

NEWS LETTER

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 **I.S.O.L.A.**
Innovative Strategies and Opportunities for Less Favoured Areas

Via Domenico Millesime, 1 - 09127 - Cagliari (Italy)
Tel. +39 070.400.601 - Fax +39 070.662.385
www.isolaproject.net - isola@isolaproject.net

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JORDAN

Jordan (Arabic: **أردن**, transliterated as Al-Urdunn), officially the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (**المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية**), is a country in the Arab World in western Asia, bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the north-east, Israel and the West Bank to the west, and Saudi Arabia to the east and south. It shares with Israel the coastlines of the Dead Sea, and the Gulf of Aqaba with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt.

Jordan fares well in human development among Arab countries, but falls behind in gender empowerment and stabilizing population growth. The country ranks 94 out of 174 developing countries in human development. Jordan is one of two Arab countries whose human development ranking is higher than its per capita income — indicating an efficient investment of scarce resources, which translated into human and social development gains.

The country shows the highest female literacy and overall literacy of all Arab states and the highest life expectancy rate in the Arab world.

Jordan has the highest projected population growth among all middle-income Arab states.

It has one of the highest human development index values among medium-ranked Arab states, but one of the lowest female economic activity rates. In fact, Jordanian women make up only 3.4% of senior government positions — less than that of their female counterparts in Algeria, Syria and Tunisia.

National statistics reveal gains in health, education, strained by rapid population growth and low income.

Literacy has nearly doubled from 47% in 1960 to 87% in 1995.

11,000 Jordanians are enrolled in government literacy classes at the moment, of which 10% are males and 90% females.

67% of households have access to a doctor, hospital or health center within a ten-minute walk of their home.

95% of homes have access to piped water but only 13% of households think their water is very clean.

21% of Jordanian households live in poverty.

The average annual income was JD 4,998 per household and JD 767 per capita.

Even with the decline in fertility rates, the rapid expansion of population will continue to add 130,000 new students into the education system and 70,000 new entrants into the labor market every year for the next two decades.

Jordan's population stands at 4.6 million (1997 figures) compared to 2.1 million in 1979 and 586,000 in 1952. The Department of Statistics estimates that the population will double again by 2025.

JORDANIAN YOUTH — WHO ARE THEY, WHAT DO THEY THINK?

Youth (15-29 year olds) represent 31% of the population — the largest group in Jordanian society; youth also constitute 54% of the population over 15 years old.

The vast majority of youth support the right of women to pursue higher education (89%), to vote (82%), to work (60%), and participate as government ministers or on municipal councils (60%).



About half of youth voted in previous parliamentary elections, mostly for their tribal candidates. Most Jordanians between the ages 15-29 rate the performance of government institutions as excellent or good. Most young Jordanians live in stable families and safe communities, have unprecedented access to basic health, education, shelter and other human services, and enjoy greater life choices than any previous generation of Jordanians.

A 1998 survey by UNICEF revealed that 21% of youth encountered gender bias, particularly in intra-family relationships, 37% encountered verbal abuse and 33% encountered physical abuse.

Children constitute 80% of victims of family violence and sexual abuse.

Most drug abusers are male (94%) and between the ages of 20-35.

25% of young males smoke daily compared to 0.3% of females.

Jordanian youth shine in educational attainment, yet dropouts continue to be concentrated in low-income families. Students and trainees comprise the single largest occupational segment of Jordan's population. Since 1973-74, Jordan has increased the enrolment rate of 16-17 year olds from 44% to 73%. 75% of females (16-17 year olds) are now enrolled in secondary education, an impressive increase from 35% in 1973-4.

Youth from low-income families (20% of the population) have a much higher dropout rate than middle- and high- income families. Despite 95% enrolment in the first four grades, by 10th grade, 20% of low income students have dropped out, and by age 18 less than half remain in school or complete their secondary education.

Educators comment that high academic achievers among females often experience a 'fear of success' syndrome after graduation from high school or college: if they succeed in the workplace, they might be perceived as over-stepping the boundaries society set for them; yet if they do not take advantage of their proven credentials, they feel they are letting themselves down.

Women show superior academic performance but do not go on to contribute proportionately to the economy — the highest rate of unemployment is amongst female community college graduates (47%).

Of the 73,541 teachers in the education system, 38% are under the age of 30, demonstrating the key role played by young Jordanians.



