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Middle East Education, Research, and Training Support
SECONDARY SCHOOL TRANSITIONS STUDY

FINAL REPORT
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ACRONYMS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFID	Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled People's Organizations
EC	European Commission
EFE	Education for Employment
ESSP	Egypt STEM School Project
EU	European Union
GESI	Gender and Social Inclusion
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IT	Information Technology
IYF	International Youth Foundation
KAB	Know About Business
KII	Key Informant Interview
LESLA	Legislative Strengthening Activity
LSCE	Life Skills and Citizenship Education
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MEERS	Middle East Education Research, Training and Support
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLAY	Promotion Leadership and Activism of Youth
PTA	Parent Teacher Associations
PWY	Partnerships with Youth
PYD	Positive Youth Development
RQ	Research Question
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YDRC	Youth Development Resource Center

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

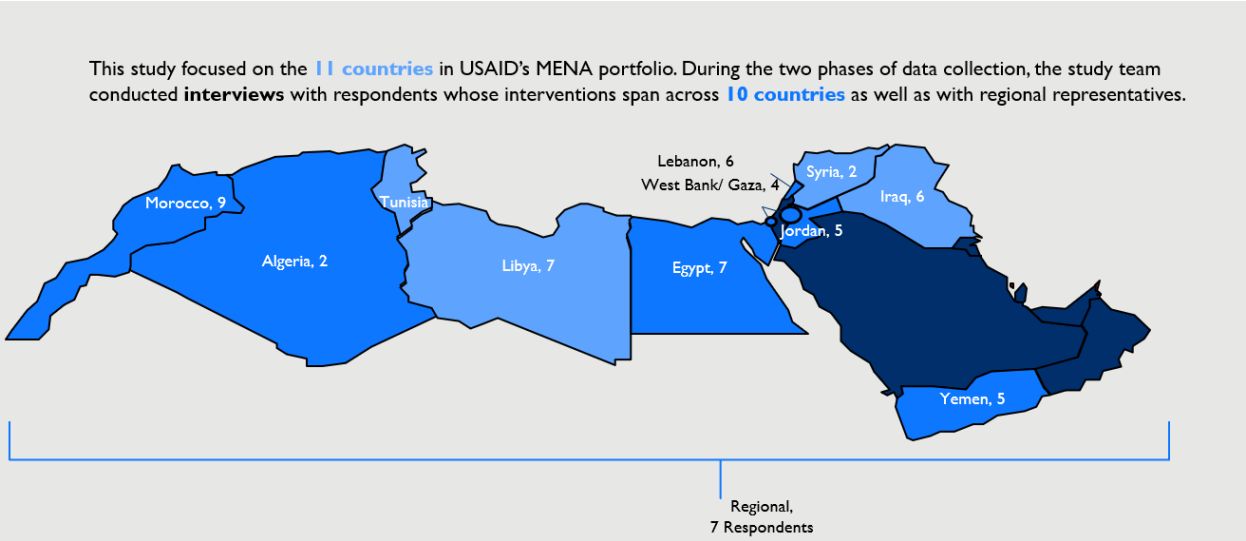
STUDY PURPOSE

The Secondary School Transitions Study was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Middle East Bureau and Missions throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in August of 2021. The aim was to investigate what has been done, and what is yet needed, to prepare secondary school-aged youth to transition into the workforce and/or continuing education. This study fills the **gap in research and understanding about interventions supporting secondary school-aged youth to navigate the critical formative years when schooling is no longer compulsory.** The study principally examined national career guidance efforts and interventions that aim to prepare youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to successfully transition into work or further education, and whether interventions were perceived to effectively set youth up for successful transitions. The study includes briefs of each of the 11 USAID MENA countries. Lessons learned and recommendations for USAID technical programming are presented to guide future efforts to support secondary school-aged youth in the region. USAID is the primary audience for this study, which is also intended to benefit ministries, donors, and organizations that support secondary school youth.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study examined four primary questions:

1. What secondary school-level interventions **support youth acquisition of knowledge** about their academic, technical education, and career/livelihood options? 1a. What demographic profiles of youth (including gender and disability) have **access** to these services?
2. How do interventions attempt to **assist in their acquisition of the necessary skills and abilities** to enable successful transitions? 2a. Are there lessons learned or examples of programming that are perceived to be most effective, and in what conditions?
3. In what ways do the variety of **stakeholders involved in secondary school level interventions support efforts to prepare youth** for transitions? What are the perceived outcomes and benefits of this support? 3a. What models of community stakeholder engagement are perceived to be most effective?
4. For interventions that have been either scaled to a national level or sustained past the original period of funding: What are the characteristics of these interventions?



LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY LEVEL TECHNICAL PROGRAMMING

The Study Team drew conclusions that led to lessons learned and related implications for secondary level technical programming. These are reported below, clustered within overarching themes that merit further consideration in programming for secondary school-aged youth in the MENA region.

RQ1 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 1—CAREER GUIDANCE

In comparison to best practices for national career guidance, young people in the MENA region are unlikely to be receiving high quality career guidance services at the secondary level. Some promising short- and medium-term interventions that include career guidance operate across the region, and generally target upper secondary-aged and older youth. Those reached by programming are perceived to receive efficient and high-quality career information, services, and guidance, but it often comes too late to affect education courses or career decisions. Notable gaps between MENA countries' career guidance efforts and global best practice in career guidance were identified and are outlined below along with implications for improving these weaknesses through future programming:

There is no agreement across the MENA region on the aims and objectives of career guidance. National Ministries of Education (MOEs) and USAID could collaborate to bring together committees that include national and local stakeholders to discuss and align on the aims and objectives of career guidance. The result of this collaboration would determine the overall design of national career guidance and how it will be funded, managed, regulated, and implemented.

Career guidance is often delivered too late to impact career choice. National MOEs, USAID, and national and local stakeholders should collaboratively develop a plan to identify appropriate timelines for career guidance interventions. These should fit global best practices and begin at an early stage before examination results limit career choices.

There is a need to embed career guidance in education policies and as part of established institutions and processes. National MOEs, USAID, and national and community stakeholders—including the private sector—should be involved in the design and delivery of technical assistance programs to foster "ownership" and generate a wider understanding of career guidance.

There are sizable gaps in measuring outcomes from career guidance. USAID should support national MOEs to determine measurements criteria (after setting goals and objectives) that relate to global best practices for career guidance.

THEME 2—INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED YOUTH

A wide variety of demographic profiles of youth, including female youth and youth with disabilities, all have access to some interventions. However, **while many programs specifically target female participants, engaged at-risk (refugee, conflict affected, and internally displaced) youth, or design programs for youth with disabilities, most programming tends to under-enroll marginalized youth.** By examining programs that did target marginalized youth, the study found that:

Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs), local organizations supporting gender equity, and those representing refugee, conflict affected, internally displaced, and other categories of youth are critical to marginalized youth's access to programming that meets their needs. Implementers should be required to include local groups that serve marginalized populations at all stages of the USAID program cycle. Additionally, there appears to be a need for greater coordination between all stakeholders, particularly in relation to female participation, persons with disabilities, and support for rural youth.

Laws and policies for students and workers with disabilities commonly exist but are not always applied. USAID could support awareness and advocacy campaigns, often organized by DPOs, to increase the likelihood that policies meet the needs of people with disabilities and are implemented as intended.

Inclusive and accessible programming is often an add-on, rather than a foundational aspect of curriculum design. USAID implementing partners that design curricula should ensure that activities adhere to USAID's Universal Design for Learning approach and that special considerations be made for targeted youth with disabilities.

Out-of-school youth and at-risk youth can benefit from accelerated learning or parallel (non-formal) learning programs. USAID could support accelerated and parallel learning through programs targeted at specific categories of youth, however, access to remedial academic support would likely benefit many (if not all) categories of youth.

Contextualized understanding of barriers is key. USAID should conduct gender and social inclusion (GESI) analyses and use findings in design planning. Results should be revisited regularly and not considered static.

RQ2 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 3—SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Given the many different interventions targeting secondary school-aged youth across the region, programs consider a variety of skills and abilities as critical to youth's transitions through secondary level education and into higher education, college-level technical and vocational education and training (TVET), or other careers/livelihoods. Examined through the Positive Youth Development (PYD) lens, the study found that **program models perceived as effective demonstrate skills development, encourage positive self-identity and advocacy, provide opportunities for youth to lead, and are implemented in spaces where youth feel safe to test and learn.** "Model" interventions were described as exemplary in one of the four PYD domains, however, these are not to be considered in isolation. Programs that operate across domains are most effective. Moreover, fitting models to the context impacts how assets, agency, contribution, and an enabling environment are received: There is not one model that is best practice across the entire region. The study found that programs should:

Build skills in combination with preparing youth for the multiple pathways they are likely to encounter. USAID should support programs that respond to educational and skills gaps in the educational systems and prepare youth to apply for transitional steps or experiences—such as training or job opportunities—that provide the relevant technical and soft skills for youth to excel.

Develop skills related to self-identity and advocacy to give youth the necessary tools/skills to advocate for pathways that are important to them, even in the face of pressure from society and their families. Implementers designing curriculum should ensure that skills development includes advocacy and opportunities for youth to learn about, and act on, their values, beliefs, and interests.

Place youth in leadership positions to set them up to take on further leadership and decision-making roles in their future transitions. Implementers designing curriculum should incorporate more learning-by-doing concepts, which are essential to ensure youth can contribute and lead.

Promote safe opportunities for work-based learning and for community programming. USAID should ensure that interventions are conducted in safe (intellectually and physically) and accessible spaces to support young people's ability to explore through trial and error and expression of self.

RQ3 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 4—STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Engaging diverse stakeholders requires varied approaches with implications for future programming:

Local organizations including community-based organizations (CBOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in connecting the labor market with the transition process at secondary school and for out-of-school youth. USAID should allocate resources to identify and build local organizations' capacity from the start of new projects. Strategic communication should be considered as a means to engage, and stakeholders should be consulted and included in finalizing of measurement indicators.

Private sector stakeholders can support efforts to prepare youth for higher levels of education and to transition from school into jobs and livelihood opportunities. The gap between the private sector and education is a space where USAID can support local intermediary organizations to play an important connection role.

Parents are critical to students' and youth's successful transition. Implementers that design programs should consider and incorporate relevant means of engaging parents throughout the lower and secondary education years. Parental engagement at the primary school level may be scaffolded into lower and upper secondary years. USAID implementers should consider leveraging the three ways of engaging parents identified in interventions (engagement, training, roles in schools).

Programs often superficially include youth in program decision-making, rather than leveraging youth as valued stakeholders. To engage youth as stakeholders, USAID should require implementers to have greater levels of partnership with youth serving (and youth-led) organizations.

Engaging teachers and the school community is critical, especially for secondary school youth. Programs should work with teachers and administrators when designing and implementing career guidance and other programming, as the school community influences student perceptions.

Collaboration with government stakeholders is essential to improving successful transitions. USAID, implementing partners, and governments should meet to candidly discuss options for collaboration from the design stage. Discussions should include resource sharing and how specific interventions can support shared objectives.

RQ4 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 5—SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING

Two key lessons with implications for fostering sustainability and scale are as follows:

Scale up and sustainability actions are commonly introduced at the last stage of an intervention. USAID should ensure that in future programming, scaling up and sustainability strategies are embedded in the design *and* implemented from the start.

Most interventions are time-bound, which reduces the likelihood of sustainability and scale. USAID should endeavor to design programs that have sustainability and scalability as the main goal—fewer one-off programs or pilots, and more sustained "flagship" models (within which piloting may be used).

INTRODUCTION

The Secondary School Transitions Study was commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Middle East Bureau and Missions throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in August of 2021. The study focuses on lower and upper secondary school-aged youth (commonly aged 12–18 years old) across the region and investigates what has been done and what is yet needed to prepare youth to transition into the workforce and/or continuing education. There is a gap in research and understanding about the interventions supporting secondary school-aged youth to navigate the critical formative years, when schooling is no longer compulsory, and that link graduates to jobs. This gap also applies to decisions about remaining in school, one's course of study, and initial experiences with the world of work, which often set youth's level of educational attainment and career direction for life. A review of the current context, key educational attainment statistics, and decision-making points for secondary school-aged youth, as well as a brief analysis of the education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) systems and macroeconomic situation across the region, are included in Annex I.

The study principally examined existing interventions for this population—including career guidance and the extent to which youth are being prepared with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to successfully transition into work or further education. This study did not examine youth outcomes/employment. Rather, it focused on the preparation of youth for employment or careers during their school-aged years, and whether these interventions are perceived (or ideally documented) to be effective. The study includes overviews of each of the 11 MENA countries that USAID works in.

USAID is the primary audience for this study, including the Middle East Bureau and the Missions across the MENA region. The study is also intended to benefit ministries, donors, and organizations who design and implement secondary school interventions in the region.

STUDY DESIGN

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The Middle East Education Research, Training and Support (MEERS) Secondary School Transitions Study reports on transitions through school and beyond in the 11 MENA countries where USAID works: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. The key objectives of the study were to:

1. Produce a body of evidence, based primarily on published literature, on what secondary school-level interventions exist to support youth academic, technical, and career/livelihood pathways across the MENA region, but specifically reported by each of the countries in which USAID operates.
2. Investigate specific country level cases (examples of interventions) to explore more deeply the conditions in which secondary school interventions operate, and how they are perceived by stakeholders to be providing secondary school-aged youth with knowledge, skills, and capabilities in these three interrelated areas.
3. Provide a summary of lessons learned that can support USAID to design future pilot interventions at the secondary school level that would improve youth's knowledge, skills, and abilities to make informed and purposeful decisions and take concrete steps towards their desired academic, technical, and career/livelihood pathways.

STUDY STAKEHOLDERS

The primary audience for this study is USAID's Middle East Bureau and the Missions and staff working on youth, education, and workforce development in the 11 MENA countries where USAID works. National and local policymakers in the workforce and education sectors will also benefit from the study's recommendations and lessons learned.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is grounded by four primary research questions. The first investigates the existence and design of interventions through which secondary school-aged youth are expected to gain knowledge about academic, professional/technical education, and career/livelihood opportunities. It also asks if all youth equally benefit from these interventions and how they are organized and managed. The next question examines the skills these programs are intended to instill, while the third question looks at the key stakeholders that support interventions—the people and organizations that help prepare secondary school-aged youth to successfully transition into academic, technical education, or career/livelihood roles. The final question investigates how programs have successfully become sustainable and/or scaled and what practices could be leveraged in future programs aiming for scale or sustainability. The specific questions are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Research Questions and Strategy

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. What secondary school-level interventions, including national efforts to introduce school-based career guidance, have been implemented in USAID MENA region countries that **support youth acquisition of knowledge** about their academic, technical education, and career/livelihood options? 1a. What demographic profiles of youth (including gender and disability) have **access** to these services? Who are excluded or face challenges in receiving support?
2. In what ways does the support youth receive from these interventions attempt to **assist in their acquisition of the necessary skills and abilities** to enable a successful transition through secondary level education and into higher education, college-level TVET, or other careers/livelihoods? 2a. Are there lessons learned or examples of programming that are perceived to be most effective, and under what conditions?
3. In what ways do the variety of **stakeholders involved in secondary school level interventions**, including parents/guardians, school counselors, local businesses, local NGOs, etc., **support efforts to prepare youth** for higher levels of schooling and to transition from school-to-work/career/livelihood, and what are the perceived outcomes and benefits of this support? 3a. What models of community stakeholder engagement are perceived to be most effective in supporting academic progression and preparatory school-to-work/career/livelihood interventions for secondary school youth?
4. For interventions that have been either scaled to a national level or sustained past the original period of funding: What are the characteristics of these interventions including how they are designed, funded, managed, and regulated?

STUDY APPROACH, METHODS AND SAMPLE

The study was conducted in three phases. **Phase I** included an initial desk review and detailed the framework and approach the study would take, which the Study Team incorporated into the design report.

Phase II included a detailed desk review and a series of remote key informant interviews (KIIs) with USAID Mission staff across the MENA region in late 2021 and early 2022. A total of 23 KIIs were conducted with a total of 30 respondents in Phase II. The first two phases resulted in the production of 11 country briefs. Each brief outlines the progression and key decision-making points in general and technical education at the secondary school level; key statistics related to drop-out and participation in TVET; an analysis of the key strengths and weaknesses of the education and TVET system; the threats and opportunities in the macroeconomic environment; and the identification of relevant interventions targeting secondary school-aged youth in each country. The Study Team identified a total of 76 (48 non-USAID and 28 USAID) interventions and reviewed related program documentation. The Study Team reviewed the 76 interventions with available project documents using an analytic matrix based on the study questions. A complete list of interventions included in the study, by country, is available in Annex II.

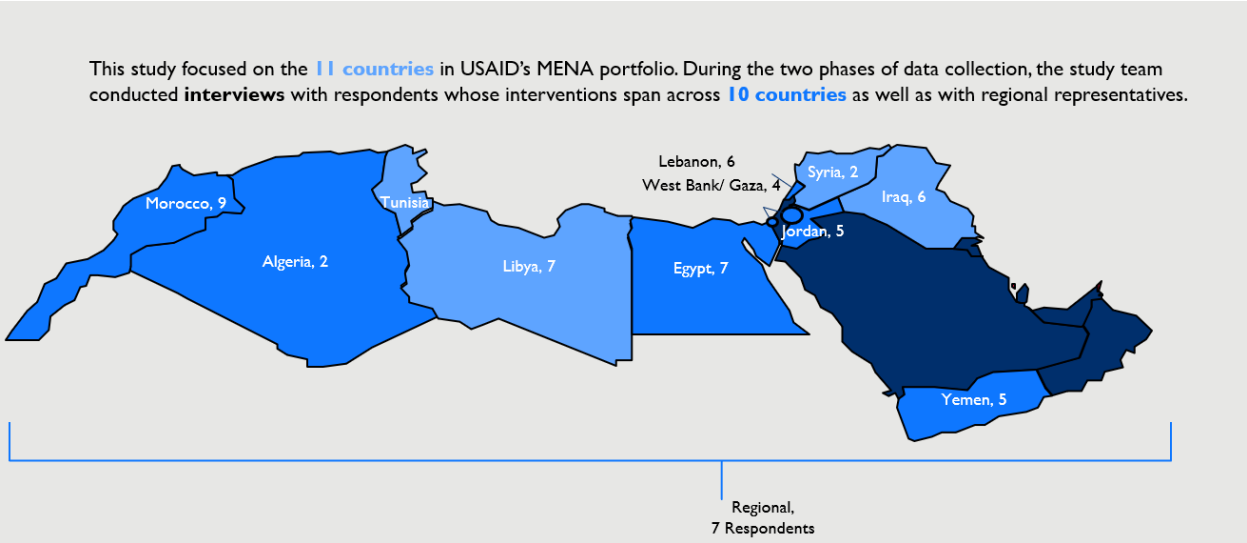
Phase III used the identified non-USAID interventions as the basis for conducting a second round of remote KIIs with respondents who design or manage identified relevant non-USAID programs in the region. In Phase III, the Study Team conducted an additional 22 KIIs with a total of 30 respondents. The Study Team also reviewed additional documentation supplied by respondents. Following the second round of data collection, the Study Team created a codebook based on the key themes that arose in interviews. All KII notes from Phases II and III were coded and analyzed using Dedoose qualitative software. The Study Team triangulated the key themes that arose from the coding and analysis of KIIs with the desk review findings that had been analyzed using an analytic matrix to produce this final report. Between the submission of draft and final reports, the Study Team held a workshop with USAID stakeholders from across the MENA region to discuss key lessons learned and implications for programming.

