emotional attention.*'

With the important caveat that older brothers can police their sisters' behaviour (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b) and use violence to ensure that they adhere to strict gender codes, many young people reported at endline that their siblings are important sources of emotional support and encouragement. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from an informal tented settlement explained that her siblings had made her feel better about herself: '*My siblings always told me you are a special girl, and you should become something in the future… They encouraged me to develop my skills and talents.*' A 21-year-old Palestinian young adult man similarly reported, referring to his academic skills, that, '*My sister always motivates me to become better.*' Young people added that sibling support becomes more important over the course of adolescence, when they have questions and need advice about topics they would prefer not to discuss with their parents. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult man from Zaatari camp explained: '*I used to speak up to my mother… I prefer to not speak up to my parents… I tell my secrets to my sister.*' Several young females noted that these closer relationships tend to be bounded by time, because as adolescent boys become young men and adolescent girls become young women, gender norms pull them apart. For example, a 24-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community explained that she and her brother had been very close until a few years ago, when her uncle told her brother, '*Be a man, don't listen to anything or take any opinion from your sister.*'

Some young people – disproportionately females – reported that schoolteachers can be an important source of psychosocial support. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from a host community explained that she felt seen and cared for by one of her teachers: '*My teacher changed my psychological status. Usually, when she knows that I am tired or something like this, she talks to me.*' A 21-year-old Bani Murra young adult man reported much the same, saying:

> *There was an assistant in the school… He knew my circumstances. I used to arrive at school all wet from rain, because we couldn't afford transportation… The assistant used to let me in to warm up next to the heater in his room first before entering school… He never let me enter school alone.*

Young females were especially likely to report support from teachers regarding exam stress. A 20-year-old Palestinian young adult woman recalled, of her time at school:

> *The teachers provided me with psychological support… They always told us not to be afraid of the Tawjihi exam, and that it would be a wonderful experience, and we were able to succeed. We felt comfortable when the teacher told us that, which motivated us to study more in order to get high marks.*

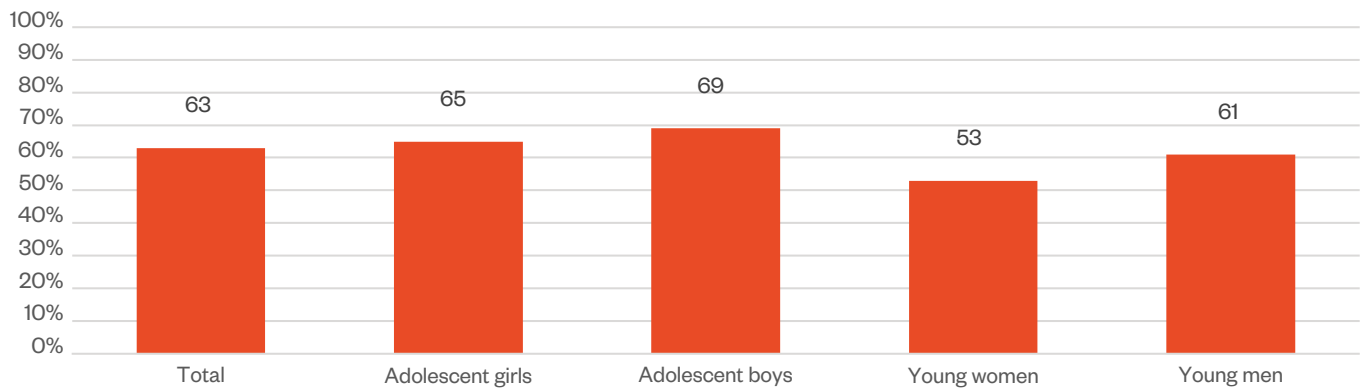
With the caveat that school-based 'social counsellors' are rare, they were also mentioned by some young people as sources of guidance and support. A 15-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from a host community reported that at his school, students approach teachers for help with academics, and counsellors for help with social situations: '*We go to the social counsellor in case of problems between students at school.*' A 17-year-old adolescent girl from Zaatari camp reported that the counsellor's remit at her school is much broader: '*She helps the girls a lot. She has a dedicated session where any girl can come to her for advice, ask questions, or get guidance on anything.*' Palestinian respondents reported less access to counsellors at school, particularly for adolescent boys. A father stated, '*I don't think there is a social guide in the boys' school, perhaps only in the girls' schools.*' A 16-year-old adolescent boy agreed that this had been the case, but then added that he had helped change that at his school: '*There's a counsellor in this school, but he only comes once a week… After I complained, he started coming every day. I reported it officially. I told them this school has no counsellor!*'

Support from peers

At endline, fewer than two-thirds (63%) of young people had a trusted friend (see Figure 15). Gender differences were significant; young males were more likely to report having a trusted friend than young females (66% versus 60%) (not shown). Cohort differences were also significant; adolescents (who were more likely to still be enrolled in school) ((Presler-Marshall et al., 2025) were more likely to report having a trusted friend than young adults (67% versus 57%) (not shown). Echoing patterns established above, cohort and gender differences are best jointly interpreted, as adolescent boys (69%) were most likely to have a friend, and young adult women (53%) were least likely. Nationality differences were not significant, except where they reflect young women's greater odds of marriage (see Box 6).

Of the young people who reported having a trusted friend, just under half (48%) had seen a friend in person in the past week (see Figure 17). Gender and cohort differences were significant – but only when examined in tandem. About two-thirds of adolescent boys (65%) and young adult men (66%) had seen a friend in person in the past week, compared to 33% of adolescent girls and only 28% of young adult women. As discussed in

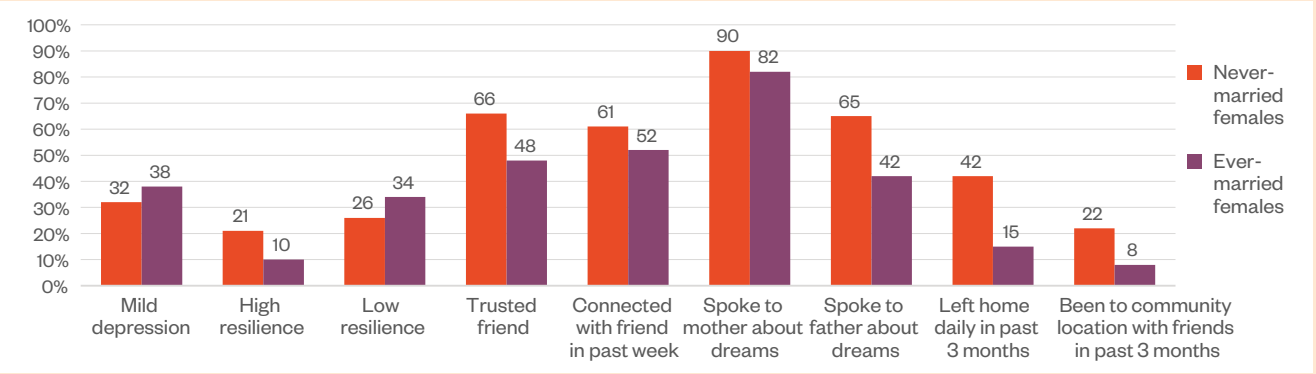
Figure 15: Has a trusted friend (by cohort and gender)



Box 6: Marriage limits young brides' access to support and increases their risk of depression

Endline research found that adolescent girls and young adult women who have been married generally fare worse in terms of psychosocial well-being than their peers who have never married. They are significantly more likely to be mildly depressed (38% versus 32%) and to have low resilience (34% versus 26%) (see Figure 16). They are also significantly less likely to have high resilience (10% versus 21%), to have a trusted friend (48% versus 66%), to have connected with a friend (either in person or virtually) in the past week (52% versus 61%), to be able to speak to their mother about their aspirations for the future (82% versus 90%), and to be able to speak to their father about their aspirations for the future (42% versus 65%). Their ability to spend time with friends is shaped by limits on their mobility. Although married young females are more likely to have a mobile phone than their unmarried peers (74% versus 58%) (because phones are often gifted by soon-to-be grooms to soon-to-be brides), ever-married young females are significantly less likely to have left home daily in the past three months (15% versus 42%) and to have 'hung out' with friends in a community location at least once in the past three months (8% versus 22%).

Figure 16: Psychosocial well-being indicators, by young females' marriage status

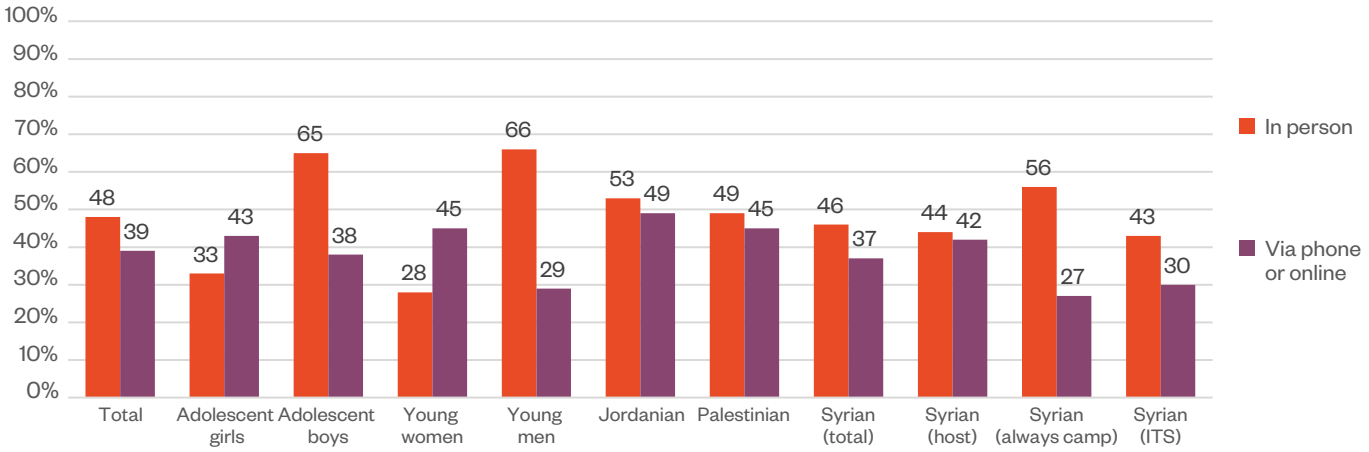


During qualitative interviews, nearly all respondents reported that young brides have no control over their own lives and only the most limited access to support from friends and family. A Jordanian mother reported that her daughter's husband had 'cancelled her university registration' and effectively imprisoned her at home. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from Zaatari camp stated that everything about his sister's life is under the control of her in-laws: '*She is restricted very much, the father-in-law controls everything, even her food, drink, dressing, going out.*' A 20-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community noted that her husband often prohibits her from even talking to her parents, '*He says, "You can't go out, you can't let anyone come to you, you can't go visit your family, sometimes you can't even talk to your family".*'

Alongside loss of agency and social support, young brides reported that 'marriage is all worry' (18-year-old Syrian young adult woman, informal tented settlement). Most observed that meeting their husband's expectations and managing their husband's demands is difficult, especially given the ever-present threat of violence (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b). A 20-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community stated that her husband had nearly killed her just for answering the phone while he was out: '*He beat me badly. He nearly killed me.*' Others noted that they are never able to relax, and remove hijabs and niqabs, even inside their own home, because of the presence of brothers-in-law. A 24-year-old Jordanian adult woman reported that she effectively lives '*in one room*' of her in-laws' home. Young brides added that motherhood increases stress exponentially, because they are exhausted by the emotional and physical needs of their children, and because they constantly worry about not being able to afford the food, diapers and medication that children require (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b). A 23-year-old young mother from Azraq camp stated of her life: '*I get stressed out too much.*'

Notably, it is uncommon for young brides to report that their husbands are a source of psychosocial support. Indeed, many young brides report that communication with their husbands is extremely limited. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community, who reported great distress about the war in Gaza, added that she cannot discuss it – or any other important topic – with her husband, '*Me and my husband? In the most important topics, we do not talk and discuss with each other….If we discuss together, we will quarrel….so we don't discuss, I tell him to play on his mobile.*' A 21-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Azraq reported even less communication: '*My husband doesn't talk to me at all.*'

Figure 17: Had connected with a friend in the past week, of those who reported having a friend (by cohort, gender and nationality/location)

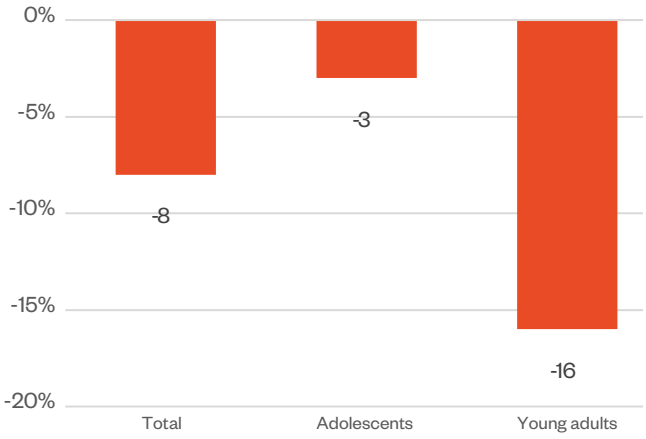


Box 6, young women's lower odds of seeing a friend in person were related to their higher odds of having been married. Nationality and (for Syrians) location differences also shaped young people's in-person access to friends. Syrians living in formal camps (56%), where interactions with non-Syrians are rare, were most likely to have seen a friend in person in the past week. Syrians living in host communities (44%) and informal tented settlements (43%) were least likely. Although disadvantages compound, and Syrian young adult women living in host communities (21%) and informal tented settlements (24%) were least likely to have seen a friend in person in the past week, nationality/location patterning also shapes adolescent boys' in-person access to friends. For example, Syrian adolescent boys living in host communities (56%) were far less likely to have seen a friend in person than their peers living in formal camps (77%).