Jordanian youth show concern towards the state of the economy and pessimism towards finding a satisfying job. Jordanian youth identify the country's main political problems as being the debt crisis, the World Bank-IMF assisted economic restructuring program, water shortages and poverty.

The main concerns expressed by youth are: future job prospects, economic well-being, equitable access to higher education, participation in political decision making, having a voice in issues that concern their lives, lack of communication between young men and women which they believe negatively affects their understanding of each other, lack of sports and leisure centers, limited extra-curricular programs linking education with employment. Additionally, youth are concerned with the lack of vocational training centers and society's lack of appreciation for vocational professions.

Main concerns of young Jordanians about their future job prospects are: a) not finding a job at all due to economic pressures b) having to accept work that is unsatisfying and uninspiring in terms of their personal interests or skills c) having to take a low paid job that will make it difficult to marry and raise a family d) limited opportunity to compete for available jobs.

Jordan's youth feel caught between a traditional, patriarchal communal social value system that promotes conformity and obedience and a modern individualistic lifestyle that promotes personal initiative, creativity and self-assertion.

Sufficient opportunities for information and cultural exchange exist, but many young people feel ill-prepared to judge the value of accessible information for their own needs and find it difficult to make competent choices.

Jordanian youth, particularly women, comprise largest segment of unemployed population.

Unemployment disproportionately affects the young. Official surveys since 1996 show that 60% of all unemployed people are below the age of 25. The highest unemployment rate was in 1997 — 76% of which were among 15-29 year olds. The highest rate, 82%, was among women of that age group.

Only 44% of the population of working age are economically active.

Within this group, 15% are women and 72% are men.

Official unemployment rates stand at 10% for 1999, whilst other independent surveys using different methodologies put the unemployment rate at over 25%.

Female unemployment is double the male.



EDUCATION IN JORDAN

Today, 74% percent of Jordan's population is under age 30 and the median age of Jordanians is 23.

The government is beginning to recognize the importance of this

sizable young population, and is attempting to engage more young people in the development of their own nation while addressing the problem of youth unemployment. One of the leading public advocates for youth development has been Queen Rania, who is catalyzing government support and public sentiments in favor of youth engagement.

In 2003, the national Higher Council for Youth was established to govern youth policy in Jordan. One of their first programs, The Youth Assembly Project, actively engages young people in government through participation in youth parliaments across the Kingdom.

With this project, young people gain experience with democratic governance and civic participation while having their voices heard by the leaders of their country.

In partnership with United Nations affiliates, the Higher Council laid out a detailed National Youth Strategy in 2004 for 2005-2009, stressing the importance of capturing youth energy and addressing youth concerns regarding civic participation, civil rights and citizenship, recreation activities and leisure time, media and culture, ICT and globalization, education and training, employment, health and the environment. Jordan's National Youth Strategy falls short of establishing a national youth service corps, but it does quote King Abdullah's support for a "public national service" while advocating for increased civic engagement among young people.

Although there is much work left to be done, Jordan's youth strategy is the first comprehensive



national youth policy and long term plan to be enacted by an Arab country, making it stand out in the region.

Jordan is investing heavily in its human resources, a strategy likely designed to compensate for the nation's lack of wealth and natural resources. While other nations in the region are investing in their oil reserves at the expense of human capital, Jordan is building an educated citizenry with the skills for a modern economy and growing civic awareness.

Achieving nearly universal education, primary and secondary school enrollment in Jordan are among the highest in the Arab world, and over 22% of men and 20% of women pursue higher education after completing their compulsory schooling. vi Nationally, the literacy rate among those ages 15 and over is 91.3%. vii Jordan's highly educated population will likely be one of the country's greatest assets for the future, as the government is beginning to recognize in its expanding youth policies.

As Jordanian youth personally benefit from the education they receive in national schools and universities, their teachers and leaders are emphasizing the value of education and its potential for improving their communities. The University of Jordan is at the forefront of a larger movement teaching students about the importance of community work and service-learning as part of their education. At the university, students in all disciplines are required to complete at least 10 hours of community service each semester, which is stressed as a vital and relevant part of their education and incorporated into the general curriculum. Recent projects conducted through the university include an environmental awareness and recycling campaign, a human rights project, the Friend Project for working with disadvantaged youths, AIDS Awareness and Protection, Youth and Democracy, educational and tutoring programs, as well as a number of initiatives supported by Queen Rania which promote, among a range of skills and issues, health, civic engagement, youth leadership, and communication.