Table 2: Number of KII Respondents

USAID KII Respondents	Non-USAID KII Respondents	Total KII Respondents
16	44	**60**

Male Respondents: 29, Female Respondents: 31

Figure 1: Map Illustrating Countries of KII Respondents



LIMITATIONS AND BIASES

The Study Team identified four key limitations. First, in terms of **data availability,** secondary data on interventions contained gaps and a mix of subjective and objective reporting. The Study Team endeavored to locate external reports about interventions (e.g., third-party evaluations) to limit the risk of subjective program documentation. Additionally, the Study Team asked KII sources to share documents to build out the record of information on various interventions that the Study Team could include in the analysis. Second, the study was conducted with a **non-representative sample**. Primary and secondary data collection across 11 countries meant that the study could not represent all possible cases, and the study naturally reflects a bias towards interventions with publicly accessible documentation and stakeholders with a presence in the field and willingness to participate in the study. The study therefore presents cases of interventions across the region, rather than a representative sample of interventions. Third, the fact that **respondents' interest in cooperation** was completely voluntary. This study was not an evaluation of a specific, or even a strictly defined set of interventions. Thus, the Study Team encountered roadblocks to accessing stakeholders with no connection to the Study Team or USAID, particularly in Phase III. Finally, **researchers' bias** was a limitation. Study Team members were susceptible to giving greater attention to interventions with which they are familiar from their prior professional experience, and those with which they hold preconceived beliefs about certain kinds of interventions. To reduce this effect, the Study Team was composed of senior specialists with diverse backgrounds, and the study design articulated clear methods for selecting a diverse sample of interventions and prioritized different types of stakeholders.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

RQ1:

What secondary school-level interventions, including national efforts to introduce school-based career guidance, have been implemented in MENA region countries assisted by USAID that support youth acquisition of knowledge about their academic, technical education, and career/livelihood options?

RQ1 FINDINGS

This section begins by briefly introducing global evidence on best practices in career guidance, then transitions to the state of national efforts at career guidance in general secondary education and TVET across the MENA region.

The study found a significant gap between global best practices and the present state of career guidance across the MENA region. Filling some of these gaps are ad-hoc interventions that provide career information, services, and guidance to more limited groups of youth than would be covered by national career guidance. However, these interventions allow space for youth to reflect on their interests, career aspirations, and future options that are otherwise largely absent from other education or training experiences. Yet, the short- to medium-term funding structures mean that programming frequently ends, or is scaled down, following the funded period.

GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES IN CAREER GUIDANCE

A rich set of data and resources clearly indicate the global value of career guidance in countries where it is provided to youth. In the USAID MENA countries examined, there is very little evidence of national career guidance provided in schools that resemble best practice from countries with developed career guidance. Leading organizations in promoting and understanding career guidance include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which has numerous publications on career guidance and offers key guiding principles as to what career guidance should entail, when it should be introduced, and how its efficacy can be measured (see Table 3 below).

Some key resources include:

- Investing in Career Guidance (2021)—produced by six international organizations including UNESCO, OECD, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the European Training Foundation—provides an overview of why career guidance is important. Notably, career guidance is defined as a set of "career management skills," that are developed over a lifetime as tools and resources to help people make successful transitions at every life stage. The report strongly states that career management skills should be developed starting in primary school and are critical to build during the secondary school years. Links to key organizations researching and publishing global data on career guidance are provided.
- OECD interactive online report highlights key metrics used in OECD member countries to evaluate career services, with specific benchmarks tied to youth at age 15. For example, three key metrics compared across countries are: the percent of students who have spoken to a guidance counsellor, percent who visited a job fair, and percent who participated in a workplace visit or job shadowing. Within OECD countries, only an estimated 18 percent of youth, on average, have done all three by age 15.

- Indicators of teenage career readiness: An analysis of longitudinal data from eight countries (2021) found evidence that "secondary school students who explore, experience, and think about their future in work, frequently encounter lower levels of unemployment, receive higher wages, and are happier in their careers as adults." The study results also supported 11 of 14 potential indicators of career readiness, which were categorized into three buckets, exploring the future, experiencing the future, and thinking about the future.

Table 3: Global Example of Sequencing of Career Guidance

Global example of sequencing career guidance – Bridging school to work

OECD: Connected categories of career guidance		3-5	6-9	10-14	15-18	19-24	15-29
Career education	Tackling stereotypes & widening horizons	Games & competitions	Accompany-ing parents to work	Employer talks	Job shadowing		
	Decreasing negative effects of socioeconomic background	Career days	Parental involvement	Mentoring, tutoring, & coaching	Internships		Individual counseling
	Assisting disadvantaged youth			Psycho-metric tests	Mentoring, tutoring, & coaching	Work experience	
Career information	Increasing self-esteem & motivation		Extra-curricular activities	Students' skill portfolios	Mentoring programs	Mock interviews & CV consultations	Pre-vocational programs
Individual career counseling	Providing quality information (about occupations, education streams, labour market)			Career brochures	Visits to universities or technical colleges	Career websites	Individual counseling
Direct contact with the world of work	Raising awareness of learning & employment opportunities			Apprentice-ship ambassador	Learning provider talks at schools	Career fairs	Work experience
	Facilitating school-to-work transition				Taster apprentice-ship	Voluntary work	Mentoring, tutoring, & coaching

Source: Mytna Kurekova, L. (forthcoming), *Strengthening Guidance and Career Information, Technical Paper.*

Table 3 illustrates that career guidance includes four categories of activities: career education, career information, individual career counseling, and direct contact with the world for work. It is universally recommended to begin at ages 3–5, with age-appropriate career education that deepens and is introduced in numerous forms as young people age. Parents are introduced as stakeholders in career learning early on (from age 6–9). At the upper secondary level (ages 15–18), direct contact with the world of work is critical, with activities such as "tasters" i.e., short-term apprenticeships, voluntary work, and mentoring, tutoring and coaching.

> *"I would involve a lot more career guidance at the middle school level, so all the programs that we do for primary should include some kind of career thinking. Bring in parents to talk about what they do, bring in practitioners, bring in people from sectors that are not conventional, and make children think outside of the box: You don't have to be a federal employee to make a living. You have to create your own money. So, I think that basically a comprehensive approach to building and empowering a child would be one thing."* (KII, Morocco)

While the above quote from a KII respondent reflects best practices of introducing career guidance even before secondary school level, this was not what the study found in practice. In this study on secondary school transitions in MENA, we found no comparable resources on which to draw conclusions about the

efficacy of efforts to introduce national career guidance in secondary schools across the MENA region. Specifically, **there is no agreement in national policies about the aims and objectives of career guidance at the secondary age that incorporates career management skills, nor highlights the importance of thinking and reflection in career guidance.**

DIRECTIVE, RATHER THAN FACILITATIVE GUIDANCE

What was evident in **numerous countries across the MENA region is that the existing system offers only directive career guidance.** Directive guidance means that a set of factors, or in most cases, one factor —exam scores—" direct" students' educational options (and their subsequent professional options) with no consideration of learners' interests or motivations. Directive guidance originates as a way to direct a percentage of students from general education into vocational and technical training options (see country examples below). However, quota based TVET placements are set in policy, which rarely matches fast-shifting labor market needs. **Directive guidance is in opposition to facilitative guidance, as illustrated by the best practices in the reports highlighted above. Facilitative guidance provides learners with opportunities to explore their interests from a young age** (primary school age) and then present them with ideas and options of how those interests could lead to different types of educational (and related career) paths that build up as young people advance towards working age.

> *"Career guidance centers try to push students into TVET and a way from desired government jobs. It is important to support young people, not to persuade them to go into TVET, just make them aware of the opportunities. This is the difference from the Western approach to career guidance, which enables students to make informed decisions versus telling people what to do."* (KII, Libya)

The ubiquity of directive guidance based on exams in the MENA region means that **career guidance is often delivered too late to impact career choice.** The study found that students' only engagement with national career guidance in almost every country (with the exception of Jordan), is after key exams. For some countries in the region, an exam is required to continue from primary school into lower secondary, and for nearly all countries an exam is required to continue from lower secondary into upper secondary.[1] **Low scores on these exams typically mean that students can proceed only into some general education tracks (i.e., literature and not sciences), and very low scores reduce students' access to technical or vocational training programs.** Students who are not interested in pursuing the available options usually drop out of the public system, though private training options are available, depending on financial means. A restructuring of policies related to exam-based progression would be required to materially change the system, as any opportunities for future career thinking and proactive actions, such as studying with the goal of entering into a desired educational track, are missed under directive guidance. Some examples that illustrate the directive approach in national career guidance are as follows:

[1] Annex 1 includes more context and key decision-making points for youth in the MENA region. Country briefs produced in conjunction with this report detail exams within each of the 11 USAID MENA countries in this study.

Libya. Career guidance is about directing students towards the academic or TVET sector based on their grades. Employability programs operating with donor funding aim to reform TVET policy to create centers of excellence and career orientation to promote quality TVET, entrepreneurship, digital skills, and gender equality. It is in these areas that career guidance operates to promote these sectors to youth, which raises issues around the impartiality of the guidance process (particularly where these sectors are not seen as attractive by youth).[2]

Algeria. Career counseling sessions focus on examination results, which form the basis of the "orientation" and take precedence over students' aspirations. Thus, it could be said that career guidance operates as a placement service directing people to occupations appropriate to their exam results.

Syria. Career planning and choice are defined by examination results, family and social pressure, and an overall lack of awareness in career guidance. At the secondary school level, some career guidance is available as an online guide, *Career Path Step by Step,* that includes resources for teachers and schools. However, it is very generic and lacks direct interactive support.[3]

Lebanon. Career orientation is built into the education system, as students are assigned career options based on their examination results in both the public and private education system. TVET is perceived as second best, and career guidance means directing students toward specific occupations.[4]

The Case Study Spotlight below highlights Jordan as a leader in the region, as the country is moving beyond a directed guidance approach to one that enables young people to make informed choices about their future. Notably, the four components detailed here demonstrate aspects of global best practices in career guidance being followed in Jordan. Focusing on the example of Jordan, it is apparent that successful interventions are those that have the full support and involvement of national institutions working together with all interested stakeholders.

[2] Elhawat. "Career Guidance in Libya: Small Steps Forward, Still a Long Way to Go" in Sultana. (2017). Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning across the Mediterranean.
[3] Diab & Barakat (2017). Career Development Services in Jordan: International Consultants Review Past Efforts and Future Prospects. Syrian Refugees in Jordan: Providing Career Guidance Services and Enhancing Access to Employment.
[4] Vlaardingerbroek et. al. (2017). The Lebanese Education System: Heavy on Career Orientation, Light on Career Guidance.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT

Jordan is one of the few countries that includes career guidance in their education reform plans and offers the most comprehensive program of countries examined in this study. The key elements of the Jordan national career guidance system are as follows:

1. There is an established tradition of counseling services in secondary education, in TVET, and general education, delivered by trained counselors with the aim to ensure that youth are aware of the range of opportunities available to them. Consequently, career guidance is available at all stages in the educational cycle.
2. These career counseling services have a broad remit, including behavioral and personal issues, as well as career guidance issues.
3. There is a good example of involvement at national level with the MOE being responsible for the counselor network in schools and in vocational training institutes, which enables them to be directly embedded into the curriculum at a national level.
4. Projects have the support and involvement of government institutions, making them sustainable in the long term.

There are elements of similar types of programs available in other countries in the MENA region (although not as comprehensive), with Morocco having career guidance as part of the educational curriculum, whilst in Algeria career guidance is offered at certain points in the educational cycle by trained practitioners.

As Jordan—and to a more limited extent, Morocco—have started to do, **determining the aims and objectives of national career guidance is a pre-cursor to deciding what should be measured** in terms of designing national career guidance programs and routinely assessing them to improve career services offered to youth. At present, the lack of clear aims and objectives from which indicators could be drawn is reflected by the dearth of statistics and the lack of MENA countries included in global best practices in career guidance reporting.[5] Job placement is one outcome, but **the overall objective of career guidance ideally includes indicators that track aspirations, experiences related to work, and thinking about the future among youth who are in school at the secondary level.** This reflects the global best practices principle that career guidance both helps young people understand their interests and motivations, as well as enables them to make decisions about, and have access to, education and training that sets them up with the skills and experiences needed to enter their desired profession.

CAREER GUIDANCE PRACTITIONERS LACK FORMAL TRAINING

In addition to securing national support for career guidance with specific aims and objectives, **countries would need to undergo a major shift in human resources. There is a lack of qualified guidance practitioners in the region,** even in countries where the education system traditionally includes career guidance,[6] and where they are a recognized profession with a determined training and career path (Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco). Where career guidance practitioners exist, they would have been trained in

> *"Career counselling exists in Morocco, but it is not enough and is not solidly organized. They [career counselors] are not placed in the school, they [work in an office]]. For 200–300 schools there are two counselors. The counselor is not someone who can accompany the student. [They are] Probably a once-a-year experience for the student."* (KII, Morocco)

[5] Note: Morocco is included in a few of the OECD graphics in their online interactive report.
[6] MENA region, guidance counseling: Sultana. (2017). Ed. Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning across the Mediterranean.

directive guidance, i.e., orientation based on exam scores, and would require re-training to provide comprehensive guidance to secondary level students.

Many career guidance practitioners are teachers who take on career guidance responsibilities in addition to their teaching role. While this could fill gaps in countries building out a national scale career guidance system, teachers would need to be trained and incentivized (paid) to take on additional roles. They would also be limited in the time they could devote to their multiple roles.

ADOPTING PROMISING MODELS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

It is worth noting that while there are limited national career guidance structures at the secondary level within the MENA region, there are examples of more developed career services within higher education systems. In Morocco and Egypt, there are promising examples of career guidance that offers individual counseling and a range of workshops such as CV writing, interview practice, and job search skills.[7] In Iraq, the university sector career guidance has been developed with international donor support and offers a range of activities to students delivered directly by trained practitioners.[8] **However, these models are designed for students nearing their job search following specialized training, at a time when their course of study has been largely determined and they are focused on professional employment options. This is markedly different from career guidance at earlier grade levels that, according to best practices, should be exploratory and focus on thinking about career options.** However, particularly in terms of helping students to consider options for their course of study and how this decision relates to career options, there could be possibilities for collaboration between universities and preparatory secondary schools.

Morocco. The **USAID Career Center intervention** developed three different model vocational training centers in the higher education sector, working with relevant ministries to scale up to six physical career centers and a virtual career center. The centers promote a facilitative approach and provide job information that enables students to make decisions when picking their field of study.

"It's not only the soft skills and work readiness skills, but it's also to recommend youth to position themselves within the job market offers. It is important to [provide career counseling] within vocational training because [the students] can follow two technical paths, and they don't need to have a high school [diploma], so you can prepare them before they get to this age, around 15 or 16." (KII, Morocco)

TVET CAREER GUIDANCE OFFERS LIMITED EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT

TVET systems are typically more closely linked to industries and employers than general education. However, the Study Team found that the involvement of employers in the career guidance process throughout the MENA region seems to be very limited, especially at the secondary level, restricting the opportunities for students to learn about specific occupational areas, particularly within the private sector. There is no comprehensive data collection system related to the placement of students after they finish their education at all levels (i.e., data related to employment, further training, jobs in other sectors, or unemployment). This lack of data directly affects the ability of youth to make informed choices and limits the level of support that career counselors can offer. There is a disconnect between the outputs of the education system and employers, indicating that potential employees may not meet the needs of the labor

[7] USAID Egypt. Egypt STEM School Project (ESSP). (2017). Final Report; GIZ. Employment Promotion Program (EPP); INJAZ Al-Maghrib; MCC. Morocco Employability and Land Compact.
[8] IREX. U.S.-Iraq Higher Education Partnership Program (HEPP); UNESCO. reforming TVET in Iraq (Phase II).

market. The Study Team reviewed several interventions, offered through international donor support, that endeavor to strengthen the relationship between employers and TVET systems:

Egypt. There is little evidence of employer involvement apart from projects that focus on developing and modernizing the TVET and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) curricula, which aim to provide career guidance as part of formal classes. Some programs, like the Mubarak-Kohl Initiative operated by the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ), focus on promoting TVET education through project-based teaching and internship placement approaches. In this instance, employers are directly involved in the GIZ program. Targeted grade levels: 10–12.[9]

West Bank and Gaza. There is limited employer involvement in career guidance. However, career guidance is considered a key factor in TVET reform and is available to students from some institutions, one-stop shops, and employment offices supported by regional chambers of commerce.[10] For some vocational training centers, like those operated by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), there is an employment tracking system in place. Targeted grade levels: 9–12.[11]

Yemen. In vocational education, projects that involve international donor funding offer some career guidance, but only as a small part of the project and with little impact on the overall education system. Consequently, employer involvement is limited. Project documents did not specify a target age.[12]

Jordan. Development of destination statistics is underway in Jordan, which may directly involve employers. Program documents did not specify a target age.[13]

Global best practices, including the examples in Table 3 above, rely on collaboration with employers, especially for students at the upper secondary age who are soon to be searching for employment. Limited employer involvement in career guidance (and in education in general) directly impacts the employability of youth, as employers have a significant role to play in raising job awareness and opportunity levels for youth. **Employer participation in labor market analysis is also critical so that career guidance practitioners have up-to-date information to share with youth about industries**: Which industries are hiring? For what type of occupation? at what job levels? with what types of benefits? in which locations? etc. are all details that should be collected, analyzed, and shared with students to help inform their career thinking.

[9] OECD. (2015). Schools for Skill: A New Learning Agenda for Egypt; Khalil. Career Guidance in Egypt: Partnership in International Cooperation for National Development in Sultana. (2017). Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning across the Mediterranean. 176.
[10] UNESCO. (2018). Analytical Review of Existing Tools and Mechanism of Labor Market Information System (LMIS) for Education and Training Policy Making in Palestine.
[11] UNRWA. (2021). UNRWRA Technical and Vocational Education and Training Program.; UNESCO. (2018). Analytical Review of Existing Tools and Mechanism of Labor Market Information System (LMIS) for Education and Training Policy Making in Palestine.
[12] MercyCorps. Promoting Youth Employment in Yemen.
[13] USAID Jordan. (2014). Final Report of Reform Support Program (ERSP) 2014.

INTERVENTIONS THAT SUPPORT YOUTH ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FUTURE OPTIONS

In addition to the specific examples of donor support for TVET career guidance, a total of 57 interventions across the region included some form of career information, career guidance, or career services. These do not have the scale nor sustainability of institutionalized national career guidance programs, but nonetheless can play an important role in providing opportunities for career thinking and exploration in absence of formalized services. Additionally, many interventions included out-of-school youth among their beneficiaries, that is, youth who may otherwise be excluded from school-based career guidance. However, most of the ad hoc programs reviewed target youth at the upper secondary age, when many career decisions have already been made. Two programs with good documentation of program operations and perceptions of high quality in the region are highlighted below. Both currently provide career guidance to youth starting at ages 10 and 11 respectively:

WEST BANK & GAZA

West Bank and Gaza. Partnerships with Youth (PWY) and Positive Youth Engagement (PYE), USAID. Initially, the PWY program operated Youth Development Resource Centers (YDRCs) that provided youth aged 14–29 with different training and career counseling, and promoted information technology (IT) skills. A new iteration of the program, (PYE), targets marginalized and vulnerable youth aged 10–19 by providing them with a menu of activities, resources, and opportunities to improve their psychosocial and mental wellbeing, and to effectively contribute to social and economic development and engage with their communities. Providing realistic career guidance is a key goal of PYE, including information about informal work and sharing new research that illustrates realistic school-to-work journeys.

