



MENA YES!

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SUMMIT

**A MENA Region, Solutions-Focused
Youth Employment Summit.**

Forward Agenda

Amman, Jordan. October 20-21, 2025

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Executive Summary

The second annual MENA YES! Summit convened youth, government representatives, private sector leaders, and civil society organizations in Amman, Jordan, on October 20-21, 2025, to co-create solutions for youth employment in the MENA region. Recognizing that no single actor can address these challenges alone, MENA YES! was designed as a collaborative platform to generate concrete solutions, connect youth with key stakeholders, and influence policies to drive inclusive growth. The summit included 20 sessions and welcomed 250+ participants from 19 countries, representing 93 organizations.

Defined by its emphasis on generating solutions rather than simply discussing challenges, the 2025 summit centered on finding solutions responding to four urgent themes:

- Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy
- Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy

Refugee and Migrant Integration served as a cross-cutting theme throughout the discussions. Participants broke into working groups to discuss these challenges and outline potential solutions.

Background

Across the MENA region, youth continue to face high unemployment rates that reach 19%, with even higher rates found in some markets.¹ Young women face additional barriers to economic participation, resulting in only one in five participating in the labor market.² These challenges are further compounded for young people living as refugees, who face unemployment reaching as much as 84%.³



Youth unemployment in MENA is a systemic challenge driven by factors including insufficient rates of economic growth and job creation to keep pace with growth in youth populations, a legacy of educational systems geared toward preparing young people for government employment, traditional gender norms affecting young women's opportunities, and societal norms that discourage young people from pursuing employment in certain sectors and job types that are deemed insufficiently prestigious.

¹ World Bank Databank. [“Unemployment, youth total.”](#) Youth unemployment rates in Yemen, Palestine, and Syria reach 32.4%, 36.1%, and 31.5%, respectively.

² World Bank Databank. [“Labor Force Participation Rate, Female.”](#)

³ MacLeod, K., Amjad, Z., Barry, A., Al Ababneh, J. (2025). [“Barriers Between Job Training and Triumph? Behavioral Insights to Support Women and Refugees in Jordan’s Job Market.”](#)

The backdrop of climate change and its associated economic impacts further complicates the current youth employment landscape. These challenges, combined, have led to a growing crisis in youth's mental well-being. Despite rising demand, mental health systems in the region remain underfunded, fragmented, and stigmatized, particularly for young people navigating transitions into adulthood and the labor market.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to build a brighter future with youth. At MENA YES!, participants collaborated to explore promising approaches and outline priorities and policy recommendations to inform initiatives that can support youth employment.

Policy Recommendations

The working groups generated the following policy recommendations to form a forward agenda for the MENA YES! Summit. Additional discussion and background on each recommendation and track can be found in the respective working group sections below.

Recommendations from the Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy Track:

Recommendation 1: Governments should consider establishing inclusive national AI frameworks that prioritize Arabic-language access, equity, and structured collaboration between the public sector, academia, and employers.

Recommendation 2: Higher education authorities should consider mandating AI literacy across all disciplines through accreditation reform, faculty upskilling, and sustained employer engagement.



Recommendation 3: Governments and education systems should consider promoting responsible AI adoption by addressing cultural resistance, embedding ethical safeguards, and upholding standards for attribution, authorship, and originality.

Recommendations from the Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation Track:

Recommendation 1: Governments and the private sector should consider prioritizing, promoting, and enforcing policies that remove barriers to women's economic participation by expanding childcare and eldercare services and ensuring that equal employment benefits are provided to male and female employees.

Recommendation 2: Private sector companies should prioritize flexible and remote working arrangements, where possible, to expand opportunities for women and working parents more broadly.

Recommendation 3: Governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should consider partnering to launch communication campaigns that expand awareness of the benefits that MENA economies and societies gain through women's employment and advancement to management levels. Campaigns should challenge beliefs that limit women's opportunities.