In aggregate, just under two-fifths (39%) of the young people who reported having a friend had connected with a friend via phone or online in the past week (see Figure 17). For adolescents, gender differences were not significant (43% for adolescent girls versus38% for adolescent boys). This was not the case for young adults; young adult women (45%) were far more likely to have connected with a friend virtually in the past week than young adult men (29%). Nationality and location differences were also significant, with better-resourced Jordanians (49%) and Palestinians (45%) more likely to have used technology to connect with a friend in the past week than Syrians in all locations (37%).

Focusing on the panel sample, in aggregate, access to a trusted friend has fallen a significant 8 percentage points since baseline (see Figure 18). Access to a trusted friend for young adults (who are less likely to be enrolled in school

Figure 18: Change between baseline and endline in young people's access to a trusted friend (by cohort)



and are more likely to be married) has fallen far faster than for adolescents (16 percentage points versus 3 percentage points) (Presler Marshall et al., 2025a; Presler Marshall et al., 2025b).

Qualitative findings regarding peer support suggested that survey results may overstate the psychosocial support that young people provide one another. During in-depth interviews, young people – females and males – very often reported either that they do not have any friends or that they keep their 'friends' at a distance '*where their absence does not hurt me or their words affect me*' (20-year-old Syrian young adult woman in a host community). Most young people singled out leaving school as the primary reason they have no close friends. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community recalled, '*I had friends in school… We used to celebrate birthdays, cook, and things like that… Then we stopped.*' A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from a host community similarly

stated, '*I currently don't have any friends… I only had friends in school.*' Young people also, however, spoke at length about not trusting their peers with genuine friendship. A 21-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community reported that her single friend had betrayed her, saying, *'I didn't have any friends except one. Even when I told her my secret, she exposed it. So since then, I've kept my distance.*' A 16-year-old Bani Murra adolescent boy told almost the same story: '*I don't have any friends… I was once exploited by a guy… He was just ruining my relationship with other colleagues…That really disappointed me and I think it was the reason why I didn't like to have friends from my age anymore.*' A 17-year-old Palestinian adolescent boy was even more blunt, saying, *'I don't advise anyone to have friends… All of them are traitors*.'

Young people, and especially young males who were not yet old enough to be working full-time, did report frequent socialising with peers. Younger adolescent boys spoke at length about daily football matches; older adolescent boys and young adult men reported spending time with one another in cafés and hanging out in the market. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from Azraq camp stated that he plays with his friends every day: '*We play ball in the streets and other games too.*' A 25-year-old Jordanian young adult man reported that he also sees his friends regularly, stating that, '*I have friends… You can say about five or six close friends… We get together in the evening… Some of them nearly every day, and some of them once a week*.' Consistent with survey findings, young females, and especially those who are married, were much less likely than young males to report socialising in person, because many '*are never allowed out of the house*' (16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl, host community). When young females do get together, it is almost exclusively in a private home. For example, when asked what she does with her friends, a 25-year-old Palestinian young adult woman replied, '*I go to their parents' house and we talk and drink tea and juice together.*' A 27-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community similarly reported, '*Once a month… we sit together as girls*.'

Also, in line with survey findings, young females reported during qualitative interviews that access to communications technology supports access to peers. This is especially important because, as we discuss in more detail below, young females have more limited access to that technology than young males. Most adolescent girls and young adult women reported talking to their friends on the phone. A 23-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community reported that she and her friends talk for hours each week: '*We have a group call. Sometimes, the call length reaches to two hours while we are talking and chatting.*' With the caveat that young females' access to the internet is even more restricted than their access to phones – in part because of social norms and in part because of the very real and growing threat of cyber violence – adolescent girls and young adult women also reported maintaining and making friends online. A 26-year-old Jordanian young adult woman, for example, reported that she and her friends cook together over a video call. And a 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from an informal tented settlement stated that she had become close friends with a girl she met on Instagram:

> *She commented in early 2020 on a post, and I replied to her. Then she sent me a message. She is from Qaryat in Saudi Arabia, but her uncles used to come and go to Jordan. I've known her for four years… Our families got to know each other.*

Access to quality psychosocial services

Outside of family support and peer networks, the GAGE conceptual framework also considers young people's access to psychosocial services. During qualitative interviews, adult respondents often reported that dedicated mental health providers are not only rare in Jordan, but that services are extremely expensive (up to 70 JOD/session) and highly stigmatised. A key informant stated, '*These things* [mental health care] *are not widely available*.' Another added, '*In our conservative society, if you tell someone to visit a mental health clinic, they may react negatively, even violently*.' A Palestinian father admitted that when parents see that their children are highly stressed, they are more likely to 'resort to Quran memorisation centres' than seek out psychosocial support services.

That said, it was not uncommon for young respondents to report some awareness of – and in a small minority of cases even access to – psychosocial support services. These included not only informal sources such as Makani centres (see Box 5), which provide programming for young people and caregivers, but also semi-formal services provided by international NGOs such as the International Medical Corps, the Norwegian Refugee Council, and CARE. Adolescent girls and young adult women were especially likely to report engagement with these NGOs, many of which are working to reduce gender-based violence. A 24-year-old Syrian young adult woman from

Zaatari camp reported that she has not been afraid since she took a class during adolescence, saying, '*Makani had psychological support courses…They taught us how to express ourselves… how to set boundaries with people… I haven't been afraid since then because I was educated*.' A 20-year-old Palestinian young adult woman noted that a few NGOs even work inside girls' schools:

> *They used to hold many seminars on psychological support, children's rights, harassment and social media. Specialists in these topics would come to the school and give lectures to the students and raise awareness among the students… I feel that these lectures are a weapon… They work to strengthen the student's personality and strengthen their ability to think and make decisions.*

Despite its cost, some young females reported having accessed formal psychosocial support services. This has become more common in just the past few years, as the Covid-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on young people's mental health but also led to increased awareness about the importance of mental health. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Azraq camp explained, '*It* [seeking mental health care] *has become normal, not like before*.' Several young females reported that they have psychiatrists who provide them with medication (usually for depression); one young adult woman reported having accessed an online psychologist, and another reported having had therapy sessions while a hospital inpatient. The young females in question had either endured severe marital violence or been badly bullied by peers due to disability-related stigma. Several had attempted suicide.

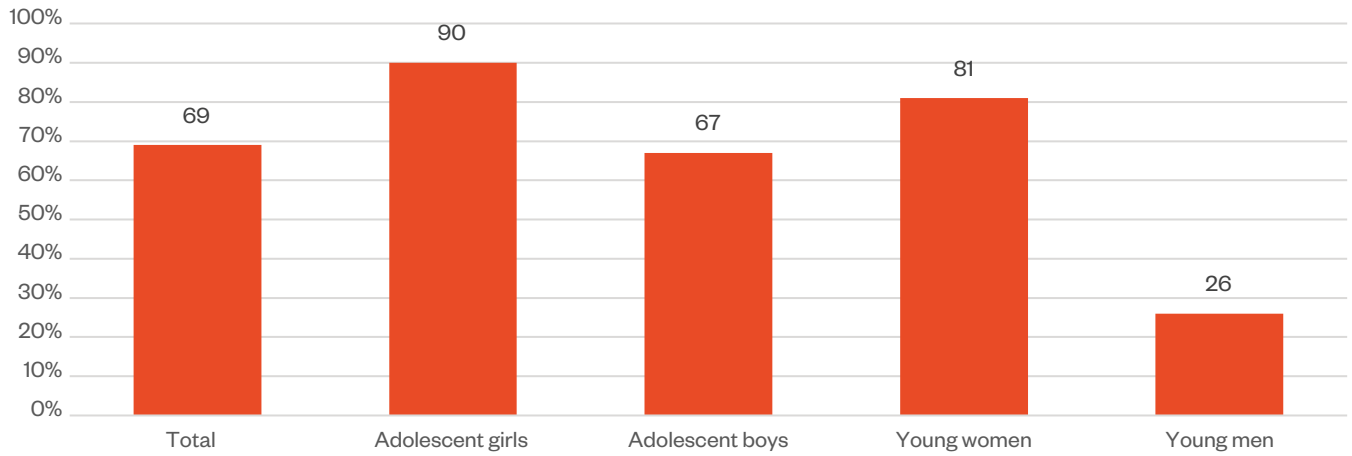
Physical mobility

A minority (31%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they can leave home without permission (see Figure 19). Gender and cohort differences were significant, and best jointly interpreted, as the gender gap grows across cohorts due to young adult men's improved autonomy compared to adolescent boys' autonomy, which is heavily shaped by their higher odds of marriage (see Box 7). Adolescent girls (90%) were 23 percentage points more likely than adolescent boys (67%) to report that they need permission to leave home. Young adult women (81%) were 55 percentage points more likely than young adult men (26%) to report the same.

The endline survey found that in aggregate, 54% of young people had left home at least daily in the past three months (see Figure 21). Gender differences were significant and grew across cohorts, in line with young adult women's greater odds of marriage compared to adolescent girls. Adolescent girls (42%) were half as likely to leave home daily as adolescent boys (77%); young adult women (21%) were a quarter as likely to leave home daily as young adult men (83%). For Syrians, location differences were significant, with Syrians living in formal camps (62%) the most likely to have left home daily (which explains their greater access to peers, described earlier), and those in informal tented settlements (40%) least likely to have. Palestinian young females (25%) and Syrian young females living in informal tented settlements (18%) were least likely to have left home regularly over the past three months.

Focusing on the panel sample, our data shows that young people's physical mobility has declined significantly since baseline. The proportion reporting that they had left

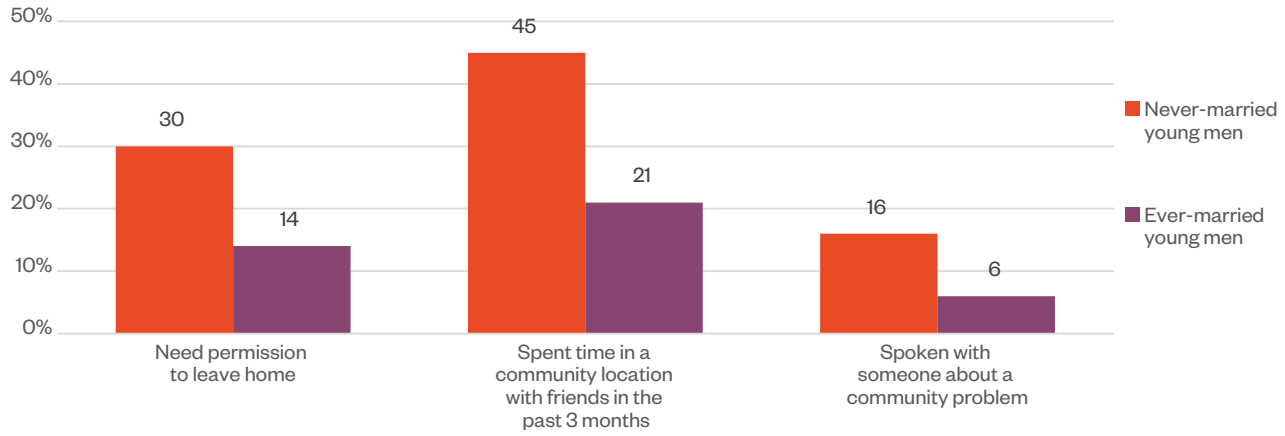
Figure 19: Needs permission to leave home (by cohort and gender)



Box 7: Marriage improves young men's autonomy – but at a cost

The endline survey – in line with previous GAGE research, which found that young adult men's parents use marriage as a way to make their sons grow up (see Presler-Marshall et al., 2020) – found that marriage greatly improves young adult men's autonomy, but also limits their recreational activities. About one-third (30%) of never-married young adult men reported that they need permission to leave home, compared with 14% for ever-married young adult men (see Figure 20). Ever-married young adult men, however, were less than half as likely as their never-married peers to have 'hung out' with friends in a public location such as a café (21% versus 45%) or to have spoken with someone about a serious community problem (6% versus 16%) – presumably because they were less likely to be hanging out chatting. Notably, while marriage limits young men's recreational activities, it does not significantly impact their access to support from family and friends. Ever-married and never-married young adult men were similarly likely to report having a trusted friend, to have connected with a friend in the past week, and to have a trusted adult in their lives. Marriage also does not impact young adult men's likelihood of being psychologically distressed, depressed, or anxious.