"We had career support work in partnership with youth at YDRCs in PWY. It was really popular, YDRCs included support in career counseling and career guidance for secondary school students, which they were not getting anywhere else." (KII, West Bank and Gaza)

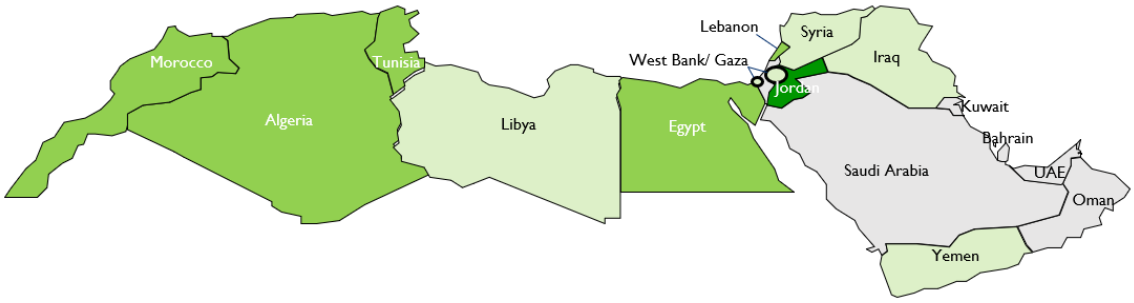
MENA

MENA. Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Started in 2014, LSCE operates in at least four MENA countries with activities adapted to local conditions and priorities. In Morocco, the Personal Project component combines life skills development with career guidance, with the goal to enable youth aged 11–18 to acquire core life skills based on a structured learning journey. It consists of 10 activities that students embark on at grade 6, designed to promote life skills acquisition as well as integration into the community. This continues in secondary school with a student 'Portfolio' providing support in developing vocational projects based on local market needs. The program has achieved significant results in improving the ability of children to make informed career decisions and has led to increased school participation. The success has led to the program being scaled up in 2018.

Additionally, see Annex II for List of Interventions that notes all reviewed interventions that include some form of career guidance as part of the program/services offered to youth beneficiaries (57 programs).

Considering the state of national career guidance for general education and TVET in the MENA region, interventions designed to support TVET career guidance, and ad-hoc interventions offering career information, services, and guidance, **there is significant room for career guidance across the region to be reconceptualized to better align with global best practices.** At present, the study found career guidance and efforts to provide youth the information they need to make successful transitions lacking (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Assessment of National Career Guidance Across the MENA Region



Country	Morocco	Lebanon	Libya	Egypt	Iraq	Algeria	West Bank and Gaza	Tunisia	Syria	Jordan	Yemen
Status											

LEGEND
Some ad hoc programs
Some evidence of youth benefiting from career guidance
Laws or policies exist, but not fully implemented
Strong national coverage

RQ1 CONCLUSION

This section examined multiple efforts, namely national career guidance and short- to medium-term donor driven interventions, that support secondary age youth to acquire knowledge about academic, technical, and career/livelihood options across the MENA region. In comparison to best practices for national career guidance, there is a significant gap, indicating that many young people are unlikely to be receiving high quality career guidance services. Several significant points arose in this review that indicate areas where national career guidance could be strengthened. There are promising interventions that, while serving fewer youth than would be reached by a national system, are able to provide some youth with what is perceived as efficient and high-quality career information, services, and guidance. The key gaps noted to best practice in career guidance are:

- There is no agreement across the MENA region with regard to the aims and objectives of career guidance. In best practices, the focus of career guidance is to provide youth with opportunities to make informed decisions about their educational course of study and their career path, that is, career management skills. With few exceptions, even in the countries that have career guidance policies, the Study Team was unable to uncover policies or signs of implementation plans that go beyond directive guidance. This means that, at present, career guidance is a means of sorting based on exam scores, rather than informed decision-making by students.
- Career guidance is often delivered too late to impact career choice. According to the OECD, career information should be introduced at, or even before, the primary level. It should continue, with grade-appropriate curricula, through all levels of education (like a competency framework that sets standards for learning across grade levels in subject-area curricula). This was not found to be the case in the MENA region.
- At present, career guidance in the region was found to be directive, rather than facilitative. Directive guidance means that a set of factors, in most cases based entirely on exam scores, direct

students' educational options (and related professional options) with no consideration of learners' interests or motivations. Alternatively, facilitative guidance provides learners with opportunities to explore their interests and then presents them with ideas and options of how those interests could lead to different types of educational (and related career) paths.

- Within general education and TVET at the secondary level, employers are not engaged to the level expected and as prescribed in best practices.
- There are sizable gaps in measuring outcomes from career guidance. Once the aims and objectives of career guidance at different grade levels are established (point one), related measurement of desired outcomes with indicators to track progress and improve career guidance would ensure programs are tracked for efficacy. Job placement is one outcome, but the overall objective of career guidance is ideally to allow young people to understand their interests and motivations, and inform them of the education and training that sets them up with the skills and experiences needed to enter a desired profession. Career guidance ideally helps youth to chart a path to access the training and educational experiences they need to make successful transitions.
- Ad-hoc programs are providing youth with spaces to reflect and think about education and career options, but they have limited impact as they are often not supported beyond the initial funded period. For long-term development, there is a need to embed career guidance in education policy and as part of established institutions and processes. Relatedly, institutionalization at national scale requires the professionalization of career guidance providers.

RQ1A:

What demographic profiles of youth (including gender and disability) have access to these services? Who are excluded or face challenges in receiving support?

RQ1A FINDINGS

Because of the diversity of programming examined in this study, the answer to which youth profiles have access to programming, and which youth are excluded, is not straightforward. Therefore, the Study Team brought together findings about the types of programming observed in the region—those that serve explicit groups of youth, as well as programs that serve many populations of youth but have taken steps to be more inclusive (than similar programs) in efforts to reach marginalized youth. For example:

- Programs for youth who are in school and/or in TVET naturally exclude out-of-school youth.
- Those established for youth in refugee camp settings likewise draw from youth within their established community.
- Women are over-represented in some programs, mirroring how some countries have higher female enrollment in secondary schools, while in other programs women are rarely mentioned in program reports or KIIs with program staff. This omission generally signals adherence to the status quo, which most often serves to limit female access.
- A few programs are designed to specifically include persons with disabilities, by purposefully designing programming that intends to support the unique needs of youth with different types of disabilities. Other programs only allow access to persons with disabilities, but in practice could (or do) not make necessary accommodations.

As a universal statement about access is not possible across the region, the following findings are categorized into programming specifically targeting access for youth at-risk, females, youth with disabilities, rural youth, and out-of-school youth. The study defines "at-risk" youth, in the MENA context, as those who are refugees, internally displaced, or economically or socially

marginalized (for example, being a member of an ethnic or religious minority group). These categories of youth, and youth in intersecting categories (e.g., at-risk women, youth with disabilities in rural areas, etc.), are more commonly excluded from mainstream general education and TVET, at higher risk of drop-out, and associated with higher rates of unemployment—especially women and youth with disabilities across the region.

While many programs appear to have a very specific target group—refugees, young women, and young males at risk of radicalization—they often include youth from a wide age bracket rather than neatly drawing from only secondary school-aged youth (12–18 years old). While all USAID programs, and many by other donors, track beneficiaries at the program level, there is no means of publicly accessing comparable data on program enrollment in number of youth beneficiaries (versus the general population of youth), nor characteristics of youth who have access to programming. It is also difficult to assess programs' impact on youth in the secondary-aged group, since disaggregating a program's impact from overall educational outcomes is challenging (and often poorly tracked), particularly in relation to employability outcomes. Reviewed programs also indicate that interventions, regardless of target population, have a limited impact once external funding stops.

Access to interventions also means working with parents in more conservative societies to enhance the inclusion of youth (especially women and girls) in program interventions, or helping youth to develop their agency to choose future paths of education away from family pressures. These pressures can sometimes come from the older generations' lack of awareness of current jobs and market trends. Also, it can mean working with local and national authorities to help equip schools to provide facilities to include youth with disabilities.

PROGRAM ACCESS: URBAN AND RURAL YOUTH

Geographical area is a determining factor in youth's access to supporting interventions, with rural areas being the least well represented. In the MENA region, a majority of programming and targeting is towards youth in urban settings. Youth in rural areas have less access to support facilities which are often based in more urban centers. There are some specific programs offering support, such as the USAID/Jordan Non-Formal Education Program, which target rural, remote, and low-income populations; facilitate continued pathways for education by supporting home-schooling; and provide MOE-recognized non-formal education certificates. This program was directly designed to support youth specifically where home schooling is required due to the lack of other effective educational provisions. **This non-formal education program also has the advantage of MOE certification, which consequently increases its perceived value in the community at large, as it provides certification that could be used in seeking employment or moving to other areas of education.** However, such a program is the exception rather than the rule, and similar programs are not widely delivered in the MENA region.[14]

[14] Final Evaluation Report of USAID NFE Program. (2018).

INTERVENTIONS DESIGNED TO PURPOSEFULLY INCLUDE MARGINALIZED YOUTH

Youth with Disabilities

While target groups are mentioned for many interventions (refugees, youth at-risk, women), support of persons with disabilities is often not specifically mentioned, and target numbers for support are not stated. In-school programs are usually not accommodating to youth who are not in secondary school, unless program design integrates special sessions or, ideally, inclusive sessions that are open to all youth regardless of school status. This is especially critical as **many countries in the region have yet to integrate children with disabilities into national school systems.**

World Learning Algeria began designing an intervention that would offer vocational transition planning to youth with disabilities but was determined to be beneficial for all youth. In a KII, World Learning emphasized that their training curriculum follows the principles of Universal Design for Learning, in which well-designed curricula are inclusive and responsive to all learners. Designing with inclusivity from the start is more impactful than trying to adapt after the fact. Additional examples of how school-based programs in the region are endeavoring to include all youth are detailed below:

Laws and policies for students and workers with disabilities exist but are not always applied. A recent study of disability inclusion across the MENA region reports a major gap in programs providing transitional support for youth. Even where policies are in place, for example the "Inclusiveness of persons with disabilities in the National Strategic Framework for TVET" in Lebanon, implementation requires an organization supporting the rights of persons with disabilities to take part in all related interventions, policy discussions, and changes. Frequently, when disabilities are included in law or policies, they are not sensitive to different disability types and what types of tailoring would best accommodate persons with different or multiple disabilities. Even when programs aim to be inclusive, the study also heard cases of proposals being rejected due to the high cost per person served. Infrastructure changes needed to accommodate disabilities are described as important medium- or long-term goals which can fail to materialize in programming that operates on short- to medium-term time scales.[15]

Programs that purposefully include and serve youth with disabilities frequently collaborate with local Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs). However, programs perceived to be high quality tend to serve few beneficiaries and are difficult to scale. Most common is programming that highlights "exceptional cases" of persons with disabilities that succeed despite the system-created challenges around them. Examples of interventions working with DPOs include the following:

Egypt. ILO's Decent Jobs for Egypt's Young People worked with DPOs to convince parents of youth with disabilities that their children are capable of employment—specifically in the tourism sector—in jobs that require living away from home. Local DPO knowledge and support was essential to operating rehabilitation programs for families and parents. The program also held round-tables with employers that allowed existing employers, who had previously hired from the training program, to share their experience with prospective employers. In total, 120 people were trained over one and a half years. Targeted ages: 15–29.[16]

[15] KII 10, Morocco.
[16] ILO and GIZ. (2016). An Impact Assessment of Career Guidance Services for Technical School Students

West Bank and Gaza. Persons with disabilities were purposefully included because the organization, Education for Employment, partnered with a local rehabilitation center and was able to train all beneficiaries with job readiness, "how to start your business," entrepreneurship, and soft skills. The program also tried to insert beneficiaries directly into jobs or volunteer opportunities. About 250 persons with disabilities were trained. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Morocco. The Humanity and Inclusion program worked with DPOs to design and implement training sessions tailored to persons with disabilities regardless of school status. The program resulted in youth with disabilities who had an opportunity to network with peers, be recognized as people who are employable, and receive tailored advice. The program component was perceived as effective, regarded as high quality, but was small-scale. Also in Morocco, building on digital learning supported by past USAID programs, the MOE adapted digital/distance learning courses for deaf language. This was an adaptation (not a direct translation) of courses on sign language and, during the time of COVID-19 and distance learning, increased the number of learners who could remain engaged in learning during school closures. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Syria. The Syria Education Program included referral services that helped youth to access the accommodations and services that could help them to enter school, such as hearing aids or wheelchairs. For students with mental disabilities, the program made referrals to special education centers, gender separated where socially appropriate, where students were provided specific programs by trained teachers. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Generally, issues around disability are not specifically addressed, nor effectively integrated, in most programs identified in this study, and inclusion of all youth in school, work, and other programs remains largely unaddressed. However, there are encouraging, if small, initiatives underway across the region.

INTERVENTIONS DESIGNED TO PURPOSEFULLY INCLUDE FEMALE YOUTH

Female access to programming cannot be assumed without targeting and purposefully constructed program design. Throughout the MENA region, while programs have been developed to enhance female participation and some mixed gender programs have more female participation than males, it cannot be assumed that female participation and full inclusion in programming will automatically be the outcome. Some programs that were successful in including women utilized a gender assessment (or a gender and social inclusion [GESI] assessment) to understand the variables involved in the local context, as part of program design. Key variables in female inclusion in programming that were discussed in KIIs and program reports, which are each examined in the following section, are:

- Contextual sensitivity
- Gender-inclusive infrastructure
- Understanding and breaking down barriers to women and work

Contextual sensitivity in gender inclusion. Social structures and inclusive infrastructure are principal determinants in young women's participation in programming. At the lower secondary level, beginning in Grade 6 (in Syria), one KII respondent flagged this as the key grade for gender impact of intervention. By this, they meant that Grade 6 is the year with elevated drop-out from school, when women (and their families) begin considering work or marriage in earnest. More generally, family is a key influencer in female participation in school, work, and programming. **Programs that work with local NGOs (e.g., in Iraq)**

to incorporate awareness raising about the importance of girls' education among girls, parents, and teachers increase the likelihood that girls will remain in school.[17] However, throughout MENA, variables such as the acceptability of mixed-gender environments can be acceptable within some regions in a country and not within others. This supports the need for gender assessments to understand the social realities of different environments for schooling and other programming.

Gender-inclusive infrastructure. Safety is a concern for women and their families. This includes physical safety, protection from sexual assault and gender-based violence, emotional safety through psychosocial support, and social safety (being able to discuss issues and concerns without fear of repercussion). Additionally, if schools or other meeting spaces do not have adequate facilities, such as bathrooms with privacy, women who reach puberty during their secondary school years are more likely to be excluded from these spaces.

Women and work in MENA. Women in the MENA region have drastically lower employment rates than their male peers and there are a number of structural and social reasons for this, which are well examined in the case of Jordan in a recent World Bank study.[18] The Gender Parity Index, a comparative proxy for the inclusion of women in social and economic life that is calculated annually in approximately 160 countries, provides a reference point for women's inclusion. The ranking of MENA countries in this study tends to be in the bottom rankings, meaning among the most restricted in the world.[19] One way **that programs (for example, in Morocco and Algeria) are exposing young women to work options is through facilitated job talks and similar events that bring women business leaders and professionals to provide mentorship to girls.**

Algeria. Bawsala Mentorship Program, U.S. Department of State funding, implemented by World Learning. Provided training, mentorship, and networking opportunities to support young Algerian women build their leadership skills and job-readiness skills (age or education level not specified). The goal was to build capacity to: a) increase self-awareness of their personal attributes and skills; b) develop leadership and job-readiness skills; and c) enhance networking skills with successful female leaders in Algeria. Program documents did not specify a target age.

> *"…a lack of dedicated programs that could support female labor force participation, but also improve their earnings, and probably also touch on the issues of identity, work condition, etc., should be the priority."* (KII, Morocco)

This study did uproot some innovative cases and ways of thinking about female employment. In Yemen, while formal employment is difficult to secure for young people, skills like knowing how to do basic maintenance to repair a community's water facility was found to make someone an asset to their community. Even if the community could not pay a market price for repair services, the youth with this skill could become a contributing member of their community, which builds self-identity and status within the community. Additional KIIs in Yemen and Egypt revealed that some women are entering new digital fields that appear to have fewer social biases and ingrained beliefs about the gender of workers. In Egypt, a respondent noted that a new technical specialization in renewable energy has opened and enrolls more girls than boys, whereas TVET enrollment generally skews male. In Yemen, a program teaching young women how to resolve technical challenges with cell phones has led to some being able to provide phone

[17] UNICEF Iraq. Education Program.
[18] World Bank. (2018). Jordan: Understanding How Gender Norms in MNA Impact Female Employment Outcomes.
[19] World Economic Forum. (2021). Global Gender Gap Report.

repair services. This is mainly to other women in their communities, while the formal sector repair service being in the domain of male workers.

A commonly used methodology to increase female participation in programming is to introduce a quota system. An example of this is the **United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Youth Employment Generation Program in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen.** This program had an emphasis on young women's participation, with a minimum quota of 35 percent females in each program component. While this is a low target for female participation, women constitute well under 10 percent of vocational students across the MENA region (with the exception of Egypt where female participation is 32%).[20] Therefore, in this context, the target of 35 percent female participation is high, and it is noteworthy that the program achieved the highest female participation (55%) in vocational training programs—and 10 percent of beneficiaries were persons with disabilities.[21] Non-employment focused programs also set quotas, such as the **Syria Education Program** funded by the Department for International Development (DFID, now UK Aid), which focused on quality education and psychosocial support activities and has set a target to reach 50 percent girls out of 300,000 supported children.[22] Though, in general secondary education, 50 percent should be seen as the minimum standard for female participation.

Gender and Conflict. In a conflict context, distorted economic incentives create confusion around gender roles and expectations. The loss of male members can open up new economic opportunities to females. However, in terms of educational attainment, countries with recent conflict tend to have the highest out-of-school rates for youth—with students of both genders dropping out for different reasons (see Annex I, Figure 6 for upper secondary level out-of-school rates in several MENA countries). In addition to the ongoing gender barriers noted above, conflict and crisis can tip the scale against female education, leading girls and young women to drop out, increasing their risk of early marriage and adolescent pregnancy. For boys and young men, conflict often makes the economic incentives to join armed groups become more attractive.

> *"The economic crisis has opened up economic opportunities for women, the conflict created more female-headed households, [yet] a lot of those women were not given many educational opportunities."* (KII, Yemen)

INTERVENTIONS TARGETING AT-RISK YOUTH

As noted earlier, this study defined "at-risk" youth, in the MENA context, as those who are refugees, internally displaced, or economically or socially marginalized (for example, being a member of an ethnic or religious minority group). Many interventions target refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and others affected by conflict (e.g., in Iraq, West Bank and Gaza, Yemen, Syria and Libya—specifically ex-combatants and former male youth militia groups in Libya). This means that for targeted interventions, these populations have access, while non-targeted programming is unlikely to otherwise reach these youth. **While all youth face barriers to completing their education and transitioning to future opportunities, youth who are refugees, internally displaced, or otherwise at-risk, are confronted with additional challenges.**

[20] See Annex I for statistics on upper secondary enrollment in TVET and the percent of vocational students who are female in countries with recent data across the region.
[21] UNDP Arab States. (2022). Youth Development Delegates program starts its second year, expanding reach to three new countries
[22] Chemonics. (2022). DFID- Syria Education programme

- Some youth settle in camp settings long-term, while others navigate what are, for them, foreign systems of education and basic services, which often require permissions and paperwork they may not have in their possession.
- In society and in schools, despite a common Arabic language, instruction and socialization often takes place in dialects that ostracize youth from marginalized ethnicities or different language groups. Financial barriers keep at-risk youth from knowing and exploring options that might be available to them but are perceived as (or are in reality) cost prohibitive.

Interventions have taken a variety of approaches to ensure programming is inclusive to at-risk youth, but KII respondents cautioned that data is lacking about at-risk youth and their needs, and therefore tailored programming is not optimized.