Recommendations from the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Track:

Recommendation 1: Governments should consider integrating mental health considerations into National Development Plans across MENA.

Recommendation 2: Governments and educational institutions should consider embedding mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and workplaces.

Recommendation 3: Governments and donors should consider funding and scaling youth-led mental health models.

Recommendation 4: Governments should consider improving data protection and legal frameworks for MHPSS to encourage utilization of available services.

Recommendation 5: Government and civil society should consider launching national and regional anti-stigma campaigns for MHPSS.

Recommendations from the Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy Track:

Recommendation 1: Establish government-supported public/private apprenticeship programs focusing on green jobs in partnership with the private sector and academic and vocational institutions. Programs should provide post-apprenticeship employment.

Recommendation 2: Governments should consider integrating green education (climate change/environmental sustainability) across all academic fields and levels as well as in informal education settings.

Recommendation 3: Establish public-private partnerships for youth and refugee populations focused on green entrepreneurship to drive innovation and employment in the green and circular economy.

Conclusion

The MENA YES! 2025 Summit generated a strong collective commitment to translating dialogue about youth economic opportunities into concrete action. Over two days of collaboration, participants identified systemic barriers, shared innovative practices, and co-created actionable roadmaps across four thematic tracks including Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy, while centering refugee and migrant inclusion throughout.

The event not only facilitated meaningful exchanges between youth, policymakers, and private sector leaders, but also built momentum toward system-level change by aligning diverse stakeholders around a shared vision for inclusive, sustainable employment in the MENA region. MENA YES! stands as a catalyst for long-term transformation, nurturing a growing community of changemakers committed to creating dignified, future-ready opportunities for young people across MENA.

Introduction

The second annual MENA YES! Summit convened youth, government representatives, private sector leaders, and civil society organizations in Amman, Jordan, on October 20-21, 2025, to co-create solutions for youth employment in the MENA region. Recognizing that no single actor can address these challenges alone, MENA YES! was designed as a collaborative platform to generate concrete solutions, connect youth with key stakeholders, and influence policies to drive inclusive growth. The summit included 20 sessions and welcomed 250+ participants from 19 countries, representing 93 organizations. The first MENA YES! Summit was organized in October 2024 in Casablanca, Morocco.

Defined by its emphasis on generating solutions rather than simply discussing challenges, the 2025 summit centered on finding solutions responding to four urgent themes:

- Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy
- Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation
- Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy

Refugee and Migrant Integration served as a cross-cutting theme throughout the discussions.

Through a dynamic mix of plenary sessions and breakout sessions, participants explored the current youth employment landscape in MENA, shared best practices, and co-designed actionable solutions to advance youth employment across the region.

During the summit, participants made more than 90 unique commitments to advance the priorities explored under the four thematic tracks. Commitments ranged from advancing advocacy and awareness raising around the topics discussed, implementing personal behavior changes, learning more about the topics, sharing resources to advance collaborative efforts in line with the priority actions identified, implementing direct training and programming to advance the priorities, and directly working on priority solutions through the planned working groups that will be launched following MENA YES!

A detailed overview of the event can be found in the *MENA YES! 2025 Summit Proceedings*.

Background and Context

Across the MENA region, youth continue to face high unemployment rates that reach 19%, with even higher rates found in some markets, particularly those that are conflict-affected.⁴ Young women face additional barriers to economic participation, resulting in only one in five participating in the labor market.⁵ Among those who do participate, unemployment rates reach nearly 30%.⁶ These challenges are further compounded for young people living as refugees, who face unemployment reaching as much as 84%.⁷

⁴ World Bank Databank. ["Unemployment, youth total."](#) Youth unemployment rates in Yemen, Palestine, and Syria reach 32.4%, 36.1%, and 31.5%, respectively.