Figure 20: Indicators of autonomy and engagement, by young men's marital status



During qualitative interviews, however, married young adult men (all of whom were Syrian) explained that their greater autonomy has come at a significant cost – namely, responsibility to provide for their wives and children. A 22-year-old young adult man from Zaatari camp explained that household expenses add up: '*Every woman wants her needs and expenses… She wants diapers for the boy and milk for the boy.*' A 24-year-old man from an informal tented settlement shared the same view, noting that with a growing family to support, he would never dream of spending money on his own recreation: *'It needs money that I don't have. I mean, everything is related to money.*' A 24-year-old young adult man from Azraq camp reported that this is because, as a married father, children must come first, saying, '*Now I earned a dinar, so instead of going to play football for a dinar, my children come first.*' Notably, married young adult men did not report that they do not see friends – only that they do not see friends in community locations where costs might be incurred. Several young adult men stated that they instead visit their friends at home. A 23-year-old young adult man from Zaatari camp explained, of his friend, that, '*He invites me and hosts me… I sit for an hour or half an hour.*'

All the married young adult men in the GAGE qualitative sample reported that lack of work is a significant problem for them. A 21-year-old young adult man from Zaatari camp stated, '*I couldn't find work… Maybe every two months, maybe every three months, you work.*' Qualitative findings do not speak to why this is not reflected in survey results. Perhaps young adult men do not see youth unemployment as a significant community problem, but instead only a personal problem. Alternatively, perhaps they have given up discussing it with others, because it has become apparent that their concerns will not be met with action.

home each day for the past three months dropped from 75% at baseline to 54% at endline (see Figure 22). Declines for young males (7 percentage points) were significantly smaller than those for adolescent girls (36 percentage points) and young women (30 percentage points).

Some young people, disproportionately young females, rarely leave home. In aggregate, two-thirds (68%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they had been to the market at least once in the past 3 months (see Figure 23). Three-quarters (74%) had been to the home of a friend or relative. Gender differences, but not cohort differences, were highly significant, especially in terms of access to public markets. Young females were 21 percentage points less likely than young males to have been to the market at least once in the past 3 months (58% versus 79%), and 11 percentage points less likely to have been to the home of a friend or relative in the same timeframe (69% versus 80%). Nationality/location differences are smaller, although unsurprisingly (given the patterns described earlier), Syrian young people living in informal tented settlements are less likely than their age mates to have been to the market or to the home of a friend or relative.

Young people were less likely to report on the endline survey that they had 'hung out' with friends in a public location (such as a café or restaurant) at least once in the past 3 months; in aggregate, only 32% of young people had done so (see Figure 24). Gender and cohort patterning was markedly different from that of many other metrics, and captured both adolescent boys' autonomy, and their relative lack of responsibility. Adolescent boys (54%) were far more likely to hang out in a public location with a friend than young adult men (39%), in large part because young adult men had begun to marry and take on more family obligations. Adolescent girls (18%) and young adult women (16%) were both as unlikely to have hung out with a friend in a public location. Nationality/location differences were smaller, with Jordanians (45%) the most likely to have hung out with a friend in a public location (perhaps due to greater financial means), and Syrians in informal tented settlements (17%) least likely to have done so, likely reflecting lack of readily available spaces in rural areas.

Qualitative research highlights the extreme limits placed on the physical mobility of young females. Most need not only permission to leave the home, but are also prohibited

Figure 21: Proportion of young people who have left home daily for the past 3 months (by cohort, gender and nationality/location)

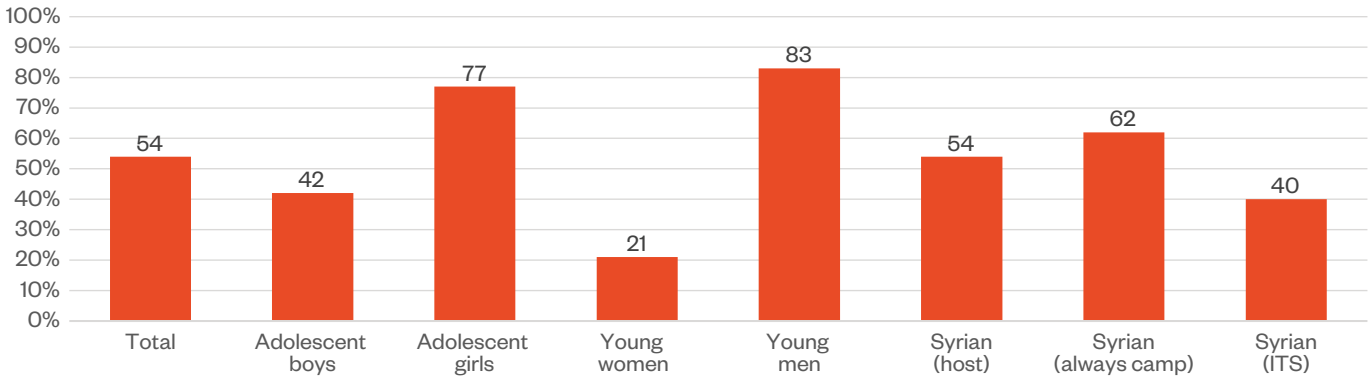


Figure 22: Proportion of young people who have left home daily for the past 3 months, over time (by cohort and gender)

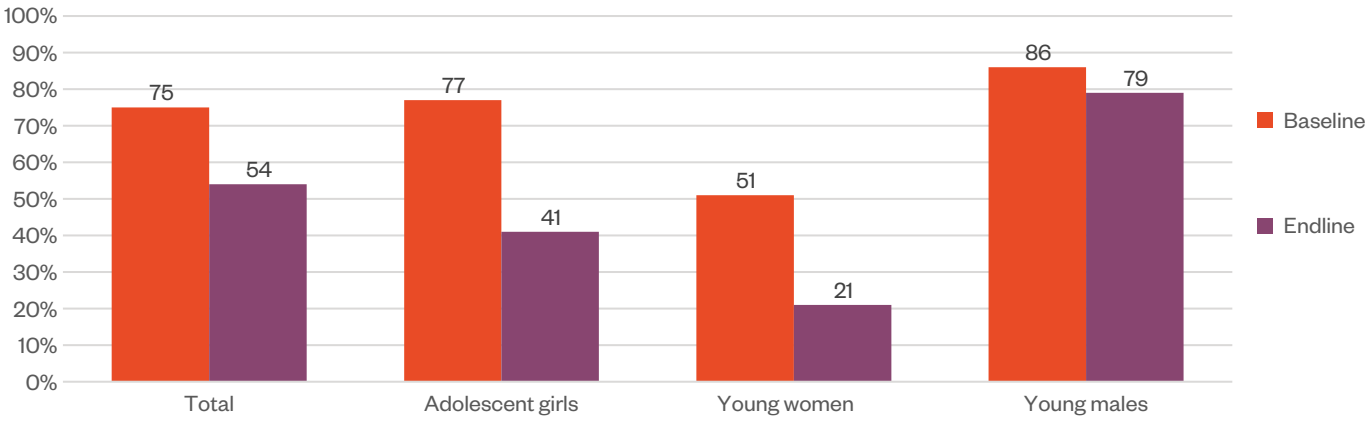


Figure 23: Proportion of young people who have been to the market or the home of a friend or relative in the past 3 months (by gender)

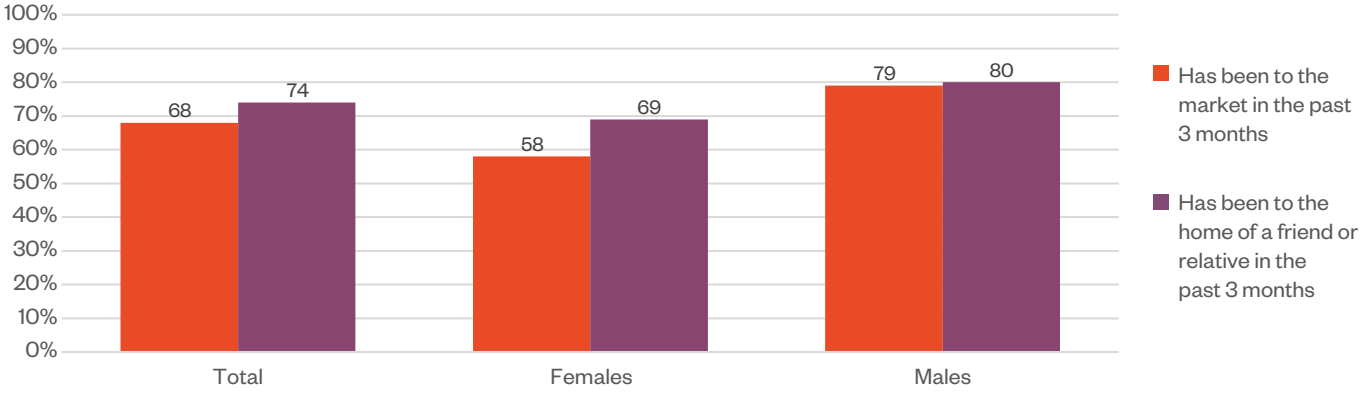
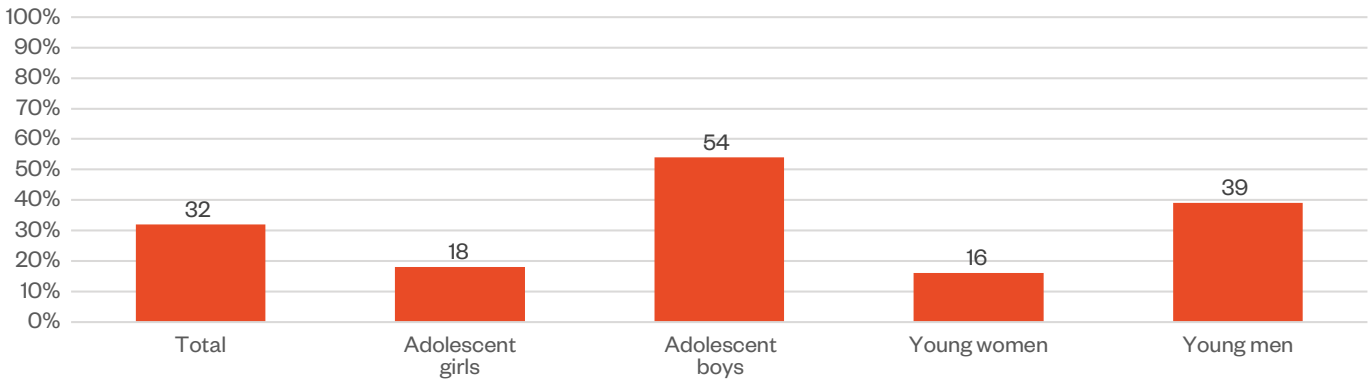


Figure 24: Proportion of young people who had 'hung out' with a friend in a public location in the past 3 months (by cohort and gender)



from doing so unless they are accompanied by a family member. A Jordanian mother, who allows her son to make multi-day visits to friends, stated that her daughter is limited to just a few hours outside the home: '*It's impossible for me to allow my daughter to sleep outside the house or to stay out for five hours.*' A 25-year-old Palestinian young adult woman reported that if she leaves home, she must have a chaperone: '*I do not leave the house alone.*' A Syrian mother from a host community admitted that her daughter is only rarely allowed outside, saying, '*She goes once every two or three months for an hour or two, her brother takes her.*' A Syrian father from Zaatari camp explained that mobility restrictions aim to protect girls' (and families') reputations by preventing sexual harassment and providing girls with no opportunities to violate expectations about feminine behaviour: '*If the girl goes out alone, no, by God, there is no security for her… and people will talk.*' Although most young females chafe against being confined to the home, and remember the freedom of their earlier childhood years ('*playing in the neighbourhood was the best time in my life*', said one 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from Zaatari camp), some young females reported that they are happy to stay home all the time. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community, when asked what was the best thing about being a girl, replied, '*That I get to stay at home.*' A Bani Murra father noted that parents often try to cultivate girls' distaste for – and fear of – the outside world, because it reduces parent–daughter conflict:

> *If I leave my daughter at home now and she stays for the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh year, and when she reaches the age that I am afraid of, I may come and tell her to go out, and she will say to me, "No, by God, I do not like to go out. I am used to staying at home".*

Young males, on the other hand, rarely face significant restrictions on their physical mobility. Although most young males reported on the survey that they need permission to leave home, qualitative data suggests this generally consists of them informing their parents (usually their mother) that they are leaving. An 18-year-old Jordanian young adult man stated that he can leave home whenever he likes: '*I'm a man, and I can go and return on my own and manage my affairs.*' A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from Azraq camp, when asked what was the best thing about being a male, replied, '*That I can enter and exit as I please.*' Caregivers admitted that limits on boys'

mobility are rare; several added that their greatest regret about parenting sons through adolescence is that they had not asked enough questions about where their sons were going, and with whom. A Jordanian mother explained, '*I say that if I go back to raising my sons, I want to change everything and not make them out of the house without knowing where they are going*.' A Palestinian father clarified that boys' freedom can be dangerous, saying, '*Boys have more freedom… He can go to places that aren't suitable, maybe he will go with boys who use drugs*.'

Digital mobility

The endline survey also queried young people about their digital mobility. In aggregate, nearly three-quarters (73%) of young people reported on the endline survey that they have a device (such as a phone, laptop or tablet) for their own use (see Figure 25). Young females were less likely to have a device than young males (65% versus 82%); and adolescents were less likely to have a device than young adults (64% versus 84%) (not shown). Adolescent girls (55%) were least likely to have a personal device, while young adult men (91%) were most likely to. Jordanians (80%) were more likely to have a device than Syrians (72%) or Palestinians (71%), presumably because they were better able to afford them.

Young people's access to mobile phones has improved significantly since baseline. Within the panel sample, mobile phone use climbed from 32% at baseline, to 48% at midline, to 71% at endline (see Figure 26). Adolescent girls (13% to 53%) and boys (20% to 72%) saw the largest increases in access to mobile phones over time. Young adult men, whose access was already good at baseline, saw the smallest increase (72% to 92%).