Supporting youth dealing with trauma. For youth who experience conflict at home, or those forced to leave their homeland, some interventions use trauma-informed approaches and different psychosocial tools (e.g., drawing or storytelling), which help at-risk youth to process past situations and report abuse. For example, an education program in Syria emphasized the importance of creating a safe environment for at-risk youth in which to facilitate well-being activities and build resistance.[23] In Morocco, respondents noted that psychosocial support is important (for all youth) and is becoming a policy priority. Programs can develop youth positive identity through career guidance provided they are using participatory approaches to give at-risk youth hope that they can have (or reclaim) ownership over their future.[24]

Syria. Syria Education Programme, UK Aid. The program supports the delivery of safe, inclusive, and quality education services for up to 400,000 vulnerable children in Syria. The project supports children to return and access learning opportunities in safe school environments through the provision of microgrants for refurbishment, safe school practices through violence-free classroom management training, and a focus on wellbeing as an element of safety through the provision of mental health and psychosocial support for teachers and students. The livelihoods of teachers are supported through the provision of stipends and teacher training and support. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Embracing non-formal education. Formal pathways through schooling are often not accessible to at-risk youth, therefore non-formal education centers and accelerated learning programs can help youth catch up and re-enter education or TVET in the future. At-risk youth are often forced to move frequently, meaning that if youth are enrolled in schools, they are frequently experiencing new teachers, educational administrators, and school communities. Frequent changes make it more likely that students will be taught by teachers who are not familiar with their learning history and how to best support them. The Syria Education Programme noted above started a tracking system for students in their program. With the students' and families' permission, local program representatives would track students who moved to new communities and provide the new school with past records and information of the incoming student.[25] This helped bridge the gaps in student learning and lack of community belonging that can come from frequent moves, and otherwise increase the risk of drop-out.

[23] Ibid.
[24] KII 10. USAID Morocco.
[25] Chemonics. (2022). DFID- Syria Education programme

Syria, Injaz II Project, U.S. Department of State. Provides remedial education and distance learning in formal and informal education settings, including IDP camps. The project also manages school rehabilitation to form child-friendly spaces, social and emotional learning for children and their caregivers. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Iraq, Improving access to quality and inclusive education with gender equality for out-of-school children in Iraq, UNESCO. Aims to provide access to quality and inclusive education with gender equality for out-of-school children in Iraq. The three main objectives are: a) providing safe and child-friendly learning spaces; b) the enrollment of out-of-school children (including IDPs/returnees); and c) improving all national stakeholders' capacity and ensuring the quality of the deliverables. Program documents did not specify a target age.

RQ1A CONCLUSION

The breadth of programming reviewed across the MENA region meant that, a wide variety of demographic profiles of youth, including female youth and youth with disabilities, all had access to some interventions. However, **the reality that many programs specifically targeted female participants, engaged at-risk youth, and designed programs purposefully for youth with disabilities and targeted rural youth were remediations for the fact that programming without clear targets tend to under-enroll marginalized youth.** By examining programs that did target marginalized youth, the study was able to examine the factors that make a difference in allowing them to participate in programming; approaches that could be adapted to future programming design to ensure access for all youth; or to tailor specific programs to meet the different needs of youth across the region. Key takeaways were:

- It is important to work with local DPOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) that understand the needs of different youth populations (men and women, at-risk youth, youth with disabilities, rural youth, etc.) in the local context and are able to guide the design and implementation of programs to best meet the needs of diverse categories of youth across the MENA region.
- For students and workers with disabilities, laws and policies exist, but are not always applied. Awareness raising and the application of policies to support youth with disabilities in interventions may reflect some of the only spaces where youth (with and without disabilities) can witness and learn about their legal rights.
- Inclusive and accessible programming is often an "add-on" rather than a foundational aspect of curriculum design from the start. Programs highlighted for being inclusive tend to have considered how to be inclusive from the initial design stage.
- In terms of short- to medium-term interventions, a diversity of programs targeted to different categories of youth were observed, which points to the need for a dual strategy (already common among USAID youth programming). Here, all interventions aim for inclusion and accessibility, and some targeted interventions are designed with greater recruitment of specific populations as a goal, i.e., non-formal education for out-of-school youth, or interventions for other categories of youth least likely to access programming without explicit targeting.
- While there are common barriers that limit women and marginalized youth's engagement in school, interventions, and work, these vary by context, even within countries. Contextualized understanding of barriers is key. More inclusive programs advocate for locally conducted GESI analyses, ideally conducted with local youth and other stakeholders (see RQ3 for more details on stakeholder inclusion) and using the findings to influence program design.

RQ2:

In what ways does the support youth receive from these interventions attempt to assist in their acquisition of the necessary skills and abilities to enable a successful transition through secondary level education and into higher education, college-level TVET, or other careers/livelihoods?

2a. Are there lessons learned or examples of programming that are perceived to be most effective, and in what conditions?

RQ2 FINDINGS

According to the 2018 USAID Education Policy, cognitive, social, and emotional skills, and personal qualities help people navigate their environment, relate well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals. Soft skills are sometimes used as a synonym for social and emotional skills, yet, depending on the program, they can refer to a wider range of skills, behaviors, or qualities**. Insufficient soft skills among youth job candidates are identified as a key challenge by employers in the MENA region.** According to Brookings,[26] much research has gone into studying the factors behind the phenomenon of high youth unemployment and long periods of unemployment in the MENA region. On the supply side, researchers have identified several factors, including a demographic wave that increased labor supply pressures across the region in the early 1990s and 2000s; weak educational systems that did not adequately prepare youth for the world of work; a lack of labor market information systems and career planning resources for job seekers; and a mismatch between the expectations of educated job seekers and the wages and prestige of available jobs. **Soft skills development has arisen as a bridge to the gap between school and work, but work is only one benefit of acquiring skills. The intention of skills development in many programs, and in literature related to skills development, is to improve youth resilience and capacity for decision-making in all aspects of life.**[27]

The types of skills prioritized by interventions, and how these skills were perceived to assist youth to make successful transitions, are detailed in this section which is focused on promising cases. A list of all interventions drawn from to produce this section of the report (10 programs) is included in Annex II. Highlighted interventions present "models" of innovation in skills development that are perceived to be effective (in the variety of contexts in which they were implemented). Lessons learned are further expanded on in the final section of this report.

Of the interventions reviewed for this study, school-based iterations commonly followed an approach of developing new curricula and integrating soft skills development into the school day or as after school programming. Some programs specifically developed STEM skills or financial management skills. **Working with the whole school environment (i.e., key stakeholders within the school and community) is essential in these approaches, as they require political will—particularly from teachers and educational staff** to develop the teaching skills and capacity to deliver curricula on top of teachers and school administrators' existing responsibilities.

TVET skills programs are a growing focus in the region. However, some countries are more advanced than others in developing infrastructure needed for TVET, relevant curricula, and promoting this type of programming. As noted earlier, the percent of students enrolled in TVET remains low across the region.

[26] Kabbani, Nader (2019). Youth employment in the Middle East and North Africa: Revisiting and reframing the challenge, Brookings.
[27] Murphy-Graham. (2021). Life Skills Education for Youth in Developing Countries: What Are They and Why Do They Matter?

Interventions to develop TVET skills work with young people on technical skills building alongside life skills or innovation and entrepreneurship skills. This integration is intended to address the gap in soft skills development in the educational system in the region, as there is a growing demand for these skills in the job market.

Finally, community-based skills development interventions offer key skills, especially for out-of-school youth, who are not always included in programs delivered in school settings. Development of youth skills to enhance their community participation, such as leadership, communication, or civic participation are common. These are critical skills in the transition that all young people make to engage and positively interact with their communities in new ways as they approach adulthood.

According to USAID, Positive Youth Development (PYD) is defined as engaging youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. While individual programs used many different frameworks to design interventions, the core skills and approaches used by interventions could be (and were) layered onto the four domains of PYD by the Study Team. As such, the themes from respondent interviews and the desk review are organized by the domains of the PYD framework that they reinforce, though not all programs described their programs using PYD terminology. Finally, while the section below organizes key program aspects into one of the four PYD domains, strong youth programming integrates all four domains.

Figure 3: Four Domains of PYD

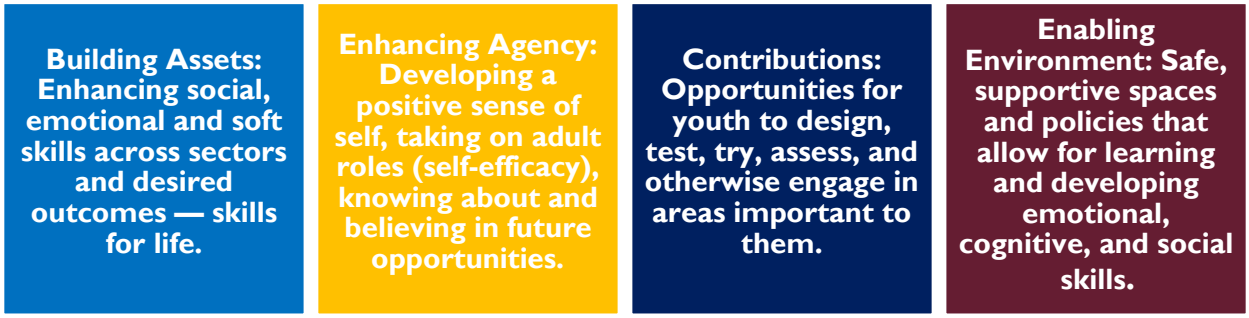
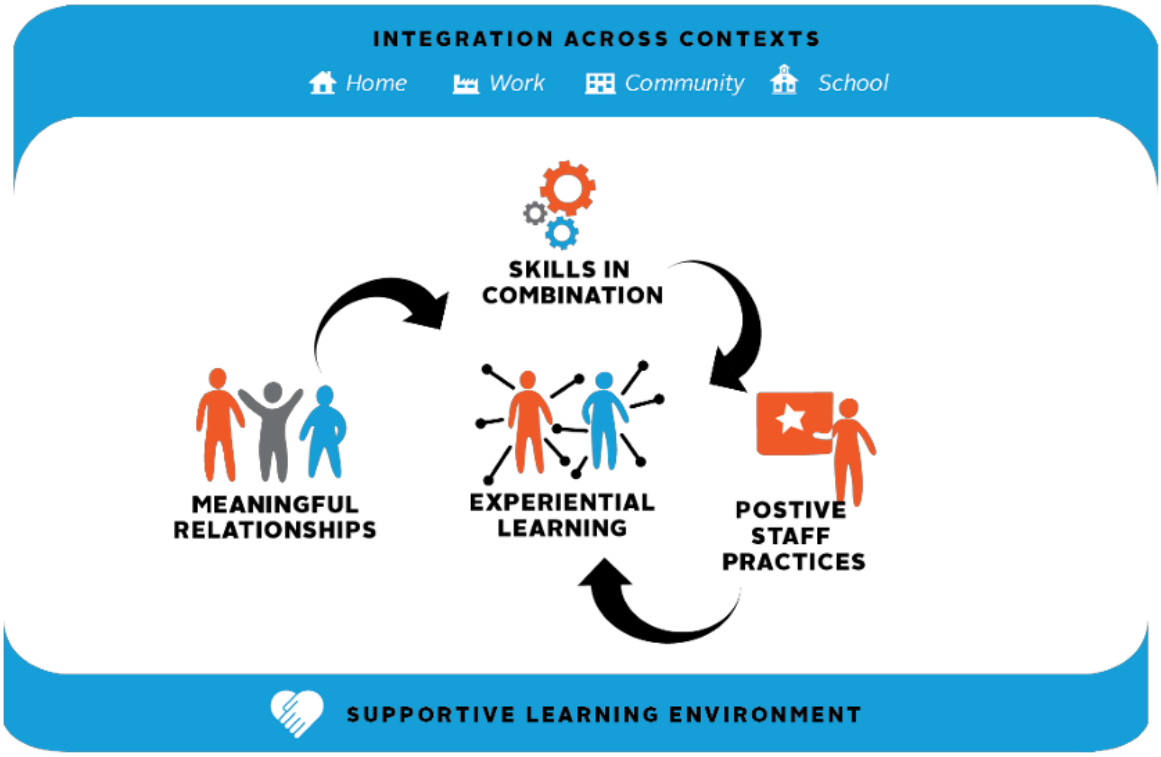


Figure 4: Integration of PYD across Contexts



BUILD ASSETS

Developing skills in combination. It is evident that many interventions have endeavored to build skills in combination, rather than isolation. A combination of skills that can support academic progress, performance in the workplace, and successfully navigating daily life decisions—whether youth are to seek higher education, TVET, or employment in the future. Basic education across the region was perceived by key informants and literature to be riddled with gaps in the provision of core soft skills (namely: problem solving, teamwork, and communication). Interventions justified the focus on soft skills as most relevant to help young people in their everyday lives, either at work or in their transition from the school environment to the broader society. Moreover, the study found evidence that building skills related to self-employment and entrepreneurship are emphasized to expand youth's mindset when it comes to their career options, as well as planning personal projects (see examples in RQ1 related to career guidance). That is, ways to understand their interests and how they could translate to different types of work are exercises that widen the options beyond public and private sector hiring, which, across the MENA region, does not match demand for work. Thus, the combination of soft skills with training was seen as creating opportunities that could help young people overcome regular employment challenges and other barriers faced by young people transitioning to future employment and/or other means of financial stability, and adulthood.

The following examples reflect the PYD "Assets" dimension, demonstrating how interventions are instilling soft skills in combination, for programs in school, in TVET, and in community settings or safe spaces:

Algeria. The World Learning Youth Employment Project integrated transferable skills in programming to improve a broad range of skills in youth beneficiaries. The rationale behind the integration and combination of skills was to bridge gaps in the educational system where schooling did instill critical skills such as communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, which are needed in everyday life. Another World Learning program designed to foster STEM education exposed students to problem-solving through science and evidence-based learning. Engaging students in real life problems using STEM helped to develop a data-driven thinking approach. Targeted university level with some attention to the secondary TVET level.

Jordan. Injaz, Economic Opportunities for Jordan Youth integrated a mix of interpersonal skills and business development skills. Programs prioritized supporting and developing youth's skills and ways of thinking, with youth starting a business as a tangential objective. Targeted grade levels: 7–12, university students, as well as entrepreneurs and fresh graduates seeking employment.[28]

West Bank and Gaza. Amideast programming followed a skills integration approach, which focused on integrating essential skills into subject matters. Furthermore, it followed a learner-centered approach using English as a medium for developing a range of skills. Students were challenged to participate through partner and group work. Amideast avoided focusing on memorization and teacher-centered pedagogies, and integrated and championed teaching skills in combination, such as critical thinking, collaborative work, creative thinking, innovation, and problem-solving. Program documents did not specify a target age.[29]

> *"We are talking about the transferable skills. These are the things that they don't really get in school. Things like communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, because they are always engaged in such routine study hours"* (KII, Algeria).

ENHANCE AGENCY

Positive self-identity. By supporting youth to develop their agency and identity, they more positively perceive their roles within their school, community, and other spaces. KII respondents noted that there are several skills needed for youth to build their capacities for active participation. Many programs adapt a set of skills to increase the capacity of youth by enhancing their confidence and ability to participate in their societies. Several programs, especially in areas affected by conflict, focus on skills related to advocacy and debate. **When young people's self-confidence is enhanced, they can convey their beliefs and effectively communicate with peers and others in their communities. This can enable youth to advocate for the pathways that meet their interests and needs, even in the face of societal or family pressure to choose alternative routes.**

Moreover, different programs aim to help youth promote themselves as "knowledge generators." This means that approaches are used to develop youth's research skills and analytical thinking to help them identify and address contextual challenges within their communities, and then provide them opportunities

[28] Injaz Jordan.; KII 27. Injaz Jordan.
[29] Amideast; KII 45. Amideast West Bank and Gaza.

to report out evidence-based findings to their communities and stakeholders. **The ability to perceive oneself positively, and to imagine future opportunities as truly possible to achieve, is key to setting goals and then being able to meet them. This, in turn, is an essential element to young people becoming active agents of change and positive contributors to society.**

Examples of interventions that follow the PYD "Agency" domain by explicitly developing youth's belief in their abilities and propensity to get engaged include:

Libya. Libya Elections and Legislative Strengthening Activity (LESLA), USAID/National Democratic Institute (NDI). The program worked to enhance young people's agency and skills by supporting youth through dialogue, debate, advocacy, and leadership activities that allow youth to voice their opinions on issues and concerns to community stakeholders and decision-makers. Targeted secondary school and university students.

Iraq. Youth Excel, USAID/IREX. The program supported young people through advancing research, data analysis, and advocacy skills to help youth through data-informed programs and youth-led learning dissemination events. Targets local youth-led and youth-led and youth-serving organizations.

YOUTH AS CONTRIBUTORS

Leadership is at the center of skills development. The concept of leadership by and among youth—whether through leadership skills as an element of a skills program, or by presenting young people as leaders within a program—is a frequently used design feature perceived as effective by respondents and in project reports. Key informants spoke about the importance of youth leadership and contribution, describing the associated benefits of leadership with community participation, development of youth-led roles, and the related enhancement of youth's confidence and ability to communicate with peers and various stakeholders. **Opportunities to contribute help to better position youth within their communities to ensure that the transition through school to what follows is navigated with a leadership mindset—by young people who know how to lead and manage their own life trajectory.** Many interventions work to advance young people's leadership skills, allowing youth opportunities to test, try, lead, and actively practice what they are learning, by putting young people at the center of project activities. This practice matches the core principle of "contribution" centered at the heart of PYD.

> *"Whenever we visit schools or have VIP visitors, [the students] lead the visit. They are the ones who take us [to] the school and explain the system. I'm really surprised how they [have] changed, and they [have] become very fluent in talking to the public. Speaking to the public and presenting are skills that they didn't have when they first joined the school."* (KII, Egypt)

Egypt. Egypt STEM School Project (ESSP), USAID. During high-level visits to the programs, students presented on the project's educational outputs and the levels of impact they felt. This practice aimed to enhance students' self-confidence and ability to communicate and speak in front of stakeholders. This fostered students' participation and direct communication with stakeholders. Targeted grades: 10–12.[30]

Libya. Promoting Leadership and Activism of Youth (PLAY) for Peace, USAID. The program, implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Libya, worked to enhance the capacities of young people to contribute and participate effectively in their community by enhancing their soft skills in leadership, negotiation, and planning. These skills aimed to help young people create spaces for effective dialogue and discussion with decision-makers from older generations that hold most of the power in traditional Libyan society. Targeted ages: 18–24.

West Bank and Gaza. PWY, USAID/IREX. The program worked to enhance the role of youth in creating knowledge and resources that were led and disseminated by youth to the community. These practices put young people at the center of the development process and, moreover, positioned young people at the forefront of their society with knowledge production and youth-led activities. Targeted ages: 14–29.

Tunisia. The Ma3an (Together) Program, USAID. This program promoted youth engagement in society by equipping them with skills to lead various activities. The project improved the overall environment and community by encouraging youth contribution, which changed the perceptions of youth to see themselves as leaders in their communities. Program documents did not specify a target age.

PROMOTE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Safe, supportive spaces and policies that encourage learning and skills development. Creating safe spaces for youth to learn and develop skills is one of the most used approaches in skills development focused interventions. As a result, many adopted programs that carefully consider its physical setting (or how such settings could be created digitally) provide youth with physically and/or intellectually safe spaces that foster socialization, learning by trial and error, and exploration. This is especially relevant due to the lack of spaces that cater to trial-based learning across the MENA region. Environments like these are not commonly available in most other spaces frequented by secondary school-aged youth. This includes schools, at the community level, or in social settings—including many youth centers.

Additionally, one venue that is not commonly considered a "safe space" are work environments that can be spaces where youth develop knowledge and experience in the workplace. **On-the-job training** programs can offer youth beneficiaries the opportunity to develop industry specific skills that help shape their abilities, build better expectations, and create a more precise image of the industry or line of business young people are aspiring to. In best practice, work-based learning would operate in settings where skills are progressively developed, learning and growth are encouraged, and constructive feedback is offered when young trainees make mistakes.

[30] KII 5. USAID Egypt.

Egypt. One example is from Egypt's Employment Promotion Project where practical work experience is embedded into program design for a secondary TVET intervention.[31] The program was designed as an incremental approach of work-based learning: job shadowing would graduate to one-to-two-week internships at different companies, which allowed students to experience a range of opportunities and to build their confidence in a safe learning environment. Program documents did not specify a target age.[32] Similar examples were identified in Algeria[33] and Morocco.[34]

In addition, programs working with at-risk youth emphasized **safe spaces for learning in conflict or post-conflict areas.** Respondents stated that these spaces provide an environment conducive to reintegration and support young men and women to overcome some of the difficulties they face, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and to engage in such healing spaces was perceived to be a means to steer young people away from various types of violence. **Social and emotional learning (in safe spaces)** was taken up in interventions that work with children and young people of different ages to build their social and emotional skills and psychological resilience. Respondents expressed that an approach used to provide these skills was through psychological support (especially for groups affected by conflict) and through other skills such as teamwork, dialogue, and communication skills. The importance of these skills for respondents, especially those working in the field of conflict in countries such as Syria and Iraq, is recognized in the tools used to support children and youth to reintegrate and foster positive interactions between them, their peers, and society.