⁵ World Bank Databank. ["Labor Force Participation Rate, Female."](#)

⁶ World Bank Databank. ["Unemployment, Youth Female."](#)

⁷ MacLeod, K., Amjad, Z., Barry, A., Al Ababneh, J. (2025). ["Barriers Between Job Training and Triumph? Behavioral Insights to Support Women and Refugees in Jordan's Job Market."](#)



Youth unemployment in MENA is a systemic challenge driven by factors including rapid growth of youth populations, rates of economic growth and job creation insufficient to keep pace with growth in youth populations, a legacy of educational systems geared toward preparing young people for government employment, and societal norms that discourage young people from pursuing employment in certain sectors and job types that are deemed insufficiently prestigious. Young women's economic participation is further limited by societal expectations that women serve as the primary caregivers for children and families, placing strain on their ability to balance expectations in the

workplace and at home. These challenges were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacted economic opportunities for youth and women.⁸

The backdrop of climate change and its associated economic impacts further complicates the current youth employment landscape. Climate change poses one of the most significant global challenges to sustained human development, security, and prosperity today, and the MENA region is among those that will be most affected.⁹ Furthermore, ranking 69th out of 191 countries per the Inform Risk Index, Jordan is one of the more at-risk countries from climate change impacts, including higher ambient temperatures, decreased and more variable precipitation, drought and increasing aridity. These challenges will have broad economic impacts. For example, lower water availability for the agricultural sector could reduce Jordan's GDP by up to 6.8% or about US\$2.6 billion.¹⁰

These challenges, combined, have led to a growing crisis for youth's mental well-being. Despite rising demand, mental health systems in the region remain underfunded, fragmented, and stigmatized, particularly for young people navigating transitions into adulthood and the labor market.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to build a brighter future with youth. At MENA YES!, participants collaborated to explore promising approaches and outline priorities and policy recommendations to inform initiatives that support youth employment during the coming period.

Working Group Discussions and Recommendations

At MENA YES! 2025, working groups pursued in-depth discussions to understand how these contextual factors relate to the key summit themes, identifying concrete systems-focused

⁸ Barry, A. Little S., and Martinez R. (2022). *COVID-19 and Youth Employment in Jordan and Palestine: Impacts, Opportunities, and a Way Forward*. Education For Employment.

⁹ World Bank. *"Climate and Development in the Middle East and North Africa."* (2023).

¹⁰ Taheripour, F. et al. (2020). *Water in the Balance: The Economic Impacts of Climate Change and Water Scarcity in the Middle East*. World Bank Group.

priorities for the coming period. The following sections outline these thematic discussions and the resulting recommendations.

Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents one of the most disruptive technologies of our time. It has the power to significantly increase human prosperity if properly harnessed, though fears remain that it could lead to large-scale job losses and unforeseen impacts on societies.

Discussions in the AI and the Digital Economy breakout track focused on understanding the systemic barriers that limit inclusive, AI-driven employment initiatives across the MENA region, particularly for youth, women, refugees, and displaced populations. Participants identified three core clusters of barriers: weak policy frameworks and coordination among governments, academia, and the private sector, exclusionary access gaps due to limited Arabic-language AI tools, poor infrastructure, digital divides, and cultural resistance or limited digital literacy within educational systems. Participants felt that these barriers slow innovation and risk deepening inequities. As one participant noted, “Access to infrastructure is not just about technology, it’s about dignity.”



In discussing a forward agenda to follow the MENA YES! Summit, the AI and Digital Economy working group prioritized the integration of AI into higher education across disciplines. By 2030, the working group has a vision that all Jordanian higher educational institutions will train departmental “AI champions” to embed AI in teaching and learning into standard approaches. In 2026, the group will coordinate with key stakeholders in Jordan, such as DigiSkills and the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions, to conduct needs assessments and host national awareness sessions to prepare educators and students for adoption.