With the caveat that a growing number of young females do have relatively unfettered access to online spaces (see Box 8), they are more restricted in accessing digital spaces than their male counterparts – again due to caregivers' concerns about young females' honour and family honour. Some adolescent girls and young adult women, disproportionately those who are unmarried

Figure 25: Proportion of young people with a device for their own use (by cohort and gender)

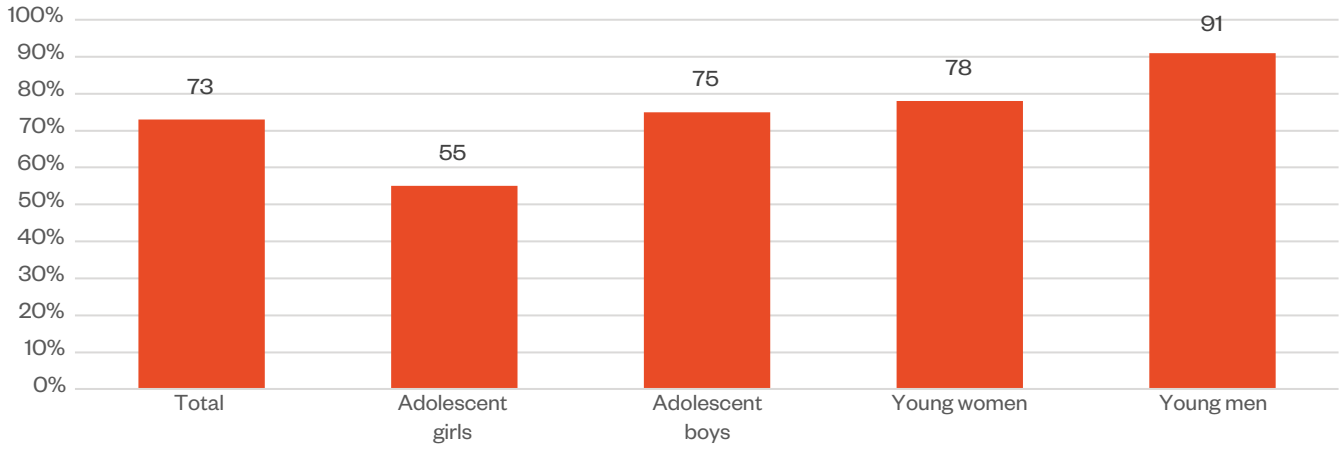
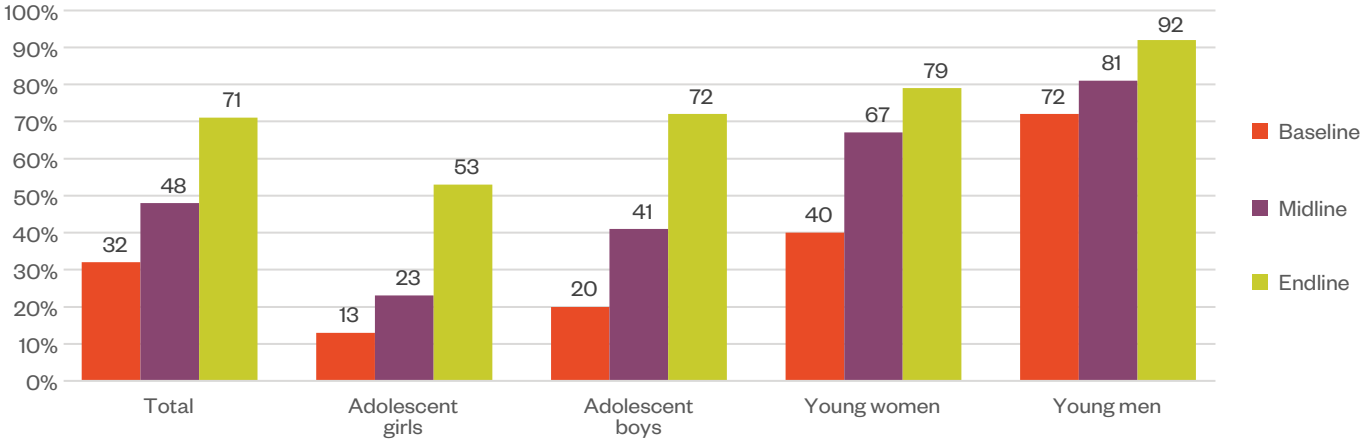


Figure 26: Proportion of young people with a mobile phone for personal use, over time (by cohort and gender)



Box 8: Young people's online lives

Respondents reported that young people's access to online spaces has grown exponentially in recent years. This is largely, they agreed, a knock-on impact of Jordan's lengthy reliance on online education during the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to a proliferation of devices and a loosening of restrictions. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from an informal tented settlement explained, '*Everyone has their own phone now*.'

Young females reported using social media apps to connect with peers and family, but also to access information and engage with the world. They watch videos to learn to sew and cook, look up ways to lose weight and space their children, access online academic and religious instruction, and keep abreast of – and participate in – national and international events. A 17-year-old Jordanian adolescent girl reported that Telegram* provides the only uncensored source of news about Gaza: '*Telegram is the only application that downloads correct news about Gaza and does not erase them.*' A Syrian adolescent girl, the same age, also from a host community, noted that while she rarely leaves home, the internet allows her to engage with topics she cares about: '*They launched a hashtag called "Stop Violence Against Women" and I participated in it. There are many campaigns, all aiming for a better future, and I participated in all of them.*'

Young males also reported using the internet to connect with peers, including those from other countries, and to seek out and engage with information and ideas. This included not only help with mathematics, news about Gaza, and 'how-to' videos on auto-repair, but also pornography – because they '*wanted to know how babies are made*' (17-year-old Palestinian adolescent boy). That said, an important theme to emerge at endline is that young males are more likely than young females to *only* use the internet for recreation. Indeed, respondents agreed that most young males spend hours of their lives each day playing PUBG (a Battle Royale online game). A Syrian mother from an informal tented settlement said of her son, '*I swear, all he does is play*.'

* Telegram is a messaging app.

and from refugee communities, are not allowed to use phones (or the internet) at all. A 19-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community reported that in her family, no girl is allowed to have a phone before marriage: '*My father believes that girls shouldn't use phones until marriage… That's what my uncles think too*.' A 24-year-old Palestinian young adult woman reported the same, saying, '*Girls in our family are not allowed to have a mobile phone.*' Other young females (again, disproportionately unmarried refugees) are allowed access to the digital world, but are carefully monitored, usually by their mother. A Syrian mother from a host community explained, *'I have an eye on what she uses. I ask her, sometimes, to show me her phone, and I do an inspection campaign.*' Respondents added that when mothers are unable to monitor their daughters' digital footprint, because they are illiterate or lack the technological acumen to do so, older brothers usually assume that responsibility. A 21-year-old Palestinian young adult man stated of his sisters, '*They have limited access to the internet. I have installed an app on my phone* [to track their usage].'

Although a few parents reported that they refused to allow their sons unfettered online access, because '*there's bad sites… the phone has illegal things*' (Syrian father, Zaatari camp), by mid-adolescence, young males' digital mobility is largely limited only by whether they can afford a device, and how much airtime they can afford. Indeed, many young males admitted that they are online 'the whole day long' (16-year-old Syrian adolescent boy, Zaatari camp); that even when they are physically with friends and family, '*everyone is on his phone*' (23-year-old Syrian young adult man, Azraq camp); and that they bypass any parental controls by '*secretly downloading forbidden apps*' (19-year-old Syrian young adult man, Zaatari camp). Despite caregivers' concerns that '*phones were only made for our destruction*' (Palestinian father), several acknowledged that young males' constant use of technology plays an important role in keeping them safe (and explains why so many do not leave home despite having the option of doing so). A Syrian father from an informal tented settlement explained: *'It's better than him getting into trouble with others. He stays at home and plays games all day*.'

Decision-making

The endline survey included a module on young people's input into decisions about their own lives. More than half (of young people reported on the endline survey that they have 'a great deal of say' over who to befriend (62%) and how to spend free time (58%) (see Figure 27). Gender and



A young Syrian adolescent refugee girl living in an informal tent settlement in Jordan © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

cohort differences are significant, and highlight young men's increased autonomy. Of adolescent girls and adolescent boys, 60% reported that they can choose who to befriend, and 57% reported that they can choose how to spend free time. Young adult women reported similarly (56% and 54%). Young men were more likely than all other groups to report that they can choose who to befriend (75%) and how to spend free time (70%). Nationality differences were smaller and primarily indicate that Palestinian young people have less input into decision-making over friendship (53%) and how to spend time (49%) than their Jordanian (60% and 59% respectively) and Syrian (63% and 60% respectively) peers. For Syrian young people, location differences were significant* for friendship: young people living in formal camps (66%), where interactions are almost entirely with other Syrians, were more likely to have a great deal of say over who to befriend than their peers in host communities (61%) (not shown).

Just over half of young people (57%) reported on the endline survey that they have 'a great deal of say' over their education (see Figure 28). Cohort and gender differences are significant, but must be interpreted together. Adolescent girls (60%) reported more say over education than adolescent boys (55%), who are often forced to leave school to work (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025ba, 2025c). The reverse is true for young adults; young adult men (68%) reported more say than young adult women (48%), most of whom are (or have been) married and have little control

Figure 27: Proportion of young people reporting 'a great deal of say' over day-to-day decisions (by cohort, gender and nationality)

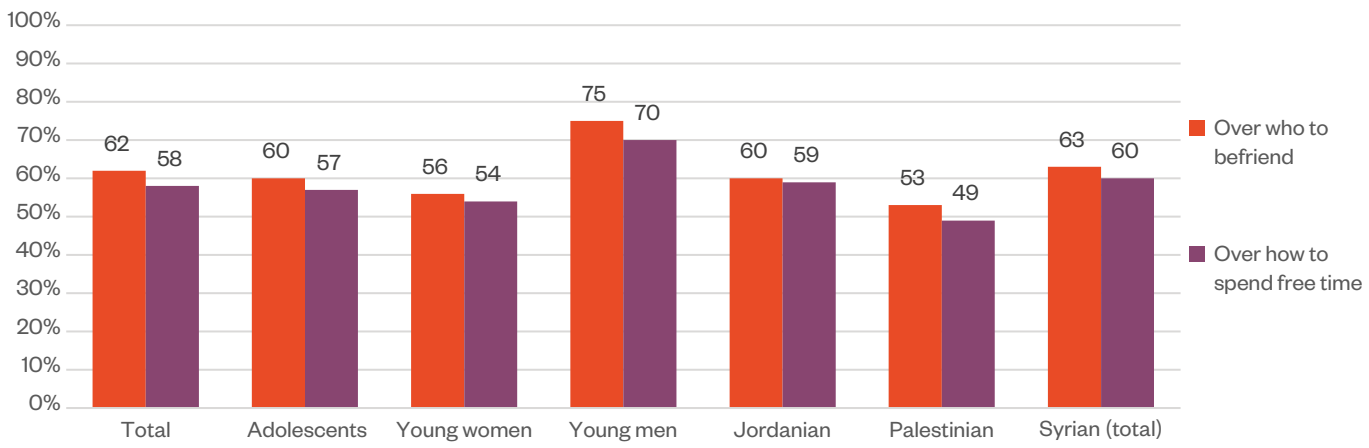
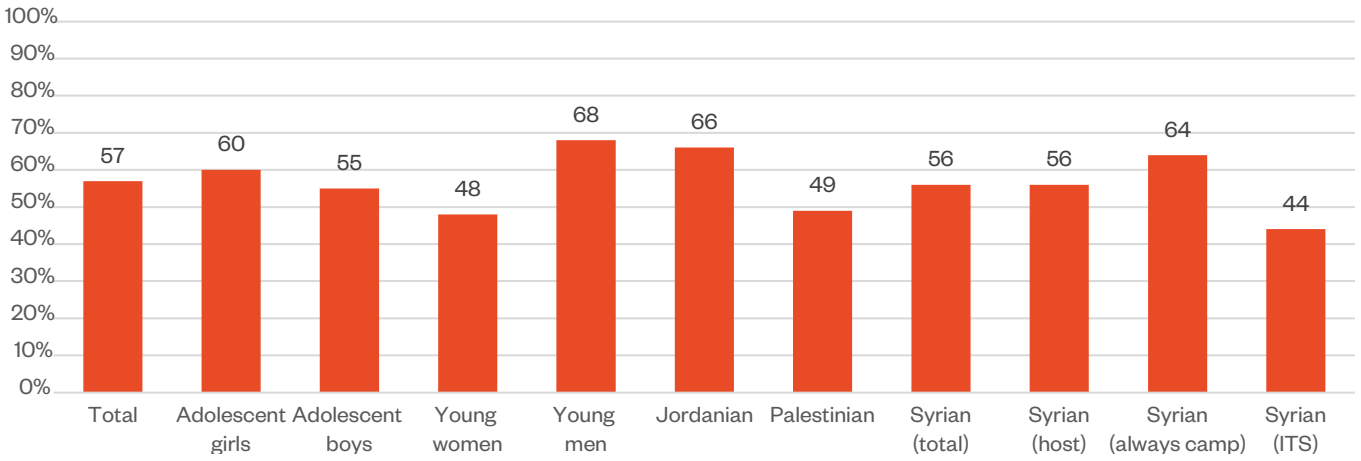


Figure 28: Proportion of young people reporting 'a great deal of say' over their education (by cohort, gender and nationality)