Further examples that illustrate the PYD domain "Enabling Environment" include the following interventions that all provide environments that are safe and challenge youth to learn, test and try:

Syria. The Manahel/Syrian Education Programme (funded by UK Aid and the European Union), provided access to safe, inclusive, and quality learning opportunities to children in Syria while strengthening education actors to manage education effectively. One of the core components of this project was to ensure quality education and psychosocial support activities. Manahel fostered resilience and quality learning outcomes while ensuring safe, educational environments for young people, especially girls. In addition, the program supported young IDPs to overcome trauma by raising awareness about rights and understanding abusive practices and through stress release activities to support resilience skills. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Egypt. The ESSP program targeted marginalized youth and integrated them through a dedicated mentorship component. The program promoted youth engagement, leadership, and participation in the community through collaborative activities and workshops that involved public and private institutions. It also created a safe space for vulnerable groups (persons with disabilities and women) to express themselves and develop a positive self-identity. This fostered students' participation and direct communication with stakeholders. Targeted grade levels: 10–12.

[31] GIZ Egypt. Employment Promotion Project.
[32] Education Development Center. (2020). EDC to Improve Teacher Instruction in Egypt.
[33] World Learning Algeria. Entrepreneurship and Employment Program.
[34] MCC. Morocco Employability and Land Compact.

Lebanon. The USAID Lebanon Livelihoods in Forestry program allowed spaces for young people from disadvantaged and minority groups to participate actively in politics within their communities. One of the program's main objectives was to establish a safe space for youth to learn, grow, and to be equipped with crucial dialogue, debate, and organizing skills. Program documents did not specify a target age.

RQ2 CONCLUSIONS

Given the many different interventions targeting secondary school-aged youth across the region, it is unsurprising that programs considered a variety of skills and abilities as critical to youth's transitions through secondary level education and into higher education, college-level TVET, or other careers/livelihoods. Examined through the PYD lens, the study found that:

Building assets

- Many programs are designed to build skills in combination to prepare youth for the multiple pathways they are likely to encounter as they make transitions, whether those are academic, training or job related, or the myriad of other life decisions.

Enhance agency

- By developing skills related to self-identity and advocacy, youth can advocate for pathways that are important to them, even in the face of pressure from society and their families.

Contribute

- Letting youth lead and contribute is often used to design features that are seen to position youth to take on further leadership and decision-making roles in their future transitions.

Enabling environment

- Interventions recognize the importance of safe spaces, encompassing safe opportunities for work-based learning and safe spaces for community programming that allow for skills development as a testing and trial-based experience in learning and growth.

The models that are perceived as effective were described as modeling skills development, encouraging positive self-identity and advocacy, providing opportunities for youth to lead, and are implemented in spaces where youth feel safe to test and learn. The "model" interventions were described as exemplary in one of the four PYD domains; however, these are not to be considered in isolation. Programs that operate across all four domains are most likely to be effective. Moreover, the fit to the context—for example, safe spaces for managing trauma—would apply to some youth across settings, and a higher percent of youth in conflict-affected settings, thus context impacts how assets, agency, contribution, and especially an enabling environment are received. There is not one model that is best practice across the entire region.

RQ3:

In what ways does the variety of stakeholders involved in secondary school-level interventions, including parents/guardians, school counselors, local businesses, local NGOs, etc., support efforts to prepare youth for higher levels of schooling and to transition from school-to-work/career/livelihood, and what are the perceived outcomes and benefits of this support?

3a. What models of community stakeholder engagement are perceived to be most effective in supporting academic progression and preparatory school-to-work/career/livelihood interventions for secondary school youth?

RQ3 FINDINGS

The Study Team examined the type of stakeholders involved in the secondary school interventions, the models of engagement, and the incentives used to keep them engaged. Interventions covered in this study show that the type of stakeholders involved vary from one country to another and among different local communities. For example, through targeted interventions, civil society and youth groups are heavily engaged in the secondary school transition in the West Bank and Gaza and Tunisia. The private sector is more involved in interventions in the TVET sector in Morocco, while the humanitarian assistance CSOs and the parent councils are closely connected to interventions working with school systems to protect girls and youth in Yemen and Syria. The Study Team identified the following main stakeholders who are involved at different levels in the transition: parents, the private sector, peers, civil society, and the ministries of education and labor. The following section answers the research question in regard to: a) who are the key stakeholders; b) what are their capacities and resiliency; c) how did they get involved in the transition-related interventions; and d) what engagement models show best results, i.e., the most effective in terms of supporting youth transitions.

Stakeholder engagement is limited and varies from one country to another depending on the host government strategies, donor priorities, and allocated resources. For example, the governments in Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, West Bank and Gaza, and Tunisia are more active in engaging donors, parents, the private sector, and civil society in transition. Specifically, the ILO, UNICEF, the World Bank, and USAID seem to work closely with MOEs in these countries to facilitate upskilling, build linkages, and empower partners. In Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, engaging stakeholders is more challenging due to sectorial conflicts, fragile governance, corruption, and weak leadership. Most stakeholders of the interventions covered in this study mentioned the need to engage local stakeholders such as the private sector, parents, civil society, and community leaders. A list of all interventions detailed in this section on stakeholders (24 programs) is available in Annex II.

PEER-TO-PEER INTERACTION

Youth are key stakeholders in interventions that impact their transition from lower to upper secondary and then either towards TVET or general education. Peer-to-peer impact is a key factor influencing youth decisions at the secondary school transition. According to KIIs, this influence has been amplified by the wide use of social media in the MENA region. According to the 2021 Arab Youth Survey, social media is by far the largest source of news among young Arabs. In Libya, the IRC is implementing the PLAY for Peace program, a model of peer-to-peer positive transition with focus on emotional, behavioral, and conflict mitigation skills. The model was first designed by YPeer International where youth and students impact peers through youth clubs at universities. Across the MENA region, youth are being involved in data collection and research about their needs and aspirations, including youth involvement in labor

market studies and other efforts to involve youth stakeholders from the start of program design.[35] A number of these efforts are described in RQ2 as opportunities for youth contribution to youth programming.

STRONG RELATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT/MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Most implementing partners include government as a key stakeholder in the project's design and implementation plans (UNICEF, Amideast, World Learning, Injaz, IREX, British Council, MCC, IRC-Yemen and Libya). However, in most cases, involving government has not translated into true partnerships. For example, Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) representatives indicated during their KII that MCC was eager to include the Government of Morocco and the private sector as true partners in the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) for Morocco, but bureaucracy made it hard for MCC to achieve this vision. Also, World Learning in Algeria found it challenging to engage in partnership with the Government of Algeria and decided to switch intervention to target TVET centers directly.

> *"And when we finished the data collection, parents came to us, and said our children have been so empowered by the fact that they were in charge. So, the children conducted focus groups with parents and community leaders. But it was the first time that we invited parents to sit with local government leaders, with school representatives, with central ministry officials and sit down and listen to children telling them why youth drop out."* (KII, Morocco)
> *"…we trained about 220 teachers from all over the West bank to train students and work with them, and encourage those students to talk to their friends and families about volunteerism."* (KII, West Bank and Gaza)

Governments' involvement appears effective when project staff have a deep understanding of the education and youth system and have worked as educators. This is the case of Amideast when they appointed a manager of their education program in West Bank and Gaza who had previous experience in the government.[36] Also, the USAID ESSP program hired an ex-ministry staff, who had extensive experience as a professor and as a ministry official, to run the project.[37] On the other hand, governments express that donors do not understand their needs and that their staff is not able to handle procurement—if funding is channeled through the government itself—in a transparent way. Despite perceived challenges, the study still found an example of effective government involvement with MCC Morocco. There, MCC partnered with the government to convert their facilities into TVET centers and invited the private sector to design TVET programs entirely.[38] This model worked well, but one challenge was that the personnel who were under government contracts had difficulty adjusting to private sector systems due to the differences in the contract uses and terms. Other successful cooperation with governments are highlighted below:

In **Libya**, USAID's PLAY for Peace program aimed to foster citizenship and civic education and worked closely with the MOE to introduce a civic education curriculum into public schools. AKII respondent mentioned that mid-level technical staff at the MOE are open to the idea of fully collaborating with donors and that local-level governments are much more flexible to adopt these curricula through local MOE offices. Targeted ages: 18–24.[39]

[35] USAID. (2020). Libya Youth Situation Analysis; USAID MEERS Jordan Youth Retrospective Study.
[36] KII 45. Amideast West Bank and Gaza; Final Report; USAID/Amideast. (2018). Leadership and Teacher Development Program Final Report.
[37] USAID Egypt. (2017) ESSP Final Report.
[38] MCC Morocco. Morocco Employability and Land Compact.
[39] USAID. PLAY for Peace Factsheet.; KII, Libya.

In **Egypt**, USAID launched the ESSP program in 17 governorates. The MOE is adopting this project at the national level and closely coordinating with the implementing partner to improve and mainstream this "project-based" approach. A relevant KII respondent noted that local buy-in fostered coordination between the ministry to articulate goals and achieve results on a national level. Targeted grade levels: 10–12.

GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Involving central government and the private sector was clearly featured through MCC programs in Morocco. The MCC launched a public-private partnership program in which the government offered facilities to the private sector to turn into TVET centers in the north. It was challenging for MCC to bring these two groups to work together at the beginning. For example, some of the government staff at donated facilities were public servants with contracts and merit as public sector employees. When they moved to work under the private sector umbrella, these contracts and merit system were entirely irrelevant and created push back and delays.[40]

West Bank and Gaza. Leadership and Teacher Development Program, USAID. Amideast partnered with the MOE to co-create effective informal and non-formal language and soft skills programs. At a certain point, they worked with almost 60 percent of public schools in the West Bank specifically. Program documents did not specify a target age.[41]

> *"We work with the ministry to train several teachers to roll out the program in schools. They are dedicating several hours per week for the Know About Business program [KAB] as an elective, and these teachers will be monitored and certified by us at the end. And at the end of the intervention, the program will be institutionalized in the schools."* (KII, Lebanon)
>
> *"The idea is that TVET institutions will set up a career advisory board to provide guidance and career services. They invite employers to do talks, organize job fairs for students, and plan internship fairs. They also work with teachers to go out to the market and find what the world of work looks like. Because a lot of people at TVET institutions have never been near an employer, the idea is to set up these boards so that what has been taught becomes more relevant to the labor market and the community."* (KII, Libya)

WELL TRAINED, HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL STAFF

This study neither focuses on quality of education systems nor teacher preparation; however, these critical aspects of secondary-aged youth's experiences must be noted.

Teachers play a critical role in influencing students' perspective on transition and encouraging them to explore different skills and multiple career options. For example, in Yemen, GIZ is training teachers to serve in the role of school counselors.[42] The program includes NGOs and staff at local education offices. GIZ is eager to sustain this program beyond the life of the intervention.

Teachers are underpaid and overstretched in most of the countries studied. However, the literature review and KIIs clearly indicate the critical role of teachers in the secondary transition. For example, in Lebanon, where 60 percent of students attending private schools are linked to their factions or religions,

[40] MCC Morocco. Morocco Employability and Land Compact.; KII, Morocco.
[41] KII, West Bank and Gaza; Final Report; USAID/Amideast. (2018). Leadership and Teacher Development Program Final Report.
[42] GIZ Yemen. Ensuring Quality Education in the Context of Crisis in Yemen.

teachers are taking on a mentoring role to track students into higher education, TVET, and employment.[43] Applying a system-approach for transition is critical to build a proper educational environment in which engaging teachers, educational staff, and the whole school community strengthens the systems that aid youth transition.

In **Morocco,** teachers are often the mechanism through which curriculum-based soft skills development is expected to be enacted in classroom learning. "[For] Adoptions of teacher approaches for soft skills, we need to tie those to incentive." (KII, Morocco) [44]

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND DONOR INTERVENTIONS

Several regional models aimed at engaging the private sector show potential to create impact and achieve sustainability and scalability locally and regionally. For example, Education for Employment (EFE), a New York-based foundation that links education outcomes with the labor market, launched local chapters in 11 MENA countries led by private sector representatives, community leaders, and academic figures. They tailor their training and upskilling to meet local labor market needs. This model proves to be effective with a high placement rate, effective private sector involvement, and labor market driven. However, the cost per participant is high, making it difficult to achieve impact at scale.

> *"In each country we operate, we have locally registered affiliates…created from our founder and local businesspeople who created the Board of Directors in each country. Every country has a permanent staff, CEO, and Board of Directors now. Funding sources come from multi-lateral and bilateral donors through competitive grants and contracts. They are corporate foundations, like JP Morgan, Starbucks, Marriott, Visa Foundation, etc. For example, we get funding to train and place 200 youth in Egypt from Visa Foundation. It's sustainable in a sense that it's ongoing. Right now, we probably have 50-60 different funders around the region. If we are looking at the portfolio, funding ranges from multilateral, bilateral donors, family foundations, high net-worth individuals etc. That's the methodology, and it's ongoing, but the individual imitative is time-bound by the source." (KII, Regional)*

Jordan. Injaz Jordan is a model that succeeded in linking the private sector with the local education system to align education and training outcomes with labor market needs across the MENA region.[45] The model stems from a partnership with Junior Achievement to help students in their school transition through entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, and work readiness. They bring private sector experience to the classroom through hands-on curricula combined with practical experience. This model is effective in balancing between formal education and private sector knowledge in a way that does not burden principals and teachers. They are effective in engaging prominent local leaders to build buy-in and sustainability. Their model of engaging with the schools and linking with the private sector has potential to impact lower and upper secondary transition. Targeted grade levels: 7–12, university students, as well as entrepreneurs and recent graduates seeking employment.

YMCA has been an active player in the MENA region in promoting TVET education for out-of-school youth. They effectively engage with ministries of labor and education and community-based organizations

[43] UNICEF. (2019). The Ministry of Education and Higher Education and CRDP in partnership with UNICEF launch the new Teacher Training Curriculum Model.
[44] KII, Morocco.
[45] Injaz Jordan; KII, Jordan.

(CBOs) to design and upgrade curricula, train instructors, and link graduates with the labor market. They also communicate closely with the private sector to align TVET outcomes with the labor market needs.[46]

The British Council and Amideast use the English language as an effective tool to engage with stakeholders, the MOE and parents, and to empower students to make informed decisions about transitioning to higher education or TVET.[47] They work closely to provide soft skills, career exposure, and teacher training.

In **Libya**, the British Council is working with the government, parents, and stakeholders to promote TVET in a positive and empowering way. Amideast in the **West Bank and Gaza** is adding services to its English program to expose students to careers in the TVET sector in a positive way through field visits and "one day on a job." Targeted ages: 15–26.

UNICEF (in Morocco, Jordan, West Bank and Gaza, and Egypt) partners closely with MOEs to offer reform, teacher training, and soft skills. UNICEF works closely with governments to implement the MENA LSCE initiative to support youth in transition through life skills, using the four-dimensional learning model: 'Learning to Know' (Cognitive Dimension), 'Learning to Do' (Instrumental Dimension), 'Learning to Be' (Individual Dimension), and 'Learning to Live Together' (Social Dimension).[48] The life skills are acquired at lower secondary age and sustained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Targeted ages are different in each country.

In **Morocco**, second chance education is adapted to the needs of the local labor market through effective private sector engagement. UNICEF designs programming with the reality that many adolescents are working already when they are in formal school: "You see that a lot in Syria and Jordan. So many children combine informal work with education." (KII, Jordan and Syria).

UNICEF works with other UN organizations and their stakeholders to ensure smooth learning and transition for young people. They work with the ILO, World Bank, and other stakeholders to align the supply and the demand of the labor market. Through effective partnerships, they offer practice citizenship, civic engagement, life skills, and TVET training that are transferable and help youth find jobs.

> *"… UNICEF partners with host governments to boost students' focus on life skills. We're looking at 21st century skills, transferable skills, skills for learning, employability, empowerment, and citizenship, which are serving several purposes from keeping children in school to making the education they receive more relevant for their lives…"* (KII, UNICEF)

CSOS AND YOUTH CENTERS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE

CSOs as entities demonstrate great flexibility and understanding of the private sector, and provide students with exposure to the real-world career challenges and how to navigate them. Also, they offer better understanding and flexible solutions for secondary school transitions.

[46] YMNC is not one of the cases under this study but their contribution to TVET transition is impactful in several countries sin the region; UNDP. (2020). Support to TVET in East Jerusalem.
[47] British Council. Middle East and North Africa.
[48] UNICEF. Life Skills and Citizenship Education.

West Bank and Gaza. PWY, USAID/IREX. USAID launched a creative model to turn 24 youth clubs into "multipurpose youth development resource centers" (YDRCs).[49] These centers provide in-school and out-of-school youth with soft skills, opportunity to express their talents through training at media clubs, an enabling environment to thrive, and a sense of agency to identify community challenges and act on them. This model proved to be impactful and played an important role of bringing together public sector education resources and knowledge with CSOs' dynamism and flexibility, combining them with the private sector's effectiveness and efficiency. Targeted ages: 14–29.

In **Morocco**, MCC's Morocco Employability and Land Compact contracted local educational CSOs to create model schools.[50] The project is based on the concept of social impact bonds. The MCC issued a call for local CSOs to meet schools' needs, ranging from renovation to teacher training, to technology, to curricula, and supporting career counseling centers with proper transition. When CSOs deliver these activities against specific milestones, they will be paid based on their performance. The scope of work is comprehensive and focused on enhancing the quality of the transitions in these schools. The model was very successful, and the government is considering this approach in the future reform strategies. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Libya Elections and Legislative Strengthening Activity (LESLA), USAID/NDI. The project was launched to work with local councils to empower youth—as semi-governmental entities—which have some level of independence from the Tripoli government.[51]

"Definitely Covid made it more difficult. Working locally, the team leader of each city has briefing sessions with his/her focal points when they organize events or dialogue with the local municipal council. Youth are engaged in developing ideas, plan and implement projects, and measure impact. It is amazing how the peace project supports the municipal council, fosters local security, engages tribal leaders, and solicits input from businessmen and women-led organizations." (KII, Libya).

PARENTS PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE

Parents in the MENA region face difficult choices based on their household's socioeconomic status. For example, a common phenomenon among refugees in Jordan and Lebanon is for parents to push their children to leave school in order to contribute to their family's income.[52] An example of parental support is to create a parallel schooling system through private tutoring, as in Egypt and Lebanon, which negatively impacts the public education system and the academic advancement of learners who are unable to access (afford) private tutoring.[53]

Parents are a key influence in students' career choices. Middle- and upper middle-income households often dictate the academic track that their children can follow, leading to high demand in fields where employment will be difficult. For example, many families in Jordan and the West Bank and Gaza are pushing their kids to pursue medical, law, or engineering degrees to gain social status. As noted in RQ1, best

[49] USAID/IREX. PYD & Non-Formal Education Programs – Partnership with Youth.
[50] MCC Morocco. Morocco Employability and Land Compact; KII 30. Morocco.
[51] KII 40. USAID/NDI Libya.
[52] KII 33. Manahel / Syria Education Program.
[53] KII 5. USAID ESSP Egypt.

practice career guidance indicates that parents should be involved from when children are 6–9 years old, for example, by having children accompany parents to work or by participating in school-sponsored visits for students to parents' workplaces.