In addition, individual participants and organizations made the following commitments:

- A representative from DigiSkills committed to continuing to advocate for issuing national policies in Jordan pertaining to the use of AI.
- A representative from Taawon Lebanon committed to continuing to train vocational and technical students on the use of specialized AI tools that fit their specialties, with a focus on refugees.
- A representative from Injaz Palestine committed to advancing the implementation of capacity building programs within universities through peer-to-peer learning.
- A representative of the Volunteer Circle committed to advancing foundational research in Lebanon as well as regional advocacy relating to AI.
- A representative of the Crown Prince Foundation committed to training teachers across Jordan’s governorates and empowering them with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach their students.

Policy Recommendations: Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy

The following policy recommendations emerged from the discussions:

Recommendation 1: Governments should consider establishing inclusive national AI frameworks that prioritize Arabic-language access, equity, and structured collaboration between the public sector, academia, and employers.

National AI strategies should move beyond broad ambition and include clear implementation mechanisms that address linguistic exclusion, fragmented governance, and unequal access. This includes setting standards for Arabic-first AI systems and representative training data, incentivizing private-sector localization of AI tools for MENA contexts, and investing in shared infrastructure such as community tech hubs and low-connectivity or offline AI solutions for rural and displaced youth. Formal coordination mechanisms should align government ministries focusing on the digital economy, education, and labor with universities and employers, while embedding youth participation in policy design and monitoring to ensure strategies remain responsive and grounded in lived realities.

Recommendation 2: Higher education authorities should consider mandating AI literacy across all disciplines through accreditation reform, faculty upskilling, and sustained employer engagement.

AI education should be treated as a core competency rather than a specialized or optional skill. Policies can require universities to integrate practical AI literacy across fields, including humanities and social sciences, supported by accreditation standards and structured faculty training. Governments should consider incentivizing the creation of departmental AI champions, fund national needs assessments, and support pilot programs that link AI learning to applied projects, internships, and labor-market demand. Partnerships with employers and technology actors are essential to ensure curricula remains relevant, practical, and adaptable to evolving labor markets.

Recommendation 3: Governments and education systems should consider promoting responsible AI adoption by addressing cultural resistance, embedding ethical safeguards, and upholding standards for attribution, authorship, and originality.

AI adoption policies should explicitly address fear, mistrust, and skepticism within academia, government, and society by normalizing responsible use of AI through awareness campaigns, peer learning, and visible MENA-led success stories. At the same time, clear ethical and legal frameworks are needed to guide appropriate AI use, prevent copyright infringement, ensure transparency around data sources, and protect ownership of creative and intellectual work. Critical AI literacy, including understanding bias, limitations, and ethical boundaries, should be integrated into education and workforce programs to prevent misuse while promoting responsible innovation.

Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation

Women's economic participation is critical for supporting sustainable economic growth in addition to supporting broader women's empowerment. Recent research found that within

OECD¹¹ countries alone, bringing men's and women's labor force participation into parity and closing the management-level gender gap could contribute \$7 trillion to the global economy.¹² With women's labor force participation rates in MENA averaging less than 20%,¹³ the MENA region stands to benefit from significant economic gains if women's participation is increased.

The discussions under the Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation breakout sessions

focused on removing systemic barriers to women's economic inclusion across policy, workplace, and social levels. Participants identified persistent inequalities in access to finance, mobility, and decent work, care burdens that keep women out of the labor force, gender wage gaps, and cultural stigma surrounding women's employment, particularly for refugees and women living in rural areas.

Participants highlighted that while many policies aimed at supporting women's labor force participation exist, they lack enforcement or funding, noting that workplace discrimination and rigid human resources systems continue to limit women's advancement. As one participant remarked, "We can train women all we want, but if they can't get to work or afford care, nothing changes." Participants agreed that inclusion must be embedded across the ecosystem, from childcare and labor policy to employer incentives and community norms, so that empowerment reflects systemic adaptation, not individual adjustment.