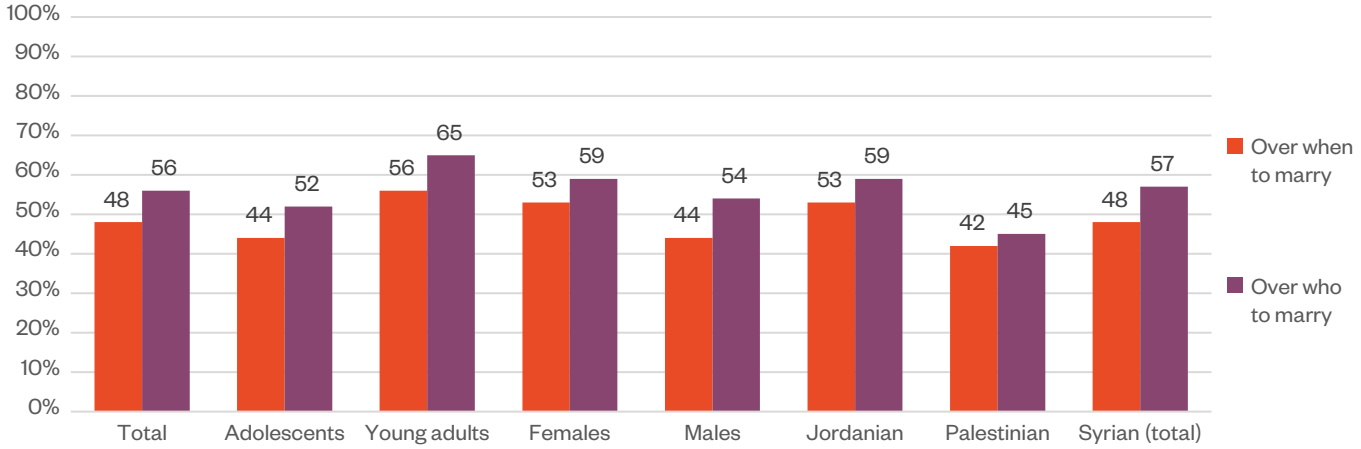


over their own lives (see Box 6). Nationality and location differences were also significant, with Jordanians (66%) – who are better resourced and less at risk of child marriage – reporting more say than Syrians (56%) or Palestinians (49%). Syrians living in formal camps (64%), where child labour is less common because jobs are scarcer, reported more say than their peers in host communities (56%) and informal tented settlements (44%).

Approximately half of unmarried young people reported that they have 'a great deal of say' over when (48%) and who (56%) they will marry (see Figure 29). Cohort differences are significant, with young adults more likely than adolescents to report a great deal of say into both when (56% versus 44% respectively) and who (65% versus 52% respectively) they will marry. Interestingly, gender differences are also significant – and favour females. Young females are more likely than young males to report that they have a great deal of say into when (53% versus 44% respectively) and who (59% versus 54% respectively) they will marry. Nationality differences are also significant. Syrians are the most likely to report a great deal of say into marriage decision-making; Palestinians are the least likely to.

In qualitative interviews, a minority of young people – disproportionately those who are relatively well-educated or male – reported that they are encouraged to set their own goals, make their own decisions, and speak their own mind. Some young people attributed their agency to their own personality. A 20-year-old Syrian young adult man from a host community, for example, stated, '*I am stubborn and don't get convinced easily*.' A 16-year-old Palestinian adolescent girl, when asked who had strengthened her personality, replied, '*No one, only me by myself*.' Most, however, acknowledged that their parents had set them on this path. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl (the first of her relatives to attend secondary school) explained, '*My mother likes to let me be a different girl in this family*.'

Figure 29: Proportion of unmarried young people reporting 'a great deal of say' over when and who to marry (by gender, cohort, and nationality)



Broader narratives suggest that a key difference between caregivers who encourage their children to become active agents in their own lives, versus those who do not, is their tolerance for risk. Unlike most parents, who believe '*the most important thing is that mistakes are not allowed*' (Syrian mother, Azraq camp), some are willing to let their children make – and learn from – mistakes. A Syrian mother from Zaatari camp explained that, '*God willing, I always try to make them have self-confidence… I give them a chance… Even if they make mistakes… There is no one who does not make mistakes*.' A Jordanian father shared that view:

> *The way you deal with your son… In how you treat him and talk to him… You're important… In my eyes, you're better than the whole world. Even if the whole world succeeds and you fail, but your failure came after trying and making an effort, then you're a success to me.*

Because of restrictive gender norms prevalent throughout the Middle East, and indeed codified into Jordanian law, the most self-confident young females are those whose parents do not see violating gender norms as 'mistakes' at all. A 16-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from a host community, who is a successful student as well as a budding artist, reported that she wants to prove to the world '*that the female is strong and brave*' and that she has been encouraged by her mother to do just that. When asked how she plans to achieve her goal of becoming an engineer, a Syrian adolescent girl the same age but from Zaatari camp similarly replied, '*I will never forget the role of my parents who give me the power*.'

Qualitative research suggests that disparities between young females' and young males' input into decision-making might be even starker than survey results indicate. Indeed, although most key informants reported that strict age hierarchies mean that many young people '*can't decide anything besides eating biscuits*' (key informant, Azraq camp) and that '*in the end, a teenager's decision-making is not in their hands*' (key informant, host community), this appears to be the case (at least in terms of day-to-day decision-making, including about what to eat, what to wear, and how to spend time) only for young females. Many mothers, especially refugee mothers, reported near total control over their daughters' lives. A Syrian mother from a host community stated, of her daughter, '*I would choose her friends for her*.' A Palestinian mother stated, of her daughter, '*I interfere with their clothes*.' Young females agreed. A 19-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community reported, '*Girls don't have the freedom to make any decisions*.'

Young females added that they rarely push back against the rules that shape their lives. A 23-year-old Jordanian young adult woman explained that such behaviour is almost unimaginable, saying, '*Of course, I cannot say no to what my parents say*.' Several caregivers, after observing that many girls do advocate for more independence in middle adolescence, reported that they work to ensure their daughters' compliance by convincing them that all restrictions are in their own best interest. A Syrian mother from a host community explained, '*Those ninth grade girls… they become "No, I don't want, no, I don't like this"…. until you convince her of the idea*.' Young females' broader narratives suggest this tactic is highly effective in making them feel they do have agency over their own lives. For example, several who reported resisting their parents' instance on wearing the hijab [head covering] then added that they had later adopted the niqab [head and face covering that leaves only the eyes exposed] or abaya [long dress that covers the entire body] on their own. As a 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Azraq camp explained, '*My mother didn't want us to wear niqabs… I wear the niqab so that I don't gain sin*.'

Boys and young men, on the other hand, while often admitting that '*when my father says stay, I stay; when my father says go, I go*' (18-year-old Syrian young adult man, Zaatari camp), usually reported that they feel largely free to make day-to-day decisions over their own lives. This is primarily (they noted) because their fathers are out working – and because young males have the option of simply leaving home if they disagree with their mother's decisions. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent boy from a host community stated, '*For example, if I want to drink soft drinks but my parents do not agree, I will drink without telling them that I will drink outside the home*.' Mothers, despite framing their sons' growing independence (and defiance) as a form of '*torture*' (Syrian mother, Azraq camp), largely admitted that they rarely interfere with the day-to-day decisions their sons make, because they see this independence as evidence that their sons are becoming men. A Syrian mother from Zaatari camp stated, '*He's independent now*.'

Qualitative research found that age hierarchies are very important in terms of young people's input into the major decisions that shape their lives, such as how much education to complete. With the caveat that young females are markedly disadvantaged compared with young males,



A 14-year-old Jordanian boy with a hearing disability, does not attend school © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

because boys are far more likely to want to leave school than girls, these hierarchies limit what boys and girls can do – albeit for gendered reasons. As noted earlier, respondents reported that girls, especially refugee girls, are regularly made to leave school to keep their reputation – and thereby family honour – safe. Some girls reported that they did not argue with their parents' decision. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl who left school after sixth grade explained, '*They did this for my benefit, to keep me safe, that's why they did it. They know more than me, that's why I accepted the ground reality.*' Other girls reported that they advocated to continue in school, but to no avail. A 25-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Zaatari camp, who left school after seventh grade, recalled: '*We fought a lot. I used to tell them I didn't want to leave school.*'

Adolescent boys, and especially adolescent refugee boys, are also made to leave school by their parents – for the reason of contributing to household finances (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025c). As with adolescent girls, some adolescent boys strenuously object to leaving school. A Syrian mother from a host community reported of her son, who left school in seventh grade, '*The older one tells me "I won't forgive you because you took me out of school!*"' Other boys observe their parents' struggle to make ends meet and take ownership of the decision to drop out. A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from an informal tented settlement recalled, '*My family didn't pressure me… I wanted to help my family.*' Ironically, when young women ask to be allowed to work, most are told no. A Palestinian mother reported:

> *She would like to work in a flower shop, she says that she would love to have the opportunity to work in a flower shop because she loves flowers very much and loves decoration… But I would not let her work.*

In stark contrast to survey findings, qualitative research also found that young people have only limited input into marriage decision-making (Presler-Marshall et al., 2025b). Young brides generally first reported that marriage had been their choice. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Zaatari camp, married to her cousin, stated: '*That was my choice.*' Respondents explained that the framing of 'choice' is due to the fact that females are explicitly asked by legal and religious authorities if they consent to marriage, in line with Islam's prohibition against forced marriage. A Syrian mother stated, '*By God! We are not strict or force the girl to marry as we want!*' That said, with only rare exceptions, broader narratives suggest that young females' input consists solely of agreeing to a specific match that has already been approved by their parents – and that parents work hard to convince their daughters to say yes. A Syrian father from an informal tented settlement explained, '*If someone came to engage my daughter and I find out… the house is good, and the young man is suitable for her, I give her to him… Of course, after asking about her opinion… I might convince her.*' A 17-year-old Palestinian girl, whose cousin recently married

at age 15, similarly reported, '*It was her family's decision. She is young... so they can convince her with a few words*.' The minority of young females who reported that they had tried to more actively input into marriage decision-making – by having a boyfriend formally approach their parents – usually admitted that this had failed and left them without recourse. A 19-year-old Jordanian young adult woman, who was denied permission to marry her boyfriend, stated, *'I do not object. Everything is up to my family.'*

Young males' input into marriage decision-making is also limited, albeit in different ways than for young females. On the one hand, young males have far greater input than young females do; few are pushed into marriage before they are ready, and some choose their own bride. A Syrian father from Zaatari camp explained:

> *The family's role is that he chooses the girl, and if he comes to his mother or father and says, 'I want the daughter of so-and-so', if the family is suitable and respectable, then we say, 'Alright, we'll propose for you'.*

On the other hand, parents appear to have unilateral veto rights over any potential partner, tearing some young males apart from their girlfriends and forcing them to acquiesce – without even the ritual of consent – to a marriage they do not want. A Palestinian father stated:

> *My son can't just randomly choose any girl from the street. No. We have culture and traditions. We don't allow love and relationships.' A 21-year-old Syrian young adult man from an informal tented settlement, married at age 18 to a girl he did not want to marry, explained that he had capitulated to his parents' will: 'As long as I didn't marry the one I loved, it's whatever.*

Voice and participation

Nearly all young people (88%) reported on the endline survey that they feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer (see Figure 30). Cohort differences were not significant, but gender differences, although small, were. Interestingly, young females (90%) were more likely to feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer than young males (86%). Nationality differences again highlight Palestinian (82%) young people's disadvantage compared to their Jordanian and Syrian peers (89%). This disadvantage is entirely driven by Palestinian males, only 73% of whom reported that they feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer – likely because of their growing risk of experiencing violence if they do so. It may also be capturing a growing sense of voicelessness in response to the genocide in Gaza, as there were significant declines among Palestinian male respondents between baseline, midline and endline data

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of young people also reported that they feel comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person (see Figure 31). Gender and nationality/location differences were not significant, but cohort differences were. Surprisingly, there was not a major difference between young adults (77%) and young adolescents (71%) in terms of reporting feeling comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person. However, qualitative research revealed that this confidence did not necessarily extend to expressing views around major life decisions, as highlighted by interviews regarding decision-making on the return to Syria following the fall of the Assad regime in late December 2024 (see Box 9).