> *"… parents are aware that they have to send their children to the schools, but they don't have the financial resources. We offer livelihood activities for parents in a conditional way where they have to send their children back to school."* (KII, Syria)

Parents have limited resources, time, and awareness, and therefore need to be included in interventions and supported and encouraged to learn about when and how they can best support their children during this transitional time in their lives. The role of parents in supporting youth transitions was discussed by 29 KII respondents in nine countries. There were three common methods for engaging parents in interventions: direct parental engagement in program activities, training (by youth-focused programs) held specifically for parents, and parents being engaged at the school level. The results of engaging parents included strengthening of TVET—when parents were convinced of the value of TVET and the direct tie with specific jobs and industries that are actively hiring, it increased acceptability to alternative career pathways for their children, e.g., entrepreneurship. Parents also helped to fill gaps in programming and schooling—teachers, program staff, and the community are stretched thin and cannot support youth fully without parents. Finally, there were cases in which parental involvement drove inclusive education programming and reduced resistance to curricular reforms:

DIRECT PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES

Morocco. FORSATY Program, USAID. Youth conducted focus groups with parents and community leaders. While the target was younger youth, **this innovative approach to youth-led research was the first time parents were invited to sit with local government leaders, school representatives, and ministry officials. They heard directly from youth as they explained their research on why youth drop out of school and gave recommendations to the community about their perspectives and how they could support youth to stay in school.** The program involved parents in the USAID National Program for Reading, and some sessions were held with parents to explain why reading with their children is important. The program further engaged parents through their smartphones by sending them stories to read with their children. Targeted ages: 10–24.

West Bank and Gaza. PWY, USAID/IREX. Parents were invited into youth centers to watch their children perform and to attend program ceremonies, which provided opportunities to showcase what youth had learned through the program. Targeted ages: 14–29.

> *"The education system is comprehensive, we cannot separate school from the community. For that, we created a curriculum to demolish the world between the school and its community to integrate. We also created a talent council in each school, so we had the intervention of the parents in the kids' performance."* (KII, Lebanon)

YOUTH INTERVENTIONS OFFERING SPECIFIC TRAININGS FOR PARENTS

In addition to the examples above, another West Bank and Gaza program, operated by Amideast, offered parents short training sessions on how they can better support students to learn English, even when they are not English speakers themselves.[54]

Egypt. Employment Promotion Project, GIZ. The programs aimed to expose parents to TVET to raise parental awareness of the benefits and career paths. For example, one program offered technical summer camps to students and followed these with awareness sessions for parents. Program staff noted that "parents are the ones who decide for their children," and, therefore, when parents have better information about educational options, they will be able to make informed decisions about how to direct their child's studies. Program documents did not specify a target age.[55]

Egypt. Transition to Employment, ILO. The program supported youth with disabilities to obtain job training and to gain employment in the tourism industry. However, the program and job opportunities were at a distance from youth's households, and the program faced—but overcame—many hurdles: for example, in changing parents' perspectives that their children with disabilities were employable, and that they would be able to manage living and working away from home. The program held many sessions for parents and families in order to gain the trust and shift mindsets and was ultimately successful in securing parental and family approvals and in employing youth with disabilities. Program documents did not specify a target age.

Lebanon. Know About Business (KAB), ILO. The program provided youth entrepreneurship training, held dedicated sessions for parents of program beneficiaries to sensitize them (and spouses of young married women) on the importance of self-employment and entrepreneurship. The program had recognized that parents often block youth from taking up entrepreneurship because it is viewed as risky.[56]

Several respondents from programs in **Iraq, Syria, and Yemen** noted that informing parents of program goals and benefits was critical to getting their buy-in for women and youth with disabilities to partake in programming. Working with parents to understand and overcome their fears about programs resulted in parents who championed their children's participation. For example, in **Syria**, one program, after receiving feedback from parents, shifted programming from a setting where boys and girls would be present (at different times, but in the same setting) to more "formal" spaces, i.e., girls' schools, which were seen as more appropriate spaces for young women to meet compared to community centers that were (separately) open to young men and young women.[57]

ENGAGING PARENTS AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

For programs that operated within school spaces, parents were engaged in parent teacher associations (PTAs) or similar parental structures in programs that operated in Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen. For example, several USAID Gateway to Education programs in **Yemen** formed parents into "father and mother councils" that provided protection and facilitated access to schools, even in the most marginalized and poor communities.[58] Yemeni parents were motivated to get involved in these "father and mother councils" to make sure their girls had access to a healthy schooling environment, mainly with proper sanitation.

[54] KII 45. Amideast West Bank and Gaza.
[55] KII 29. GIZ Egypt.
[56] KII 38. ILO KAB Lebanon.
[57] KII 33. The Syrian Education Program, DFID.
[58] USAID School Doors, USAID Gateway to Education

Parents can also help "fill gaps with what teachers cannot support, ensuring that they [parents] are part of your implementation is important to make it successful." (KII, Yemen). In **Syria**, the Manahel project formed local committees to engage partners, community leaders, and teachers to address the access challenges and mitigate security risks.[59]

> *"Manahel provides awareness for parents to make sure they are not prioritizing boys over girls to access schools… we offer livelihood activities to provide parents with income in return of sending their children back to school… but it's still risky for the girls and therefore we form local committees with parents to help provide protection from air strikes, kidnapping, harassment."* (KII, Syria)

When parents are not informed of programs and changes in the school system, they can push back. For example, one regional KII respondent described resistance to an education reform to introduce competency-based curricula that encouraged developing 21st century skills. Parents had not been consulted on the change and questioned the shift, saying "what happened to the old curriculum?" On the other hand, parents can be critical allies in framing the messages around transition, about education reform, and the quality of education through public messaging campaigns. In **Egypt**, parent-formed groups played a critical role in successfully promoting the new digital curricula (which had many opponents when launched by the government).[60]

RQ3 CONCLUSIONS

Parents/guardians, private sector, peers, CSOs, and government influence youth to prepare for higher education, TVET, or livelihood in the following ways:

- Influence the design and delivery of soft skills
- Encourage children to access and stay at schools
- Help in career transition, through involvement with schools and career guidance
- Provide protection, especially for girls

Interventions cited by respondents as most effective had the following characteristics:

- Engaged stakeholders earlier in the design to build buy-in with a constant feedback loop and learning
- Used "joint learning" as a theme, not only partnership or local engagement
- Combined incentives and capacity building to motivate stakeholders through co-design and co-creation
- Had staff who were knowledgeable in multiple disciplines such as education and private sector, public and private sectors, or STEM and TVET
- Used a participatory approach and encouraged youth to co-design activities as equal partners

Engaging diverse stakeholders required varied approaches:

Local organizations including CBOs, CSOs, and NGOs play a critical role in connecting the labor market with the transition process at secondary school and for out-of-school youth. USAID is attempting to engage more local partners (CBOs, CSOs, NGOs) in supporting development, including youth transitions, however, more investment in building their capacity is needed. The process of engaging local

[59] Chemonics/DFID. Manahel – Syria Education Program.
[60] UNICEF. (2021). Life Skills and Citizenship Education helps students to thrive during summertime.

actors is easily overlooked, while the processes of both trust building and knowledge transfer are complex as they require time, resources, deliberate learning, and buy-in.

Private sector stakeholders can support efforts to prepare youth for higher levels of education and to transition from school into jobs and livelihood opportunities. There are serious attempts by donors to engage and incentivize the private sector to connect with secondary school transition; however, there is a deep gap in understanding of these two distinct worlds. On both sides there is interest in building bridges, but due to the fragmented nature of the private sector and widespread informality in the MENA region, desired outcomes have yet to be achieved.

Parents are critical to students and youth's successful transition. However, the roles they play may encourage and strengthen education systems but also disrupt patterns through encouraging a parallel system, such as the case of private tutoring in Lebanon or Egypt. While this study focused on secondary level interventions, a few programs began at primary level and extended into lower secondary. These tended to be programs that integrated parents regularly, whereas those focused on upper secondary levels tended to not mention parental engagement, signaling that it was either absent, or not prioritized.

There were three ways that parents are engaged in secondary level interventions:

1) Directly in program activities, e.g., parents/guardians are invited to showcase events featuring performances or demonstrations by their children
2) Tailored training or sensitizations for parents (within youth programs)
3) Created roles and engagement opportunities at the school level, e.g., PTAs or other similar associations

Programs often superficially include **youth** in program decision-making, rather than leveraging youth as valued stakeholders. Youth engagement is not fully understood as a major standalone function that needs significant resources, knowledge of youth psychology, and considerable time and effort.

Engaging **teachers** and the school community is critical, especially for youth in secondary school. The school community is instrumental in how youth come to understand options within general education, TVET, and livelihoods, and how youth form ideas about future career prospects. The school community presents role models, informal mentoring, and exposure to careers. Teachers in the MENA region are considered the "source of knowledge" and their influence is strong on youth choices.

Collaboration with **government stakeholders** is essential to improving successful transitions. While governments and implementing partners realize and promote the value of collaboration, they articulate conflicting ideas about resources and control, priorities and agenda setting, corruption, and power sharing making it difficult to form fruitful partnerships.

RQ4:

For interventions that have been either scaled to a national level or sustained past the original period of funding: What are the characteristics of these interventions including how they are designed, funded, managed, and regulated?

RQ4 FINDINGS

This section examines interventions that were sustained and scaled beyond the original scope: who were the stakeholders that helped the model become sustained; what factors supported sustainability and scale; and how stakeholders provided long-term financial support. The Study Team found that donors tend to design and implement projects without planning for sustainability and/or scalability. Interventions focus on stakeholders' involvement with the goal of lining up resources rather than building sustainable partnerships. This section examines the attention given to identifying the program model, refining it, and clarifying it to stakeholders before taking the intervention to scale, and the key steps for sustainable and scalable programs. These steps are examined in cases of government-led scale up, private sector-led scale up, regulatory and policy change, and design-led sustainability models. Despite efforts to sustain interventions, many secondary school-level transition programs are donor-driven, and their impact is limited to the activities undertaken during the financed period. A list of all interventions included in this section on sustainability and scale up (29 interventions) is available in Annex II.

GOVERNMENT-LED SCALE UP

Government-led scale up efforts tend to take more effort and time due to bureaucracy and resistance to reform. Most countries that were examined under the study have insufficient education budgets which prevents them from allocating resources to enhance the transition, and therefore donor programs fill gaps in providing services to smooth youth transitions.

Libya. PLAY for Peace, USAID/IRC. The program is coordinating closely with MOE to integrate civic education curricula at the national level to help students learn critical thinking and debate skills, tolerance education (how to be open to others' opinions), and how to solve conflicts respectfully. The donor and the implementer started to engage the government at an early stage to guarantee local buy-in and seek sustainable scale. Targeted ages: 18–24.[61]

In **Jordan**, UNICEF involves the government to integrate digital and financial literacy at a national level to serve more than 130,000 students.[62]

In **Morocco**, MCC partnered with the ministries of education and labor to launch a national TVET program in partnership with the private sector. Separately, MCC launched a model school in partnership with several CSOs. Program documents did not specify a target age.[63]

[61] USAID. PLAY for Peace Factsheet.
[62] UNICEF. (2021). Reimagine Education Case Study – Jordan.
[63] MCC. Morocco Employability and Land Compact.

In the **West Bank and Gaza**, Amideast worked closely with MOE to offer English language and informal programs to boost soft skills.[64] This model of effective partnership has the potential to be scaled and sustained locally and regionally, especially because Amideast offers English language programs across the MENA region that are compelling to governments, private sector actors, and parents, as these stakeholders recognize that English language skills can open future opportunities for youth. In reviewed literature, parents expressed willingness to pay for these services and share the burden with donors, government, and the private sector. English programs are critical for all stakeholders and could trigger sustainable and scalable models. Program documents did not specify a target age.

PRIVATE SECTOR-LED SCALE UP

Private sector-led scale up of programs that aim to be sustainable can often do so more effectively than NGO or government-led programs. This is mostly due to the private sector's ability to articulate value to educators and parents, offer clear and relevant pedagogy, and create concrete learning (or employment) outcomes and results.

In **Libya,** for example, Elham is a private sector education provider that works to boost the entire school ecosystem.[65] The founder developed a project-based curriculum based on a specialized pedagogy that incorporates behavioral competencies. For example, students and teachers are trained to observe each other and report on good behaviors such as offering help to others, picking up trash, greeting guests, asking good questions, being on time, etc. This behavioral bank is reported to enforce positive social and emotional behaviors through recognition and positive reinforcement. The founder mentioned that he has contracts with 90 percent of the private schools in Libya and his business is growing. The owner recently entered into negotiations with the MOE to launch their services in public schools. Inspire Lab targeted ages 4–17.

REGULATORY AND POLICY CHANGE

Regulatory and policy change is detected as an effective approach to achieve sustainability and scalability, especially if built on a public-private partnership such as the Injaz model in Jordan.[66] Injaz worked with the MOE, central bank, the private sector association representing the banking sector, and the Brookings Institute to build a business case about investing in financial education at schools. A long process of collective private-public sector dialogue resulted in a new law enforced by the central bank to allocate 1 percent from banks' revenues to fund and scale up a financial literacy curriculum at the national level. Brookings Institute was contracted to launch a scaling up lab to constantly collect data about this model to improve, sustain, and gauge buy-in by stakeholders.

DESIGN-LED SUSTAINABILITY MODEL

When the proper stakeholders, including parents, the private sector, community leaders, NGOs, and, especially, youth themselves, are included at the design stage of any intervention, with clear and defined measurement and objectives, the programs may ignite system change at scale:

[64] KII 45. Amideast West Bank and Gaza.
[65] Elham. Inspire Lab.
[66] Injaz Jordan.; KII 27. Injaz Jordan.

Egypt. ESSP, USAID. The project funded a STEM education pilot to reach 5,000 students in 17 governorates.[67] The project-based curriculum had never been used in Egypt before. The program presented an excellent model to include promising, but marginalized, students and help them gain academic and soft skills. When asked how they teach soft skills, a project representative mentioned "we don't teach soft skills but rather we let students model them." For example, if the school had a visitor from the government or the private sector, teachers mentored groups of students to prepare for the visit. Teachers observed how students prepared the presentation and provided guidance. A clear obstacle to scale up this project was that the cost to participate is $3,000 a year per student, but this could be reduced over time. This successful model attracted the attention of the MOE to the extent that the ministry included STEM education as a key pillar of their 2030 education strategy, with emphasis on how to reduce the cost and mainstream this approach across the country. The obstacles to scale are complexity, high cost per participant, and lack of clear roles of partners. Targeted grade levels: 10–12.

RQ4 CONCLUSIONS

Most interventions under this study had sustainability plans, but many of the projects were not sustained beyond the period of donor funding. There was a trend towards complacency in expecting program activities to end with the original funding period, versus eliciting a more critical review of what worked, and if the intervention should have (and could have) been sustained and/or scaled. Challenges to sustainability and scale include poor design and waiting too long to solicit buy-in from stakeholders—by which time stakeholders often do not see the activity as serving their community. **What has been successful is when organizations, such as Injaz, International Youth Foundation (IYF), and EFE effectively engage the private sector to build partnerships and local advisory groups to own the design and implementation.** However, this process is costly and requires the right intermediary partner—a step that is often overlooked.

Most programs that have the potential to be sustained and scaled:

- Have sound design and clearly articulate how interventions are linked to local systems
- Systematically engage stakeholders from the start
- Have leadership team that proposes clear strategies that leverage local resources
- Drive sustainability and scalability by offering sound Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting and Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning strategies to gauge stakeholders' interest based on evidence, feedback loops, and proved concepts

Any sustainable or scalable model must show proof of concept before being taken to scale, as was the case in the Egypt STEM model. Another example was the Libya program which introduced civic education, debate, and conflict management. The program was designed with the aim to bring these skills into the local education system from the start. The government, especially the MOE in Libya, was very receptive to integrating the program's curriculum in a way that addressed the culture of top-down leadership that hindered innovation, openness, and critical thinking at the secondary school. EFE, MCC (Morocco) and Injaz designed programs with desired outcomes in mind: developing skilled workers that meet private sector needs. They engaged local leaders to develop collective curricula that meet private sector needs. These programs have potential to be scaled and sustained because they prioritize local leadership.

[67] USAID Egypt. (2017) ESSP Final Report.

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SECONDARY LEVEL TECHNICAL PROGRAMMING

The Study Team identified lessons learned and related implications for secondary level technical programming, organized by RQ, which deserve further investigation in considering programming for secondary school-aged youth in the MENA region. Lessons learned and implications for programming was the focus of an upcoming MENA region USAID workshop, and the final version of this section is refined based on discussions during that workshop.

RQ1 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 1—CAREER GUIDANCE

Table 4: Lessons Learned/Implications for Career Guidance

Lessons Learned	Implications for Programming – Design and Support Initiatives that:
There is no agreement across the MENA region with regard to the aims and objectives of career guidance. At present, career guidance in the region is directive, meaning, that learners do not have opportunities to think about their interests and consider how these relate to educational or career options.	• National MOEs and USAID could collaborate to bring together committees that include national and local stakeholders in the educational community, those engaged in donor-funded programs providing ad-hoc career guidance, private sector stakeholders, and youth to collaboratively discuss and align on the aims and objectives of career guidance. • Based on what is decided, the overall design of national career guidance, and how it will be funded, managed, regulated, and implemented should be determined. Doing so will give a framework against which career guidance activities can be measured and provide a template for the evaluation of their success.

Lessons Learned	Implications for Programming – Design and Support Initiatives that:
Career guidance is often delivered too late to impact career choice. According to the OECD, ILO, and other organizations studying career guidance best practices, career information is introduced at primary level and continues, with grade-appropriate curricula, through all levels of education (like a competency framework that sets standards for learning across grade levels in subject-area curricula).[68]	• National MOEs, USAID, and national and local stakeholders in the educational community, those engaged in donor-funded programs that include career guidance, private sector stakeholders, and youth who are directly impacted by exam-based sorting, should collaboratively develop a plan to identify appropriate timelines for career guidance interventions and particularly at an early stage before examination results limit career choices. • Essentially the goal should be to establish competency frameworks to determine what grade level local stakeholders feel is appropriate to introduce what types of career guidance curricula. While existing tools, such as the OECD work, can serve as a guide, these would need to be validated in each MENA country. • Doing so should open more [realistic) routes into occupations so that selection is not based entirely on examination results.
Ad-hoc programs have limited impact as they are often not supported beyond the initial funded period. For long-term development there is a need to embed career guidance in education policy and as part of established institutions and processes. Relatedly, institutionalization at national scale requires the professionalization of career guidance providers.	• National MOEs, USAID, and national and community stakeholders should be involved in the design and delivery of technical assistance programs to foster "ownership" of career guidance and to generate a wider understanding of what career guidance involves. • USAID can support national MOE efforts to train professional career guidance counselors, which (in the short term) may require incentivizing those already in school settings, e.g., teachers, administrators, etc., to take on these roles, and offer additional payment to compensate for these additional responsibilities. It will also be important to explore the possibility of shared funding/partnership with interested private sector stakeholders, particularly their involvement in career guidance delivery. • Institutionalization of set aims and objectives of career guidance would be most assured by embedding career education and guidance in the overall educational curriculum.
There are sizable gaps in measuring outcomes from career guidance. Once the aims and objectives of career guidance at difference grade levels is established, related measurement of desired outcomes should be adapted with indicators to track progress.	• USAID should support national MOEs that desire national career guidance programs to determine measurements related to best practices for career guidance globally. This should be developed in conjunction with a system of evaluation that should include continuous, robust monitoring of longitudinal outcomes and correlation with labor market data. This will involve collection of data on outcomes from career guidance, education, and the labor market. This data should be analyzed and applied to improve career guidance and youth decision-making.

[68] Investing in Career Guidance (2021) & OECD. (2021). How youth explore, experience and think about their future: A new look at effective career guidance.