In discussing a forward agenda following the MENA YES! Summit, the Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation working group envisioned a future where workplaces across the MENA region are inclusive by design, ensuring equitable opportunities for women in hiring, retention, and career growth, and where the private and public sectors collaborate to make inclusion a business priority, not just a corporate social responsibility initiative. As one participant concluded, "Empowerment isn't just about helping women rise, it's about systems making space for them to do so."

Participants agreed upon the importance of identifying employer champions for inclusion to co-create equitable workplace policies, community hubs for digital work and learning to expand rural and refugee women's access to jobs, and promoting inclusive by design approaches to embed gender-responsive systems across education, policy, and business. Participants emphasized engaging men as allies, normalizing shared caregiving, and treating inclusion as a business imperative, not a social add-on.

Individual participants and organizations made the following commitments:

- A representative from Khibraty committed to working alongside all stakeholders in the ecosystem to advance women's labor force participation.



¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

¹² Holland, D. and Ell, K. (2023). ["Close the Gender Gap to Unlock Productivity Gains."](#) Moody's Analytics.

¹³ World Bank Databank. ["Labor Force Participation Rate, Female."](#)

- Education For Employment-Yemen (EFE-Yemen) committed to advancing career guidance for young women.
- A representative from the Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) committed to writing a policy brief highlighting successes and case studies of employers improving women's inclusion in their workplaces.
- Multiple attendees committed to continuing to work together following MENA YES! to advance the priority actions that the track participants identified.

Policy Recommendations: Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation

Recommendation 1: Governments and the private sector should consider prioritizing, promoting, and enforcing policies that remove barriers to women's economic participation by expanding childcare and eldercare services and ensuring that equal employment benefits are provided to male and female employees.

Increasing understanding of the benefits of women's employment forms only one component of the solutions needed to increase women's labor force participation. The infrastructure to enable women's effective participation forms a critical piece to advancing this important goal. Currently, women are tasked with completing the majority of child and home care responsibilities across MENA and globally. Without the combined renegotiation of these roles and the provision of needed infrastructure to enable families to balance child and eldercare needs with employment, progress will advance only slowly. Government and the private sector both have a role to play and stand to benefit by supporting regulations and initiatives that advance women's employment opportunities.

Recommendation 2: Private sector companies should prioritize flexible and remote working arrangements, where possible, to expand opportunities for women and working parents more broadly.

Although remote work was briefly adopted in some MENA countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, remote and flexible working arrangements are not the norm. This creates challenges for working parents in general, but particularly for young women, who are currently tasked with taking on a significant share of family-related responsibilities. Increasing flexibility and remote work options for *both* women and men has the potential to expand opportunities for all, particularly for those living outside of large cities. Importantly, expanding these options for all employees ensures that the approach will not create disincentives for employers to hire women due to perceptions that they require more accommodations than male employees.

Recommendation 3: Governments, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) should consider partnering to launch communication campaigns that expand awareness of the benefits that MENA economies and societies gain through women's employment and advancement to management levels. Campaigns should challenge beliefs that limit women's opportunities.

Although many in the MENA region understand the benefits of women's employment, including expanded resources to cover family needs, there is room to continue increasing this understanding. In order to promote system-level change, campaigns could be managed through public-private partnerships and in coordination with NGOs working to advance employment initiatives. Efforts should be made to counter inaccurate and negative perceptions around women's employment, such as beliefs that women's employment reduces employment

opportunities for men, beliefs that married women are not able or interested in advancing to leadership roles, and others. In addition, campaigns can promote the benefits of shared responsibility between men and women in caring for children and the home.

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Strong mental health forms a key enabling factor for success in the labor market. The Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) track brought together youth leaders, service providers, policy makers, and civil society actors to envision a future where mental health is not a privilege, but a guaranteed right. The track emphasized the urgent need to normalize conversations around mental well-being and to integrate MHPSS into national systems for education, employment, and community development. Refugees and internally displaced youth, in particular, were centered in these discussions due to their acute and often unmet needs.