Figure 30: Proportion of young people who feel comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer (by gender and nationality)

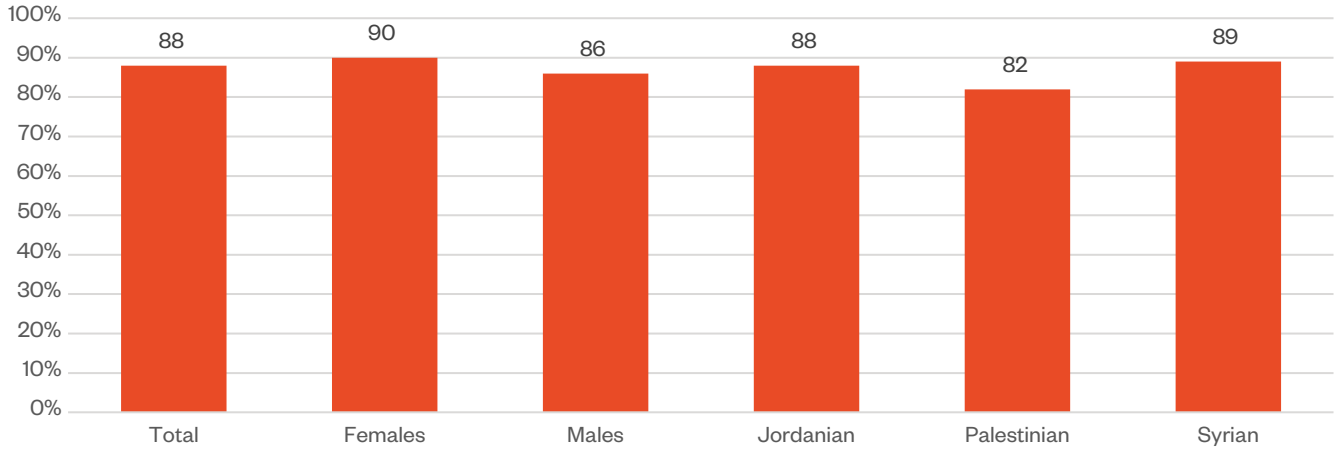
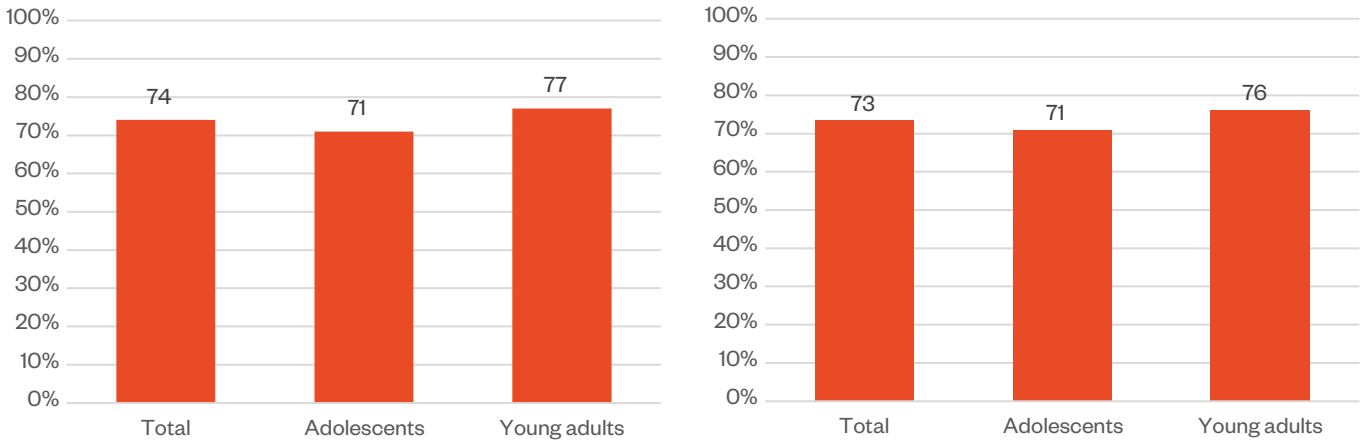


Figure 31: Proportion of young people who feel comfortable expressing an opinion to an older person (by cohort)



Box 9: Refugee youth involvement in decision-making around the return to Syria

The removal of Bashar Al-Assad after 24 years in power and the concomitant end of 13 years of violent civil conflict in Syria has generated new questions about the futures of more than 6 million Syrian refugees who fled the country in the early 2010s. Many of these refugees are young people, who have spent the majority of their lives in displacement in neighbouring countries, including Jordan. GAGE undertook interviews with 60 young people aged 16-24 years who have been part of the longitudinal study and 30 of their caregivers in early 2025 to explore narratives about decision-making by young Syrian refugees and their families as to whether to return to Syria, remain in host countries, or seek alternative pathways such as resettlement or onward migration (see Pincock et al, 2025). These interviews highlighted that their initial rejoicing around the overthrow of Assad's brutal regime notwithstanding, many young people had ambivalent feelings about returning to Syria. As a 22-year-old young man living in a host community noted: "*Of course we were happy, naturally. But personally, I didn't live in Syria for long. I came here when I was 10 years old, so I don't really know…*". This was especially the case with adolescent girls and young women. A 17-year-old girl, who had left Syria at the age of 6, described feeling pleased that the regime had fallen, but on behalf of Syrians who had remained in Syria rather than feeling joy herself:

> *"Honestly, you feel like it's a nice thing, like you should be happy, but the happiness doesn't feel like it's yours. But since I was raised here, grew up here, lived my childhood here… So… how can I say it? I was happy, yes, but I didn't feel like that joy was mine. I was happy for the people over there* [in Syria]*."*

However, many families were planning to return and young people's complicated emotions were not deemed to be a key factor in household decision-making. One Syrian refugee mother of adolescent sons and daughters living in a host community in Amman noted for example:

> *"My daughters and I sit and talk about coming back….And my son also says no to travelling…he will come back if things improve and he has work and there's security… But we* [my husband and I] *want to go back to our country… But the final decision it will honestly be my husband's. As my husband wants".*

Another caregiver noted that she would be unable to force her twenty-year old son to return but that she would compel her younger adolescent son and if her daughter had been unmarried but a legal adult she would not have allowed her to stay in Jordan:

> *"What should I discuss with them? Jobs? They say 'As you wish…Just as you brought us here, we will return as you wish". I don't force* [my son]*…He's twenty… but* [my younger son] *I will force him as he's young… and my daughter I don't force her, if she's married, of course…But if she's single, I won't leave her".*

Girls and young women in particular, however, emphasised that they were concerned about what return would mean for their futures given stricter gender norms around mobility and age of marriage in their communities back in Syria, and with likely restrictions on their ability to pursue higher education. A nineteen year old Syrian girl from a host community in Mafraq noted:

> *"Our goals are to graduate, study, fix our lives, live our lives –and then if God wills it, we'll think about* [marriage]*. But for now, no, not at all. So what's scary is that people… How do I explain it? They'll start talking about it. Like, 'Why isn't she married yet?' 'Why doesn't she get married?' …We no longer have the concept of early marriage at home* [in Jordan]*. But over there, they're all married young".*

One-in-ten (10%) young people reported on the endline survey that they had ever taken part in youth centre programming (see Figure 32 and Box 10). Gender and (for Syrians) location differences were significant, but nationality differences were not. Adolescent boys (12%) were more likely to have participated than adolescent girls (8%). Of young adults, 10% had participated, with no differences by gender. Syrians living in formal camps, 19% of whom had taken part in youth centre programming, were more likely to have participated than their peers living in informal tented settlements (4%) and host communities (7%).

A small minority of young people (9%) reported that they had ever spoken with someone else about a serious community problem (see Figure 33). Cohort differences were not significant, but gender differences were. Young males were twice as likely as young females to have done so (13% versus 6%). Nationality differences were also significant and highlighted young Jordanians' greater voice compared with their Palestinian and Syrian peers. Young people were very unlikely (only 3%) to have acted with others to solve a serious community problem.

Only 19% of young people reported on the endline survey that politics are very important to them (see Figure 34). Indeed, nearly half (45%) reported that politics are irrelevant to a person like themselves. Gender and nationality differences were not significant, but cohort and (for Syrians) location differences were. Interestingly, adolescents were significantly more likely than young adults to report that politics are very important to them (22% versus 15%) and were less likely to report that politics are irrelevant (43% versus 48%). Syrian young people living in formal camps (23%) were the most likely to report that politics are very important; their peers living in host communities (17%) were the least. Syrians living in informal tented settlements (54%) were the most likely to report that politics are irrelevant.

Figure 32: Proportion of young people who ever participated in youth centre programming (by cohort, gender and nationality/location)

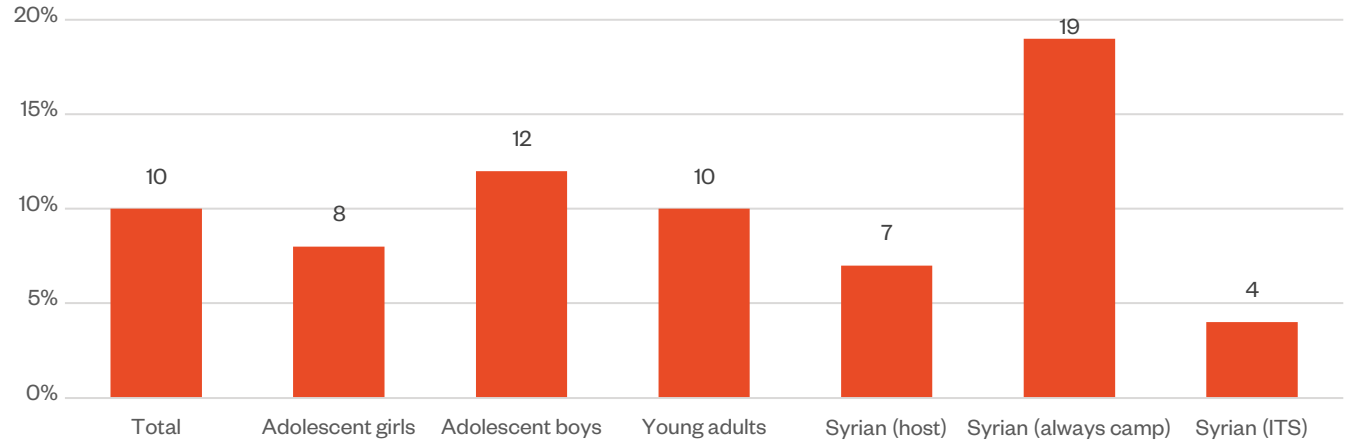
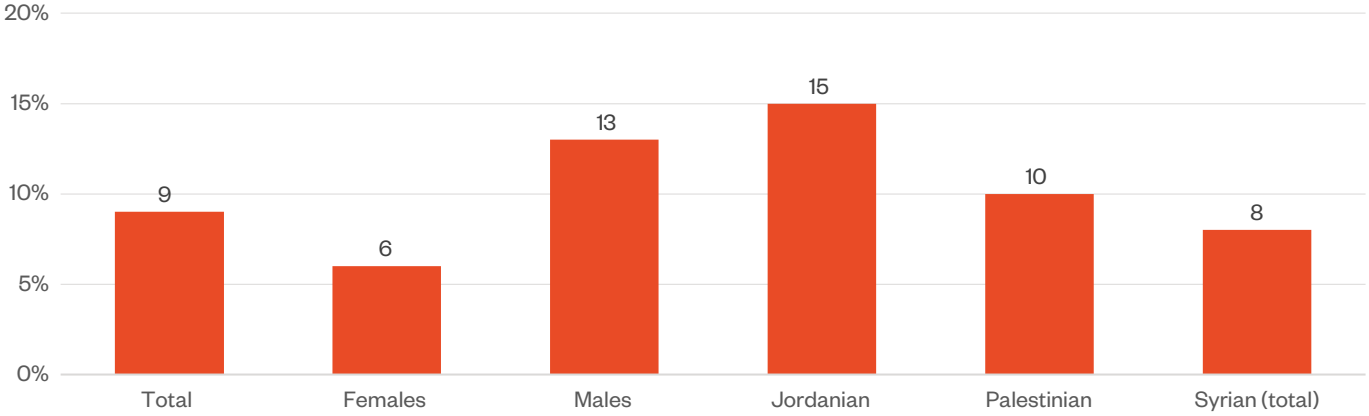


Figure 33: Ever spoken with others about a serious community problem (by gender and nationality)



Box 10: Opportunities at Youth Centres

The Ministry of Youth has established youth centres in all governorates, typically in larger urban centres, reaching tens of thousands of youth (15-24) across the country each year. Centres provide a safe space for young people to drop in and engage with peers—especially through community volunteer activities but also through sports in some locations. Although our findings highlight that there is considerable variation in which centres offer which courses, depending on external programme funding and staffing (e.g. from UNICEF or USAID), centres also provide a range of courses related to social innovation (problem solving to tackle social issues identified by young people), IT skills, communication and leadership skills, vocational training and career guidance. Programming is sex segregated, with different time slots open to male versus female young people.

Although only 10% of the young people surveyed in the GAGE sample reported having ever attended a youth centre, among those who have, 58% reported being enrolled in a youth empowerment of life skills class. The strongest centres foster long-term engagement. It was not uncommon for young people to report that they had initially taken part in activities as participants and then later became volunteer trainers for younger youth.

Qualitative research found that most Youth Centre participants are Jordanian. Furthermore, most are well educated, with at least a secondary—and often post-secondary—education. Respondents noted that better educated Jordanians are more likely to take part in Youth Centre programming because they have the time to do so if they are male (because they are less likely to be involved in income generating activities) or have permission to do so if they are female (due to fewer concerns about their mobility and honour). Respondents also noted that better educated Jordanians are more likely than others to be able to afford transport costs. Among those who attended, the feedback on the value of participation was very positive. Some focused on concrete skills that they learned, especially financial literacy. For example, a 16-year-old Jordanian boy from Zarqa noted:

The youth centre shows us things that motivate us, teaches us things about society and our lives….For example, from the life skills programme I learned how to deal with money. I benefitted a lot from learning about savings and how to use my personal allowance and that I can save a portion regularly for the future. I've really prioritised this.

Others, especially young men who had left secondary education, emphasised the value of opportunities to connect with peers in their community. A 20-year-old Jordanian man from Aljoun explained:

They talked about skills, communication… there was a kind of information that I felt was interactive. I felt like a real youth. I didn't feel like it was boring and I wanted to go….I liked that it gives you a chance to connect… At first, when I first entered these centres, I felt like I was nervous, and sitting on the edge of a chair. I didn't know what to say. Then, over time, you have the ability to talk to people. You get to know people… Some of the people I met during the programme started taking us to other programmes.