Table 5: Lessons Learned/ Implications for Including Marginalized Youth

Lessons Learned	Implications for Programming – Design and Support Initiatives that:
DPOs, local organizations supporting gender equity, and those representing refugee, conflict affected, IDP, and other at-risk categories of youth are critical to marginalized youth's access to programming that meets their needs.	• Local groups serving marginalized populations should be brought together as part of an evaluation project. There would appear to be a need for greater coordination between all stakeholders, particularly in relation to female participation, persons with disabilities, and support for rural youth.
Laws and policies for students and workers with disabilities commonly exist, but are not always applied.	• USAID could support awareness and advocacy campaigns, often organized by DPOs, to increase the likelihood that policies meet the needs of people with disabilities and are implemented as intended.
Inclusive and accessible programming is often an add-on, rather than a foundational aspect of curriculum design from the start.	• USAID implementing partners that design curriculum should ensure an inclusive approach from the start, considering gender, persons with disabilities, at-risk youth, and ensure these categories are accommodated in the original design, not as an addition if and when needed. • Universal Design for Learning principles for curriculum design can serve as a resource to validate if curriculum is accessible to all learners.
Out-of-school youth and at-risk youth can benefit from accelerated learning or parallel (non-formal) learning programs that provide second chances to education and related diplomas that facilitate transitions to work or advanced training.	• USAID can support accelerated and parallel learning to out-of-school and at-risk youth. Though programs target only some categories of youth, remedial academic support may also benefit a wider segment of youth than those usually considered more likely to drop out.
While there are common barriers that limit women's and marginalized youth's engagement in school, interventions, and work, these vary by context, even within countries. Contextualized understanding of barriers is key.	• Conduct a GESI analysis with support from local NGOs involved in supporting marginalized youth (persons with disabilities, gender inclusion, refugee services, rural youth, etc.), and use findings in design planning and review regularly as trends and perceptions may shift—especially if the program is designed to do so.

RQ2 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 3—SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Table 6: Lessons Learned/Implications for PYD-based Skill Development

Lessons Learned	Implications for Programming – Design and Support Initiatives that:
Many effective programs are designed to build skills in combination to prepare youth for the multiple pathways they are likely to encounter as they make transitions, whether those are academic, training or job-related, or the myriad of other life decisions.	• USAID should support programs that respond to educational and skills gaps in the educational systems, including programs that prepare youth to apply for transitional steps, such as training or job opportunities, and with the relevant soft skills to excel in those opportunities.
Developing skills related to self-identity and advocacy gives youth the necessary tools/skills to advocate for pathways that are important to them, even in the face of pressure from society and their families.	• Implementers, or those designing curriculum for interventions, should ensure that skills development is not a passive activity. Youth should learn and practice advocacy and have opportunities to learn about and act on their values, beliefs, and interests.
Programs that put youth in leadership positions set youth up to take on further leadership and decision-making roles in their future transitions.	• Implementers, or those designing curriculum used by interventions, should incorporate more learning-by-doing concepts, which are essential to ensure youth can contribute and lead, such as: ○ Connecting skills development opportunities to professional sectors can help develop young people's interest in following TVET. ○ Promoting internships and jobs through private sector partnerships can support young people's social and professional skills development.
Interventions recognize the importance of safe and accessible spaces, encompassing safe opportunities for work-based learning, and safe spaces for community programming that allow for skills development as a testing and trial-based experience in learning and growth.	• USAID should ensure that the youth education and skills development interventions are conducted in safe (intellectual and physical) and accessible spaces to support young people's ability to explore, trial and error, and expression of self to help youth's growth and preparation for integrating into the community.

RQ3 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 4—STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Table 7: Lessons Learned/Implications for Incorporating a Variety of Stakeholders

Lessons Learned	**Implications for Programming –** Design and Support Initiatives that:
Local organizations including CBOs, CSOs, and NGOs play a critical role in connecting the labor market with the transition process at secondary school and for out-of-school youth.	• Project funders should allocate resources to identify and build local organizations' capacity from the start of new projects. This will reinforce local leaders and champions for the intervention. • From initial program design, implementers should consider how objectives will be communicated and what will appeal to relevant stakeholders. Strategic communication is not about selling the project to stakeholders, but rather about engaging and carefully listing (and aligning with) where their needs and interests meet program objectives. • Engage stakeholders in finalizing measurement indicators, demonstrating how feedback loops and adaptation are built into the Monitoring and Evaluating (M&E) system. This will encourage buy-in for sustainability and scale up, as results will be clear, meaningful, and timely.
Private sector stakeholders can support efforts to prepare youth for higher levels of education and to transition from school into jobs and livelihood opportunities. There are serious attempts by donors to engage and incentivize the private sector to connect with secondary school transition; however, there is a deep gap in understanding of these two distinct worlds.	• The gap between private sector and education is a space where local intermediary organizations can play an important role. Selecting local intermediaries that understand the private sector and the objectives of donor funded programs was successfully modeled in the case of interventions such as EFE (in West Bank and Gaza) and Injaz (in Morocco, Jordan, and Egypt), among others.

Lessons Learned	Implications for Programming – Design and Support Initiatives that:
Parents are critical to students' and youth's successful transition. However, the roles they play may encourage and strengthen education systems. But can also disrupt patterns through encouraging a parallel system such as the case of private tutoring in Lebanon and Egypt. While this study focused on secondary level interventions, a few programs began at primary level and extended into lower secondary. These tended to be programs that integrated parents regularly, whereas those focused on older secondary levels tended to not mention parental engagement, signaling that it was either absent, or not prioritized. There were three ways that parents were engaged in secondary level interventions: 1)directly in program activities, i.e., parents/guardians were invited to showcase events featuring performances or demonstrations by their children, 2) tailored trainings or sensitizations for parents (within youth programs) 3) created roles and engagement opportunities at the school level, e.g. PTAs or other similar associations.	• Implementors that design programs should consider and incorporate relevant means of engaging parents throughout the lower and secondary education years. Parental engagement at the primary school level may offer models of how parents are involved at those levels, and how this engagement can be scaffolded into lower and upper secondary years. • USAID implementers should consider leveraging the three ways of engaging parents identified in interventions: Parents could be more motivated to engage with programs through attendance at performances and ceremonies by youth; in sessions that aim to sensitize parents to the importance of education and employment opportunities for girls and children with disabilities; training to help parents support their children to develop high-level literacy skills and/or to build their English skills (even among non-literate or non-English speaking parents); and introducing ways for parents/guardians to participate in school communities, such as—depending on what is needed in different contexts—on school boards, PTAs, and father and mothers councils. Systems and cultures in West Bank and Gaza, Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco seem the most respective to include parents in lower and upper secondary education and transition.
Programs often superficially include **youth** in program decision-making, rather than leveraging youth as valued stakeholders.	• To engage youth as stakeholders, USAID should partner with, or require implementers to have greater levels of partnership with, youth serving (and youth-led) organizations to create a ripple effect and cascade impact where youth support one another, such as the YPeer model in Libya and examples of youth leadership in programs (RQ2). Supporting youth-to-youth engagement that leverages the benefits of social media and increasing youth connection are ways that can build youth's ability to manage emotional stress, behavioral changes, and social conflict—online and in-person.

Lessons Learned	**Implications for Programming –** Design and Support Initiatives that:
Engaging **teachers** and the school community is critical, especially for youth in secondary school. The school community is instrumental in how youth come to understand options within general education, TVET, and livelihoods, and how youth form ideas about future career prospects.	• Programs should work with teachers when designing and implementing career guidance and other programming, as teachers influence student perceptions. Interventions should allocate more resources for building capacity, boosting trust, and articulate incentives with teachers and the school community.
Collaboration with **government stakeholders** is essential to improving successful transitions. While governments and implementing partners realize and promote the value of collaboration, they articulated conflicting ideas about resources and control, priorities and agenda setting, corruption, and power sharing, making it difficult to form fruitful partnerships.	• USAID, implementing partners, and governments should meet to candidly discuss options for collaboration from the design stage. Discussions should include resource sharing and how specific interventions can support shared objectives.

RQ4 LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING

THEME 5—SUSTAINBILITY AND SCALING

Table 8: Lessons Learned/Implications for Sustainability and Scaling

Lessons Learned	**Implications for Programming –** Design and Support Initiatives that:
Scale up and sustainability actions are commonly introduced at the last stage of an intervention. Programs encourage stakeholders to become involved to raise funds, rather than to build sound sustainability and scalability strategies.	• Sustainability and scalability models must start with a solid strategy as the cornerstone of good outcomes. • For any program to be sustained and scaled up effectively and achieve results, such strategies must be embedded in the design and implemented from the start. • Identifying the specific aspect of the program to bring to scale. Effective programs often identify at the start what the most challenging and overlooked step to achieving scale is.
A majority of interventions are time-bound, which reduces the likelihood of sustainability and scale.	• Design programs that have scalability and scalability as the main goal — fewer one-off programs or pilots and more sustained "flagship" models (within which piloting may be used).

ANNEX I: CONTEXT: SECONDARY-AGED YOUTH IN THE MENA REGION

In the last decade, beginning with the Arab Spring, there has been a sharpened focus on youth experiences in the MENA region. Youth across the region face many challenges such as finding TVET programs matching their interests, or programs in industries with employment opportunities. Persistently high drop-out rates from secondary school, unemployment or underemployment, and the lack of soft skills identified by employers as key factors for hiring are all common hurdles for MENA youth. Youth in certain MENA countries also face political and social systems marred by conflict, lack of resources, and the stress of forced migration born from regional instability. There have been numerous efforts to support political and social reforms and directly support youth, but based on a scan of the literature, the results are mixed.

This section provides context on secondary-aged youth in the MENA region, including an analysis of the macro trends that impact the economic, political, and social environments in which youth are navigating transitions; key strengths and weaknesses in the general and technical education systems in the region; and regional statistics that illustrate the current trajectories of youth, i.e., those in general education, in technical or vocational education, out-of-school, etc. This context sets the scene for the investigation of national efforts at career guidance and the multitude of interventions by USAID, international organizations, and other donors that are working within this context to build on strengths and fill gaps in the current education systems and macroenvironment in which youth transitions are taking place.

One critical aspect of successful transitions to work for youth is a strong foundation in general education; that is, functional literacy and numeracy skills that are key to critical thinking and problem solving. According to a World Bank report, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates participated in the Program for International Student Assessment[69] 2015, and their 15-year-old students averaged 2–4 years of schooling less than those of OECD's countries. [70] In Algeria and Lebanon, two-thirds of students did not meet a basic proficiency level in science, reading, and mathematics. While it is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the performance of national secondary school systems, the quality of teaching and learning, teacher preparation, curricula, facilities, and other basic aspects of general secondary education are widely acknowledged to be critical to youth's ability to persist and perform well in school, and to pursue pathways into jobs, careers, and technical training.

While educational quality was not explicitly investigated, the country briefs drafted in advance of this report did explore the key strengths and weaknesses of educational and TVET systems across the 11 countries covered in this study. Though not applicable to each country, a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of general and TVET secondary education systems across the MENA region reflects aspects that interventions targeting youth in these institutions might leverage as areas to build on, or gaps around which to target programming, as a number of the reviewed interventions described in this study have done.

[69] The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures how children apply their knowledge and competencies in reading, mathematics, and science to real-world situations.

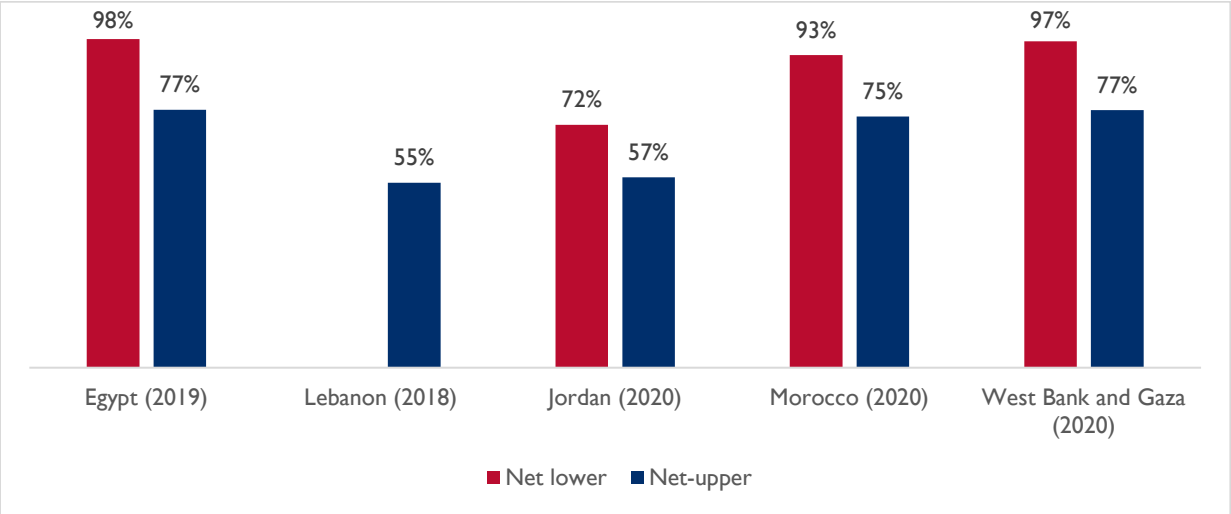
[70] Greaney, V.; Kellaghan, T. (2008). Assessing National Achievement Levels in Education. National Assessments of Educational Achievement. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Strengths:	Weaknesses:
• Prioritization of educational reform • Examples of career guidance (in higher ed.) • Renewed interest in TVET (& STEM) • Growing interest in engaging teachers and parents • History & culture of education	• Preference for academic routes • Cultural resistance to education reform • Ineffective, or non-existent, career guidance • Education systems strained by refugees • Low TVET enrollment • Few supports for students with disabilities

TRENDS IN ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

While parents, teachers, community leaders, and often youth themselves express a preference for an academic pathway, the most commonly desired progression from school to higher education does not reflect the reality of most young people in the MENA region. Secondary school net enrollment trends demonstrate that, across a selection of MENA countries (with comparable recent data), approximately 20 percent fewer youth are enrolled in upper secondary school than lower secondary school.

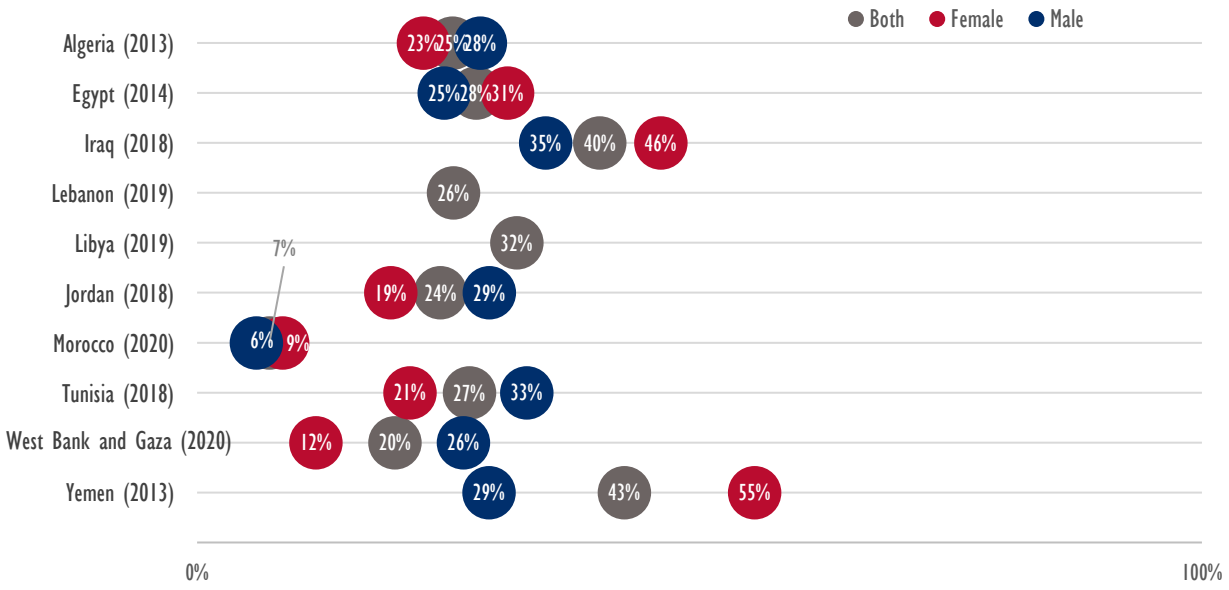
Figure 5: Secondary School Net Enrollment Rate[71]



Additionally, net enrollment data highlights that countries with high refugee populations (i.e., Lebanon and Jordan) have a lower enrollment rate in upper secondary school compared to those with lower refugee populations. In terms of out-of-school rates, Figure 6 below illustrates the rates for male, female, and all students across several countries in the region with comparable data.

Figure 6: Out-of-school Rates of Upper Secondary School Students[72]

[71] UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Total net enrolment rate by level of education. (2018 – 2020).
[72] UIS. Out-of-school rate, secondary school age by sex and location (household survey data); World Development Indicators. Adolescents out of school (% of lower secondary school age); Human Development Indicators. Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24)



Another observation is that out-of-school rates are higher in countries with recent conflicts. UNICEF estimates that one in every five children in MENA is not in school, and that armed conflict in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have increased drop-out rates, with an estimated three million children out of school directly related to these conflicts.[73]

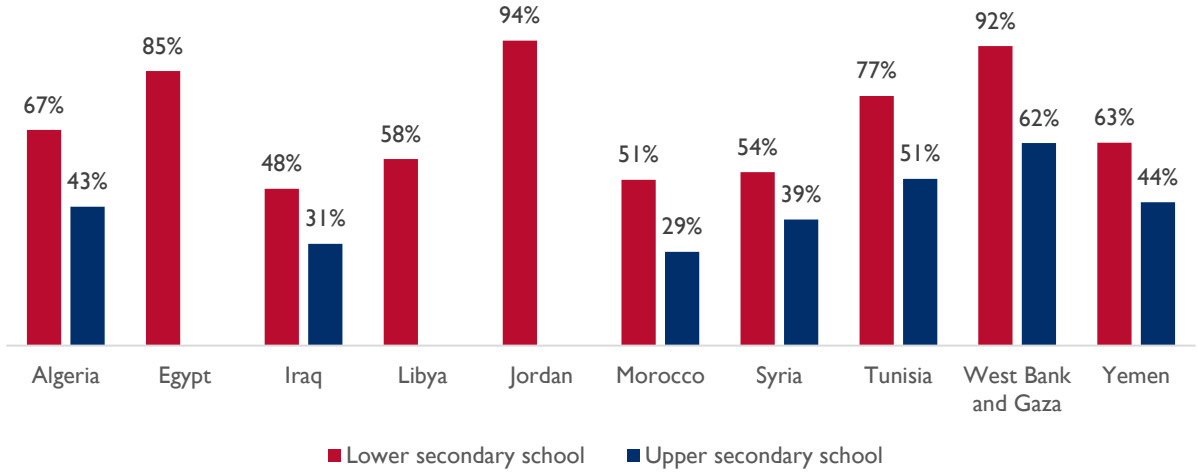
On top of this, some countries show a higher rate of females who are out of school, while others show a higher rate of males who are out of school. This is noteworthy in upper secondary school, where females are more likely to stay since they have fewer options in the workforce. However, gender inequalities also represent a major obstacle to girls accessing education, as they are at a greater risk of gender-based violence and early marriage. Adolescent girls are 1.5 times more likely to be out of school in lower secondary education in the region, and one in five girls are married before the age of 18.

Also, in "French" system schools, such as Algeria, the end of middle school exam was estimated (by one respondent) at a 55–65 percent pass rate among students, with girls outpacing boys. Failure means retaking the entire school year, and boys are highly averse to repeating a grade and likely to drop out after such failure. Boys may also be forced by families to leave school and enter the labor market to help the household. In conflict settings, including Libya and Syria, boys may be recruited to join terrorist or other armed groups.

Furthermore, completion rates for lower and upper secondary school (see Figure 7 below) are generally lower than enrollment rates, especially when it comes to upper secondary school. In Algeria, Iraq, Morocco, Syria, and Yemen, less than 50 percent of students complete upper secondary school. That means less than half of children, who are generally aged 18 or younger, exit school during their high school equivalent years and are forced to transition into livelihood opportunities while still at a formative learning and development stage.