The most active participants emphasised the personal development potential of the volunteer opportunities that the centres offer. A 23-year-old Jordanian man from Jerash emphasised:

I joined [the Ministry of Youth programme] because I was looking for volunteer opportunities or opportunities to hone my skills… Such programmes develop your personality and make you an open person to the world and not a self-absorbed person… It's not just me who doesn't only want to learn about physics equations - there are other aspects of life that you have to keep up with. I've become a regular participant…I've taken part in programmes that look at financial issues, economic issues, languages, political empowerment.

Youth trainers who took part in qualitative research reported several deficits. One mentioned overly bureaucratic rules relating to budget—and underpayment of trainers. He stated:

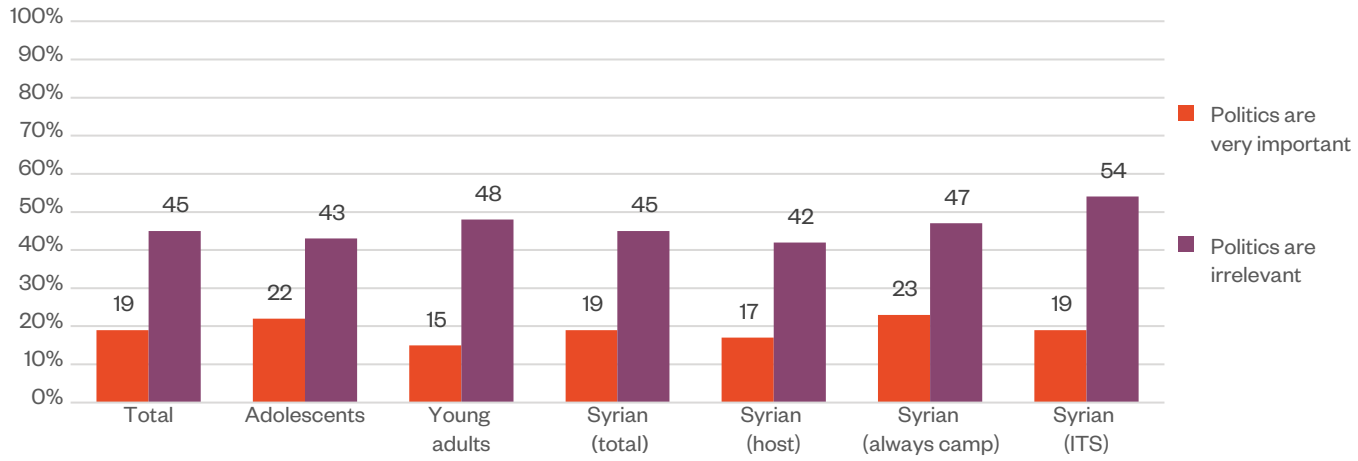
They give me a large budget—around 4,000—but when it comes to actual implementation, there are a lot of restrictions. For example, if my activity is a training course, they only cover one-time transportation for the participant, no matter how many days the course lasts….Also, trainers are not paid properly. A trainer who gets 20-25 dinars is treated the same as someone who gets nothing.'

Another highlighted the MoY's use of temporary contracts and poorly spelled out job descriptions. He explained:

I was initially hired on a temporary contract. I've been working for [decades], but when I officially got employed, I had already been working for [multiple years]. The job descriptions exist in the Ministry of Youth, but they are not publicly shared. So even supervisors don't know their official responsibilities. I must figure it out for them… I try my best, but they constantly put us in unclear situations. There's nothing official to refer to.

Trainers' concerns about budgets and amorphous job descriptions have knock-on impacts on programming that are evident to young participants. One young man reflected, '*Some centres have cooperative staff, but in our centre, the attitude is "I don't want to work beyond my hours. My job is just what happens during my shift".*'

Figure 34: Young people's opinions about politics (by cohort and nationality/location)



Despite many young people reporting that politics are irrelevant to a person such as themselves, just over half (51%) of eligible citizens (with no gender or cohort differences) reported that they had voted in the most recent election – and 41% of refugees reported that if they had been eligible, they would have voted. Of refugees, young males (45%) were significantly more likely to report that they would have voted than young females (38%). There were no differences between Syrians and Palestinians in terms of interest in voting.

Capturing another aspect of political engagement, in aggregate, 14% of young people reported that they had taken part in an in-person protest or demonstration in the past year (see Figure 35). Cohort differences were not significant, but gender, nationality, and location differences were. Young females (16%) were more likely to report having taken part in a protest than young males (12%). Palestinians (25%) and Jordanians (25%) were more likely to have protested than Syrians (10%) – and Syrians living in host communities (16%) were more likely to have protested than their peers living in formal camps and informal tented settlements (4%). Palestinian young females were the most likely to have taken part in an in-person protest in the past year (31%).

Just over one quarter (27%) of young people agreed, at least in part, with the statement that '*Women who participate in politics or leadership positions cannot also be good wives or mothers*' (see Figure 36). Gender and cohort differences were significant when considered jointly, with young males (41% not shown) more likely to adhere to conservative views than young females (15%) and the gender gap much larger for young adults (37 percentage points) than for adolescents (21 percentage points). Indeed, nearly half (48%) of young adult men reported that women cannot simultaneously be good wives and political leaders. Nationality differences were also significant, with Jordanians (23%) less likely to espouse conservative views than Syrians or Palestinians (28%).

Figure 35: Proportion of young people who had taken part in an in-person protest in the past year (by gender and nationality/location)

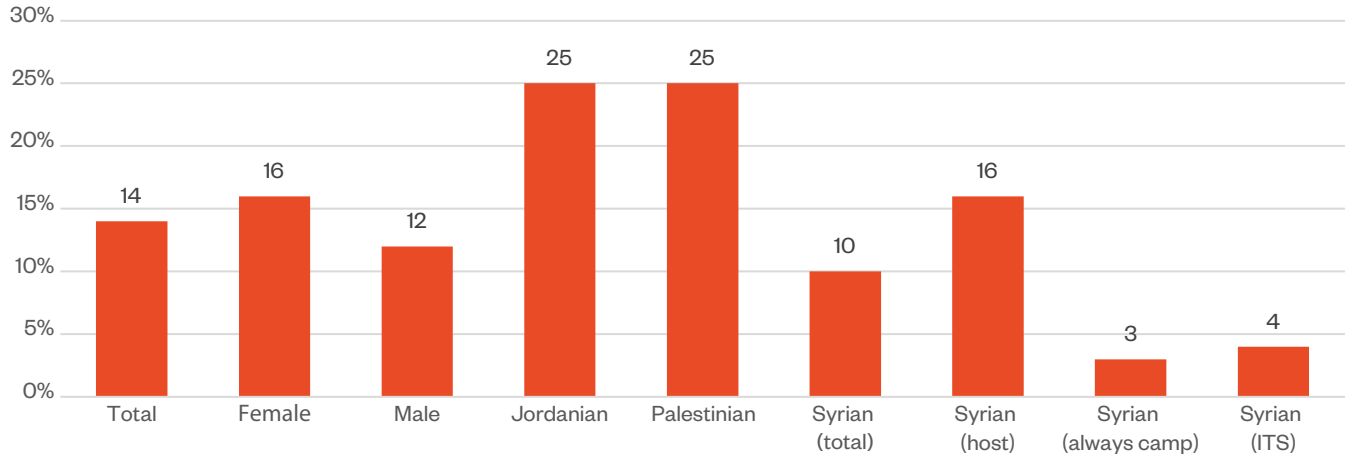
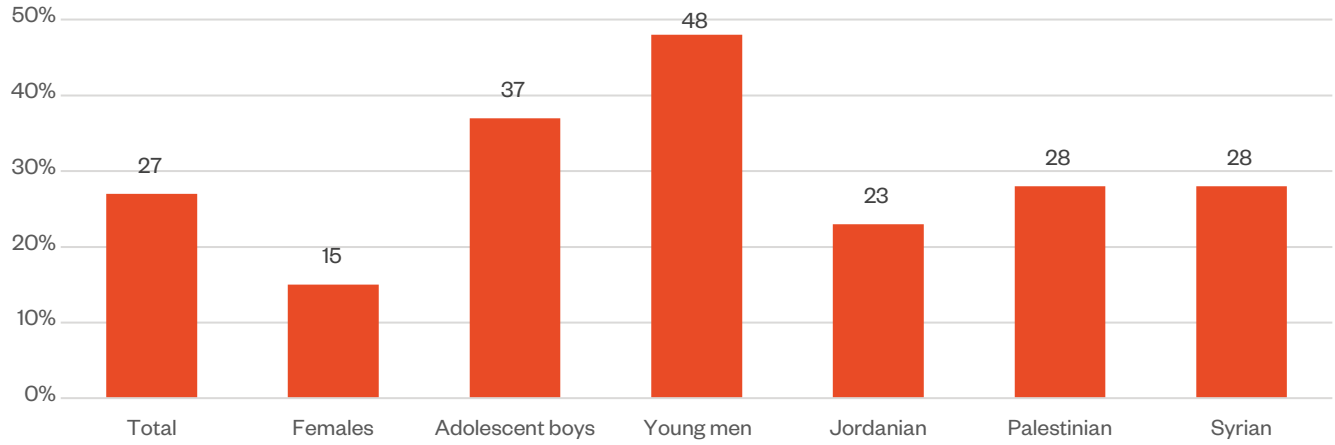


Figure 36: Proportion of young people who agree, at least in part, that 'Women who participate in politics or leadership positions cannot also be good wives or mothers' (by cohort, gender, and nationality)



Qualitative research found that young people have limited opportunities to contribute to their school community. Only Palestinian students, who attend schools run by UNRWA until the end of tenth grade, reported having taken part in sustained school-based programming designed to support young people's agency. A Palestinian mother stated that her son had benefited from participating in the school parliament when he was in seventh grade: '*He represented his classmates and voiced their needs… That really pushed him forward… He became more confident. Now he can speak up and debate with anyone.*' Syrian and Jordanian young people, most of whom attend (ed) double-shift schools, stated that such opportunities are precluded by short school sessions. That said, several did report that weekend and holiday initiatives to improve the school environment had been meaningful to them. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl from a host community explained that she especially loves planting flowers at school:

> *Our school… our yard is very beautiful. We always plant flowers in it… You feel that you have changed your mood away from home. You escape from your worries, problems, and the whole world.*

Young people, and especially young females, also have limited opportunities to participate in religious activities. Indeed, although many stated that religion is core to their identity and psychosocial well-being, most explained that they undertake religious study and prayer entirely on their own. A 24-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community stated, '*The strongest thing a person can have is their faith*'. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult man from Azraq camp shared that view, saying, '*I depend on religion for psychological comfort.*' Young males reported that they go to mosque on a regular basis, albeit usually only to '*pray and leave*' (16-year-old Palestinian adolescent boy). Young females, on the other hand, either reported that they do not go at all (because they are not allowed out of the house or because the mosque does not provide female-only spaces), or that they attend only during Ramadan. A 22-year-old Jordanian young adult woman explained, '*For women, there is no mosque.*'

Although older adolescents and young adults have limited opportunities to participate in religious activities, it was common for respondents to report that young people had been involved in Quran memorisation classes when they were younger. These were often remembered with great fondness. In some cases, young people's participation had ended because they had aged out. In other cases, it ended because centres started charging fees that families could not afford. A Palestinian mother added that the pandemic also took a toll:

> *My son was in Quran memorisation programmes since he was little… They also took them on trips… Once, they took them to the Dead Sea… He was really engaged with the mosque and the religious centre. Covid came and completely cut that off.*

Qualitative research found that there are very few opportunities for young people to contribute to their broader community, and that these few opportunities are declining over time. Young females are largely confined to their home, and volunteer initiatives are rare, especially since NGO budgets have been pared back in recent years. A 17-year-old Syrian adolescent girl in a group discussion explained, '*We were thinking of going out and creating a*

group of girls, boys and everyone… We would have loved to work like this group, but now there is no [financial] *support*.' Respondents agreed, however, that even ad-hoc opportunities to contribute (including cleaning the street, painting speed bumps, and providing evening meals during Ramadan) are beneficial to young people's sense of self and belonging. An 18-year-old Syrian young adult man from Azraq camp said that he was proud to help reduce accidents and happy to feel seen:

> *Once there was an initiative to paint the speed bumps in the camp… At that time there were accidents happening… but when there's paint on it, it reflects, and they know there's a bump here… After these initiatives, you're honoured in front of the people.*

A 21-year-old Jordanian young adult woman stated that she loves the feeling she gets when she helps distribute food to people who are hungry: '*It's fun, and with joy, you feel happy, you're making others happy. Every time you look at people's faces, you see them smiling at you and they feel happy*.'

In contrast to the survey findings, young people taking part in qualitative research reported that they feel almost entirely shut out of civic participation. For some, this is because they feel their opinions are not relevant. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult man from a host community, when asked if youth should participate in politics, replied, '*Older people are better because they have knowledge more than youth*.' Other young people explained that their lack of involvement is because they believe that the Jordanian government is not focused on young people's concerns. An 18-year-old Jordanian young adult woman explained:

> *People's voices don't matter. If the government truly considered the people's needs, the country would develop more – like reducing unemployment… Young people are frustrated with that. They protest, but it's pointless because nothing changes.*

For other young people – disproportionately citizens eligible to participate in the formal governance process – their lack of engagement was because they believe that the Jordanian electoral process is not democratic. Indeed, quite of few of those who had voted in the last election reported either that they had been forced to vote – or paid for their vote. A 25-year-old Jordanian young adult man stated, '*I participated in the last election… I was forced to vote. There is no method for us to vote freely, independently*.' A 19-year-old Bani Murra young adult woman recalled, '*The last election was the first time I voted. I voted for 20 lira. I actually don't know who I voted for… God forgive me*.' Syrian respondents, some of whom '*personally consider myself Jordanian*' (18-year-old Syrian young adult woman, host community), usually reported that they would



A young Syrian refugee woman doing laundry, ITS, Jordan © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025



An 18-year-old Jordanian student © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

very much like to engage in the formal political process, but are instead prohibited, by their parents, from even voicing political opinions. A 23-year-old Syrian young adult man from a host community stated, '*I would participate in the election… So as to choose the best, who will improve conditions… but I am not allowed to.*' A Syrian mother from Zaatari camp added: '*I always teach them – we don't want politics… we don't get involved in politics… Many people have gotten into trouble over one mistake.*'

Notably, although young respondents (especially females) are well aware that Jordan has one of the world's lowest rates of women's political representation, there is relatively little interest in change, outside of the young women studying at university. An 18-year-old Jordanian young adult woman stated that she saw little point to helping girls develop strong personalities:

> *As for women, they don't necessarily need to be in parliament… Young men entering parliament should have strong personalities and sharp opinions. Even if there are fights, they should be able to make their voices heard.*

A 19-year-old Bani Murra young adult woman was even more dismissive, saying, '*I prefer that women withdraw from politics. Men are smarter than women, we as women are reckless, we do everything without thinking. God has given more rights to men than to women.*'

Although it was common for young people – and their parents – to report that young people are prohibited from voicing their opinion on 'dangerous' topics, such as the war in Gaza, it was also common for young people to report burgeoning political awareness due to those very issues. A few young people, disproportionately Palestinian, reported taking part in organised protests supporting Gaza. A 21-year-old Palestinian young adult man explained that in the first months of the war, before the police cracked down, these protests attracted thousands:

> *We participated in many demonstrations that took place here in the camp to support our people in Gaza…. Young people, males, females, the elderly, and children participated in the demonstrations. Everyone participated in these demonstrations…Approximately 2000 people.*

Other young people, disproportionately Syrian, reported that the war had made them aware – often for the first time – of the ties between Arab cultures and the place of those cultures on the international stage. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from Azraq camp explained, '*There is no difference between us and Gaza… I have come to see the global outlook for us.*' In qualitative interviews, several young females clarified their engagement with protests. In interviews, they explained that due to mobility and safety restrictions, their participation was largely online. A 22-year-old Syrian young adult woman from a host community, when asked how she has supported Gaza, replied: '*We post "Oh God, support Palestine!*"'

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

GAGE endline research found that many young people living in Jordan are failing to thrive from a psychosocial perspective. More than one in twenty has contemplated suicide in the past two weeks, and many reported that they have no one on whom they can rely for emotional support. Although young people's distress has myriad antecedents – which vary by age, gender, and nationality – endline research suggests that the primary driver of distress is young people's limited control over their own lives and futures.

Using internationally validated tools, the endline survey found that symptoms of depression, anxiety and emotional distress are common among young people living in Jordan. Rates were higher for young adults than for adolescents and for young females than for young males. They were especially high for young people with disabilities. In qualitative interviews, young people attributed their mental health struggles to their growing recognition that they are unlikely to achieve the futures that they once imagined for themselves. Boys and young men, who often self-medicate with smoking and drugs because most are socialised to masculine stoicism, reported feeling crushed by expectations that they contribute to household income – in an environment where decent work is hard to come by. This was especially the case for refugees, for whom access to work is restricted by law. Girls and young women, again especially those who are refugees, reported that concerns about their 'honour', and how it reflects on their family, leaves them lonely and bored and unable to make even the simplest decisions about their own lives. Young people with disabilities noted that disability-related stigma limits their lives. Many reported that they are excluded and bullied by peers, and some reported that they are assumed incapable by the adults who ought to be their champions. Global events, especially the war in Gaza, are also engendering distress.

Although the majority of young people reported on the endline survey that they have access to adult support, and can talk to their parents about most things, qualitative research found that most parent-child relationships are bounded by generational hierarchies and that it is relatively uncommon for adolescents and young adults to engage in genuine dialogue with their caregivers. Indeed, because most caregivers – especially those who are refugees – are afraid of their children violating social norms, parent-child interactions regularly consist of top-down demands and



A 20-year-old engaged Turkman woman with her friend © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

instructions with few opportunities for young people to voice their own thoughts and feelings. Qualitative research found that gender norms shape parent-child relationships alongside generational hierarchies. Mothers are usually more emotionally involved in young people's lives than fathers, because of gender norms that position women as caregivers and men as breadwinners. That said, mothers tend to be far stricter with daughters than with sons, often serving as virtual jailers for the former while allowing the latter almost unrestricted freedom – while fathers tend to dote on daughters (especially when they are young) and provide sons with few signs of affection.

Endline findings on young people's access to peer support were similarly conflicted. On the survey, most reported that they had a trusted friend. Boys and young men were not only more likely to do so than girls and young women, but they were also more likely to have recently interacted with a friend – due to restrictions on young females' mobility, which tighten at puberty and then tighten again at marriage. In qualitative interviews, however, it was common for young people, males and females, to report that their peer relationships are bounded and tend more towards recreation than emotional support. This is largely due to concerns that peers will not respect confidentiality and indeed may spread rumours for their own gain. Notably, as young people grow up and leave school, even recreational access to peers has become less common. Unsurprisingly, this is especially the case for adolescent girls and young adult women.

Although there is growing awareness about the importance of mental health, primarily due to the dire impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, young people living in Jordan have extremely limited access to formal and semi-formal mental health services. This is due to costs, especially for non-citizens, but is also due to the stigma that surrounds mental ill-health. NGOs, including UNICEF-supported Makani centres, provide informal services to young people and their caregivers.

Quantitative and qualitative findings were well aligned in terms of young people's physical and digital mobility: gender is the determining factor. Restrictions on young males are looser than those on young females, and the gender gap grows as young people grow up, with those on boys further loosening as they become young men and those on girls further tightening as they become young women or marry. It was not uncommon for young females to report that they rarely leave home and that they never leave home without an escort – due to concerns about sexual harassment and how that might reflect on girls' (and families') honour and reputation. Young females' digital mobility – despite improvement over time – is similarly limited and monitored, by caregivers, older brothers, and husbands. Young males' access to online spaces is almost entirely unfettered, with caregivers – after noting that their sons are online too much – then sometimes adding that it is safer for their sons to be gaming on their phones than courting trouble on the streets.

Endline findings on young people's decision-making were conflicted, with qualitative research suggesting that they have far more limited input than the survey found. On the survey, most young people reported that they have considerable say into how to spend their time and whom to befriend, and even more into when and whom to marry. Young females, especially those who were married, generally agreed there are almost no decisions that they are allowed to independently make. They 'choose' – clothing, friends, and marriage partners – from a limited set of options curated by their parents (or marital families) and rarely demand more agency because gender norms demand females' subservience. Young males, on the other hand, face relatively few restrictions on their daily lives, as they are socialised to be independent. Most dress and do as they please. Young males' input into the decisions that shape their lives, including over when to leave school and when and whom to marry, however, is far less often their own – due to generational hierarchies that require them to bend their will to meet family needs.

The endline survey found that while most young people are comfortable expressing an opinion to a peer or an adult, few believe that politics are important and even fewer have ever spoken to someone else about a community problem. Qualitative research nuanced these findings and identified that it is rare for young people to have opportunities to express their opinions or participate in the community and polity. Classrooms are lecture-based and allow for little discussion, hands-on extra-curricular activities are uncommon, and volunteer opportunities – while they are very much enjoyed by the minority who have taken part, are rare. Although the war in Gaza has led to some political awakening, young refugees regularly reported that they are not allowed (or are too afraid) to speak out, and it was not uncommon for young citizens to report that they voted only because they were paid.

Based on our research, we suggest the following key policy and programmatic actions to ensure that young people living in Jordan have access to the supports



A 15-year-old Jordanian student © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

and opportunities they need to grow into well-adjusted, confident young adults who can articulate and achieve their own goals and contribute to their families and communities:

To help parents learn how to provide their children with better emotional support and more opportunities for feeling like active agents in their own lives

- Expand parenting education courses for mothers and fathers of adolescents. Courses should include non-violent discipline strategies, techniques for fostering open parent–child communication, and ways that parents can support their children to become emotionally resilient and capable of identifying and articulating their own goals and aspirations.
- Courses should address gender norms and how they impact girls' and boys' broader well-being by shaping both the opportunities open to them and the risks they face. Special efforts should be made to engage fathers about their modelling of tobacco use for their sons, to engage mothers about the importance of socialisation for their daughters (and daughters-in-law), and to ensure that parents understand that their obligations to their daughters do not end when girls marry.
- Courses could be delivered at Makani centres (with content integrated into UNICEF's Happy Home curriculum) and by other non-governmental and community-based organisations, at schools, and at mosques, with Sharia councils working to raise parents' awareness that tomorrow's healthy families depend on the physical and mental well-being of today's young people.
- Alongside this, address parents' mental health needs. The Ministry of Health and its international partners should work with NGOs, community-based organisations and mosques to ensure that parents have access to support groups that provide psychological first aid.
- There should be particular attention to the caregivers of young people with disabilities, given the added stress that disability can entail.

To improve young people's access to supportive peers and mentors

- Expand young people's access to the connections and content that support their immediate and longer-term psychosocial well-being.
- Leverage community centres run by the Ministry of Youth, as well as adolescent- and youth-focused programming provided by NGOs and community-based organisations, including UNICEF's Makani one-stop centres, to make safe spaces available to young


Street scenes © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

people, including those with disabilities. These should be spaces where they can interact with friends and caring adults, learn about their rights and how to report violence, discuss gender norms and how these shape their daily lives and future plans, and develop coping and broader life skills – including the importance of respecting friends' confidentiality.

- For girls and young women, these spaces should include activities that strengthen voice and agency.
- Boys and young men need opportunities to reframe masculine strength and learn how to reduce stress without turning to harmful coping strategies such as substance use.
- Given young people's currently high risk of emotional distress, service providers should be trained on how to recognise and refer adolescents who are most at risk.

To improve young people's access to quality psychosocial support services

- Raise public awareness of the importance of mental health. The Ministry of Health should invest in media campaigns that capitalise on the moment to destigmatise help-seeking and educate the public about the importance of good mental health and how to promote it.
- Step up investments in affordable formal and semi-formal psychosocial support services for the most traumatised adolescents and young people. Investments should build on the recent efforts of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health to provide services in schools and communities, and include (anonymous) helplines, app-based support, para-social workers recruited from Jordan's diverse communities, and referrals to professional therapists.
- Use schools as venues for addressing young people's mental health needs. Provide students with health education courses that address substance use and teach stress-reduction techniques. Ensure that all students have access to school counsellors who can refer them to more formal services if needed.
- Teachers need targeted training to develop their capacity to teach resilience, emotional intelligence and communication and negotiation skills. Courses should also provide teachers with tools and techniques to identify adolescents most in need of intervention and strengthen teachers' capacity to foster social inclusion. Decriminalise attempted suicide.

To ensure that married girls are not left behind

- Roll out programming for young wives that affords them opportunities to interact with peers and caring adults, and to access programming that helps them learn about their rights, including how to report violence.
- Alongside this, provide programming to engaged and recently married couples aimed at fostering communication and strengthening relationships, including addressing challenges linked to gender norms.
- Given young wives' experiences with violence, programme facilitators should be carefully trained in psychological first aid and referral pathways. Analogous programming is also needed for girls and young women who have been divorced.

Address the broader antecedents of young people's distress

- Scale up social protection. Where possible, government - and United Nations-funded programming should aim to simultaneously support vulnerable households and young people's access to education (e.g. with cash for education or transport stipends).
- Work to help young males understand existent labour market opportunities – so that they can make appropriate plans for education and training – and expand income generating opportunities, so that young people have access to education for longer (because their families can afford it) and so that young males can productively transition to manhood.
- Step up policing to prevent sexual harassment, fining and then jailing repeat offenders, and pair this with mass and social media campaigns aimed at growing awareness that sexual harassment is not girls' and women's fault.
- Continue efforts to prevent child marriage and ensure that young couples – especially young brides – understand the obligations of marriage.
- Work to build social cohesion, at mosques, in schools, through community-based programming, and using mass and social media campaigns, to reduce the marginalisation of refugees and those from the Bani Murra and Turkmen communities, as well as addressing the stigma that surrounds disability.

To provide young people with more opportunities to contribute to their communities

- Invest in teacher training on hands-on pedagogies that encourage dialectic learning and provide young people with opportunities to form and articulate opinions in the classroom. This would not only help strengthen young people's communication skills, but also likely improve Jordan's educational outcomes.
- Expand volunteer opportunities, making these gender segregated as necessary, so that young females have access, that allow young people to work together to improve their communities. These could be organised through schools, mosques, NGOs, or Youth Centres and should allow young people to input into identifying problems and solutions, not only carrying out work.



A young Jordanian woman leading a group discussion, Jordan © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2025

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Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a decade-long (2016-2026) longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit www.gage.odi.org for more information.

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