[73] UNICEF. Education in MENA region.

Figure 7: Lower and Upper Secondary School Completion Rates (2020)[74]



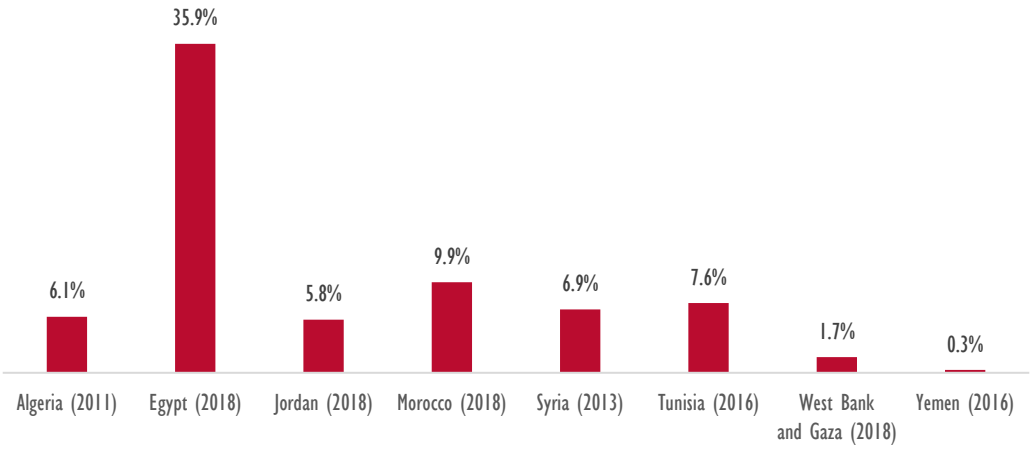
TRENDS IN TVET PATHWAYS

TVET has globally been, and remains, a secondary target to general education for government funding and student enrollment, and the MENA region is no exception. See Figure 8 for the percentage of upper secondary school-aged youth enrolled in technical or vocational education in a selection of countries. In the 2016 ILO-UNICEF consultation report, it was mentioned that "TVET is…perceived as a 'residual' category for those students who cannot make it to the general secondary path after completing basic education."[75] As such, until attitudes and investments shift, there remains a growing skills mismatch in the region.

[74] UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) 2020. Educational attainment rate, completed secondary education or higher, population 25+.

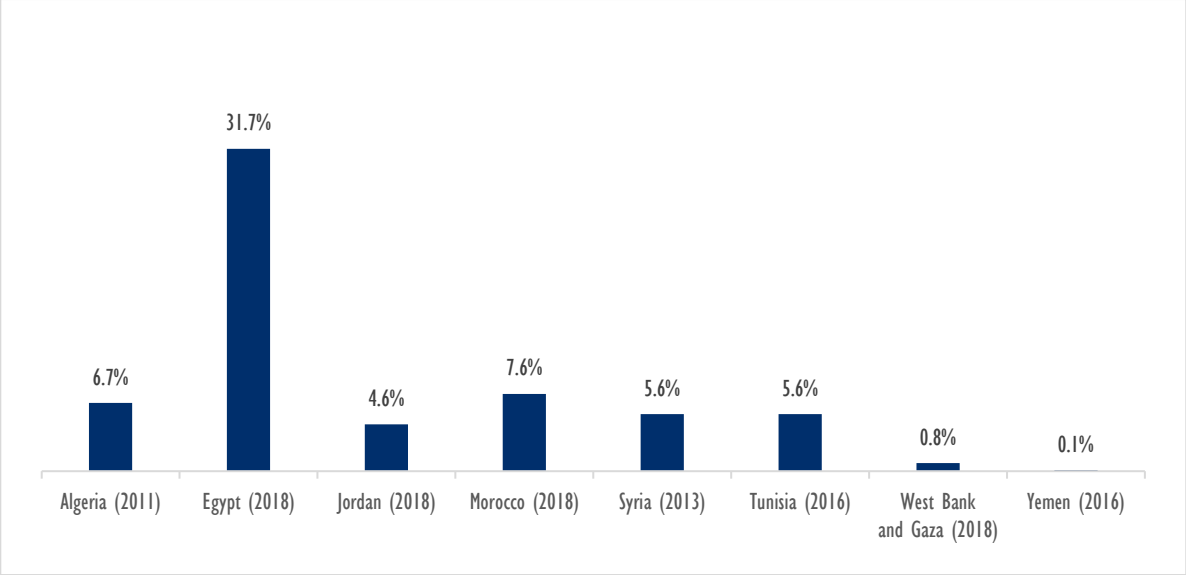
[75] UNICEF. Education in MENA region.

Figure 8: Upper Secondary Enrollment in Technical and Vocational Education[76]



Additionally, TVET is male dominated across the region. The percent of female vocational students in a number of countries with data from the last decade is well below 10 percent in all countries (with the exception of Egypt, at 32%). There is significant room for more equal participation of women in TVET.

Figure 9: Percentage of Vocation Students Who are Female



[76] World Development Indicators (2011-2018). Secondary education, vocational pupils.

The following are a few key challenges facing the TVET sector in the MENA region:

1. The youth unemployment bulge is putting pressure on TVET institutions to rapidly expand and upgrade their curricula to meet the growing demand for jobs, particularly in the digital and knowledge economies. This is complicated by the plurality of TVET options and providers in many countries, as TVET does not always operate under one ministry.
2. 2. According to the ILO-UNICEF 2016 consultation, TVET "is associated with low quality education that does not provide concrete prospects for employment."[77] Thus, youth unemployment in MENA stands at 31 percent, with an extensive workforce participation gender gap ranging from just over 40 percent in Kuwait and Qatar to nearly 80 percent in Algeria and Jordan.[78]
3. The third challenge is related to the skills gap, particularly soft skills. Employers across the region highlight that students have the technical skills to get hired, but do not have the requisite soft skills to perform their jobs as expected (see RQ2).
4. The fourth challenge is automation. While digital technology and technical skills are rapidly expanding and changing, vocational education has historically been slow to adapt technical offerings to meet current industry demands. This challenge continues to grow; for example, the World Economic Forum predicts that over 40 percent of all work activities in the region are susceptible to automation.

Governments in the region are turning to creative approaches to boost the TVET sector. For example, Egypt is working with the European Commission to draft new, comprehensive TVET policies and capacity building initiatives. These include improving the quality of TVET curricula and teaching; reforming TVET finances through partnerships between private and public TVET providers, companies, and government agencies; and establishing national regulatory and support institutions for more decentralized and demand-driven TVET systems.

Overall, what this study finds in terms of general education and TVET pathways is more complex and multifaceted than a progression through secondary school and into higher education or advanced technical training. There are students at the lower secondary education level, aged 12–14, who drop out (or are never enrolled) in general education. Some transfer to vocational or technical school options, while others find their way into non-formal training or apprenticeship opportunities. Other students drop out of lower secondary—often due to tracking based on low exam grades. These students can then find their way to non-formal education programs that aim to accelerate learning and re-integrate them back into the general education, and/or programs that offer a parallel path to complete secondary schooling. A similar, but expanded, set of options is available to students who continue into upper secondary education but drop out prior to graduation and receive passing exam scores.

There are also students who drop out to take up employment—often informal work or family labor—while others fall into the category of not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Training for jobs in the digital economy or in entrepreneurship through "hubs" or similar programs tend to be less rigid on formal academic credentials. For a small segment of youth, these "new" options provide opportunities in industries that did not exist for prior generations. The key message is that secondary school-aged youth across the MENA region are heterogenous in their educational pathways and experiences—meaning that

[77] UNICEF. Education in MENA region.
[78] Ibid.

relevant interventions that support youth transitions need to offer core skills and experience that are transferable to the many paths taken by secondary school-aged youth.

Additionally, the MENA region **macroenvironment factors** impact the lived experiences and decision making of secondary-aged youth. These include the political and economic contexts, conflict/crisis, demographics, environmental constraints, etc. A selection of key opportunities and threats, drawn from individual country contexts and summarized below, highlight aspects that may support youth transitions, and others that will continue to stymie youth in the region while these conditions persist.

Opportunities:	**Threats:**
• Expansion of IT and digital technologies • Growing industries: green economy, reconstruction, and public health • Large, educated youth populations	• Low percent of women in labor force • Difficult to provide quality of education due to youth bulge • Desire for public sector employment • Protracted conflicts • Lack of diversified economies • Corrupt governments, lack of public trust

The macroeconomic context into which secondary interventions are implemented also impacts how youth learn about opportunities, and whether they consider opportunities to be realistic and achievable. These aspects also impact if and how youth can access (or fail to access) interventions designed to support their transitions through school and into their adult lives.

ANNEX II: LIST OF INTERVENTIONS

Legend
USAID Interventions
Non-USAID Interventions

		RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	RQ 4
Morocco					
#	**General Education Intervention**				
1	**INJAZ Morocco**	1		1	
2	**USAID: FORSATY Program (in Partnership with IYF)**	1		1	
3	**USAID Morocco: Advancing Learning and Employability for a Better Future (ALEF)**	1			
4	**UNDP & Ministry of Education: Solidarity Against COVID-19**				1
5	**USAID: Advancing Disability Inclusion Education**	1			
6	**UNICEF: Reimagining Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) in the Middle East and North Africa**			1	1
#	**Technical Education Intervention**				
7	**MCC Morocco: Employability and Land Compact**			1	1
8	**World Bank: Supporting the Economic Inclusion of Youth Project**	1			
Lebanon					
#	**General Education Intervention**				
1	**Public School Counseling: Psychosocial Support**				
2	**Waznat: Career Guidance and Consultancy**	1			
3	**Reaching All Children with Education (RACE)**				1
4	**INJAZ Al-Arab, Lebanon**	1		1	
5	**U.S. Department of Labor: MENA Youth Employment Strategy (MENA-YES)**				
#	**Technical Education Intervention**				
6	**Semeurs d'Avenir: Integration of Youth in the Job Market Project**	1			
7	**USAID: Forestry Program**		1		
8	**USAID Lebanon: Community Support Program (CSP), Task Order No.4, Workforce Development**				
Libya					
#	**General Education Intervention**				
1	**USAID Libya: Elections and Legislative Strengthening Activity (LESLA), National Democratic Institute (NDI)**		1	1	
2	**Elham Education: Inspire Lab**	1			1
3	**INJAZ Al-Arab: Junior Achievement Worldwide**			1	1

4	USAID/LESLA: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)	I			I
5	USAID: Promoting Leadership and Activism of Youth "Play for Peace"		I	I	
#	Technical Education Intervention				
6	UNESCO: Youth Employment in the Mediterranean (YEM) Project	I			I
7	UNDP: Strengthening Local Capacities for Resilience and Recovery Project	I			
8	EU/British Council Libya: (TVET) Delivery and Development Project	I		I	I
9	USAID Libya: Economic Empowerment Program	I			
West Bank and Gaza					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	USAID: Partnerships with Youth (PWY), Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education	I	I		
2	USAID/Amideast: School Improvement Program (SIP)	I	I	I	I
3	USAID: Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED) Program, IYF	I			
#	Technical Education Intervention				
4	Education For Employment: Palestine	I		I	I
Egypt					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	UNDP: Youth Employment Generation Project in Arab Transition Countries — Phase I & II	I			
2	UNICEF: Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) Initiative			I	I
3	USAID: STEM Schools/School to Work, Ministry of Education and Technical Education	I	I	I	
#	Technical Education Intervention				
4	USAID: Workforce Egypt				
5	USAID: Workforce Improvement and Skills Enhancement (WISE)	I			I
6	GIZ: Employment Promotion Project (EPP)	I		I	
7	ILO: Transition to Employment Project, ILO's umbrella "Decent Jobs for Egypt's Young People"	I		I	
Iraq					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	UNICEF: Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP)	I			
2	UNICEF: School Based Management (SBM)				
3	UNICEF: Mainstream Life Skills into the Teaching and Learning System	I			
4	UNESCO: Improving Access to Quality and Inclusive Education with Gender Equality for Out-Of-School Children in Iraq	I			
5	British Council: EU Schools Program	I			
#	Technical Education Intervention				

6	UNESCO: Reforming TVET in Iraq	I			
7	World Bank: Promoting the Inclusion of Conflict-Affected Iraqi Youth				
Algeria					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	U.S. Department of State/World Learning: Algiers STEM Center	I			
2	INJAZ Al-Arab/Junior Achievement Worldwide	I		I	I
#	Technical Education Intervention				
3	U.S. Department of State/World Learning: Youth Employment Project	I			
4	U.S. Department of State/World Learning: Algeria Entrepreneurship & Employment Program	I	I		
5	U.S. Department of State/World Learning: Bawsala Mentorship Program	I			
Jordan					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	USAID: Education Reform Support Program (ERSP), Component 2: Save the Children: School to Career and Life Skills through Sports Programming	I			
2	INJAZ: Economic Opportunities for Jordan Youth	I	I	I	I
3	UNICEF: Makani "My Space" Platform	I			I
4	USAID: Youth with Potential Jordan	I			I
5	U.S. Department of Labor: MENA Youth Employment Strategy (MENA-YES)	I			
6	USAID: Non-Formal Education Program	I			I
#	Technical Education Intervention				
7	USAID Jordan: Youth for the Future/Youth:Work Jordan	I			
8	ILO: Decent Jobs: Cross-Listed ILO & IYF Upgrading Informal Apprenticeships in Jordan	I			
9	ILO: Know About Business (KAB) Program Jordan Pilot Test of KAB			I	
10	USAID/DAI: Workforce Development and Enterprise Support Project (WFD)	I			
11	UNESCO: Vocational Training Corporation Youth with Potential Jordan	I			I
Yemen					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	UNESCO & UN Peacebuilding Fund: Empowering Yemeni Youth towards Peace				I
2	U.S. Department of Labor: MENA Youth Employment Strategy (MENA-YES)	I			I
3	UNDP Yemen: Livelihood and Protection	I			I
4	USAID: Gateway to Education	I		I	I
5	USAID Yemen: Basic Education/Emergency Crisis Response Project	I			I
6	USAID: School Doors	I		I	

#	Technical Education Intervention				
7	GIZ: Yemeni Leaping into Working Life	I		I	I
8	USAID: Economic Recovery & Livelihoods Program (ERLP)	I			I
Tunisia					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	Injaz Tunisia: Volunteer Adviser Scheme			I	
2	UNESCO: Tunisia Government Project to Reform the Educational System	I			
3	Youth Clubs Association	I			
4	USAID: Ma3an ("Together" in Arabic)	I	I		
#	Technical Education Intervention				
5	GIZ/Thomas Cook: Improvement of Skills in TVET Sector	I			
Syria					
#	General Education Intervention				
1	UK Aid: The Syrian Education Program	I	I	I	I
2	Injaz Project			I	I
3	UNRWA: Engaging Youth Project	I			
4	UNICEF: Education Programs in Syria	I			I

ANNEX III: SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

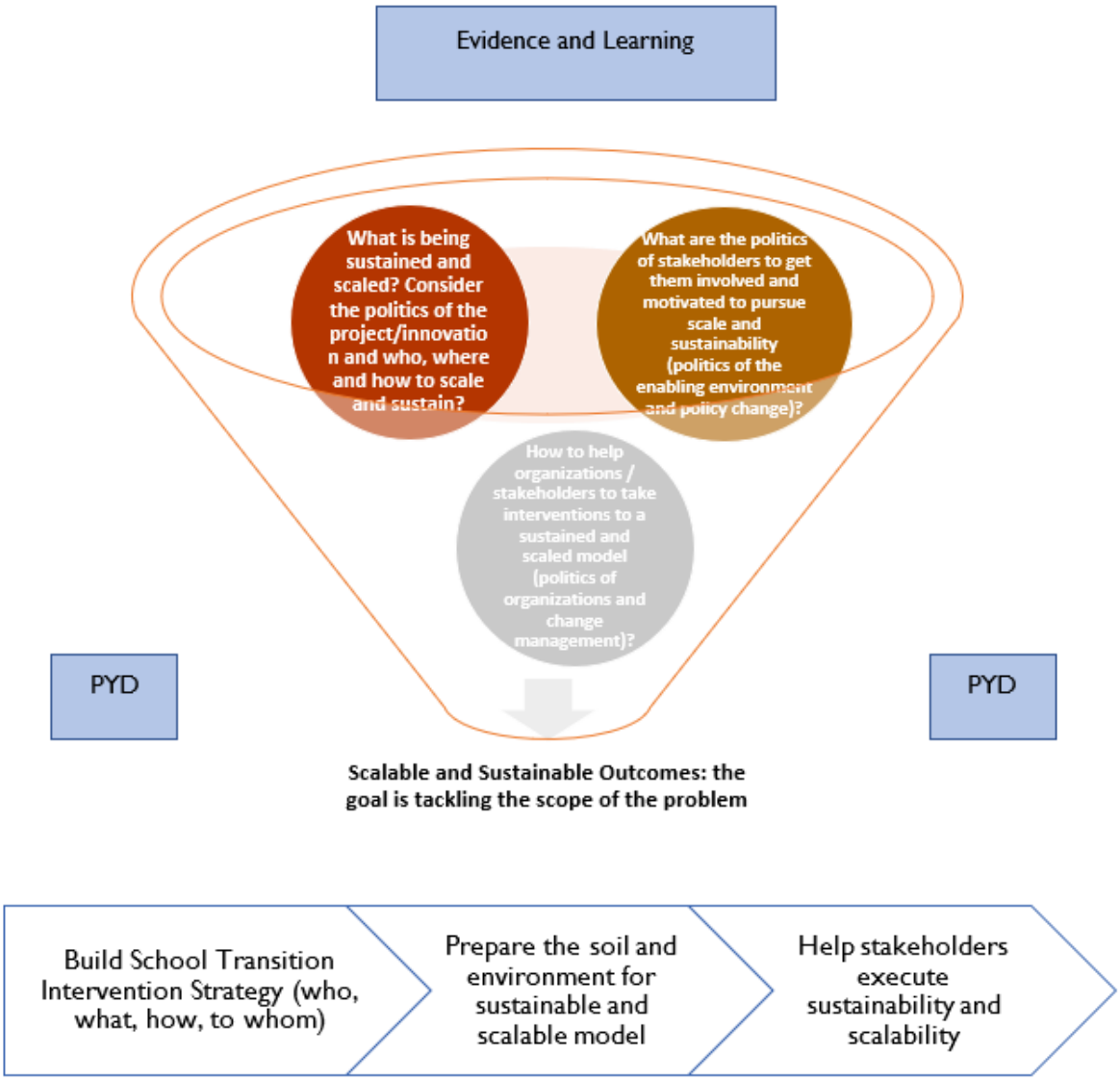
KIIs indicated that sustainability and scalability strategies must answer the following key questions:

- What is the innovation to be sustained and scaled? How do we prove it works? Which level of evidence forms a threshold to take an activity to scale? For example, the Study Team noticed that some of the programs examined focus on social and emotional skills, but the ones appeal to parents and community, such as language programs or exchanges or practical internships, tend to yield better results at scale.
- Where to launch and where to expand and adopt the transition program (i.e., the initiating context such as a school, a community, or college) as well as where to adopt the program (i.e., the adopting context)?
- How do implementing partners integrate, sustain, and scale up the activity vertically and horizontally? Vertical integration refers to integrating the activity into the local system to become part of it, while horizontal integration refers to expanding the existing offering to current students or adding offering services to new students.
- How much does it cost to scale up the program and who is covering this cost? Is the cost per participant reasonable?
- Who is taking the program to scale? Who is the intermediary organization and what is their theory of change to sustain scale up of the program?
- Who are the stakeholders who are championing, sustaining, and scaling up the program? What are their roles? Their power and their influence?

Based on the above framing questions, the Study Team recommends that USAID develop a systematic tool to:

a) Assess sustainable and scalability of interventions
b) Develop a strategic framework to help stakeholders take interventions to sustainable and scalable model

Figure 10: Recommendation Scalable and Sustainable Model Design



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