The track participants called for the integration of MHPSS across education, employment, and community systems. Participants identified fragmentation, limited access, stigma, and underfunded infrastructure as key barriers to achieving a unified and inclusive mental health ecosystem by 2030. Youth, especially refugees and internally displaced persons, face disconnected services, few trained practitioners, and minimal institutional support. Legal and data protection-related

gaps further impede coordination, while cultural taboos continue to discourage open conversations about well-being.

As one youth participant shared, “We don’t need more diagnoses, we need more doors to walk through.” The call to action was clear: MHPSS must be reframed as a regional development imperative and co-created with youth from the ground up. The absence of standardized training, integrated referral systems, and community-based hubs reinforces exclusion, underscoring the need for unified, youth-friendly, and locally grounded approaches.

The priority actions identified by session participants included embedding MHPSS in schools, workplaces, and youth centers, expanding MHPSS training for community and peer facilitators, strengthening data protection and legal frameworks, and launching awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around mental health and to build trust. The summit participants committed to working toward a MENA region in which youth initiatives that support mental health are regularly available and accessible and in which there is improved societal and personal awareness regarding mental health regulation strategies.

Together, these initiatives reflect a shared commitment of building a region where mental health support is normalized, accessible, and central to youth’s well-being and resilience, driven by integration, innovation, and collective care. Summit participants committed to a bold vision for 2030: a MENA region where mental health is integrated into everyday systems, supported by legislation, and powered by youth leadership.

Immediate next steps include:

- Establishing youth mental health working groups in at least three countries.
- Piloting peer-support and MHPSS integration programs in education and employment systems.
- Hosting a regional youth MHPSS learning exchange by mid-2026.

In addition, organizations and individuals participating in MENA YES! committed to the following:

- Representatives from the Crown Prince Foundation, the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Shapers Community – Tunis Hub, and Education For Employment-Palestine (EFE-Palestine) committed to enhancing mental health literacy and awareness within youth communities and more broadly.
- Education For Employment-Saudi Arabia (EFE-Saudi Arabia) committed to including psychosocial support in some of its trainings.
- Multiple attendees committed to supporting their own mental health by taking time to build a practice of checking in with their emotions and developing tools to effectively respond to stressors.

Policy Recommendations: Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Recommendation 1: Governments should consider integrating mental health considerations into National Development Plans across MENA.

To establish mental health as a foundational element of youth development and inclusive economic growth, governments can embed MHPSS components into national strategies across the sectors of youth, health, education, and labor. This requires a whole-of-government approach that includes the formation of inter-ministerial task forces focused on youth well-being and resilience. Furthermore, specific budget lines should be allocated to support public MHPSS services in schools, workplaces, and community settings. Such systemic integration will ensure that mental health is no longer treated as a standalone issue, but recognized as essential to fostering economic participation, social cohesion, and long-term regional stability.

Recommendation 2: Governments and educational institutions should consider embedding MHPSS in schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and workplaces.

To ensure that young people are equipped with the emotional resilience and coping tools needed to succeed in education, employment, and life, governments and institutions should embed mental health support across key youth-serving systems. This includes making mental health literacy, emotional regulation, and resilience programming a standard part of school curricula. Additionally, workforce development and entrepreneurship initiatives should integrate psychosocial support and peer mentoring components to help young people manage stress and uncertainty during major life transitions. Employers should be incentivized to create youth-friendly workplaces that prioritize mental well-being as part of onboarding, training, and employee support. A compelling model referenced during the MENA YES! Summit was the WHO-endorsed Problem Management Plus (PM+), which empowers non-specialist youth to serve as

frontline psychosocial supporters in their own communities, expanding access and building grassroots leadership in mental health response.

Recommendation 3: Governments and donors should consider funding and scaling youth-led mental health models.

To move beyond token participation and empower young people as true co-creators of mental health solutions, it is essential to position youth not just as beneficiaries but as innovators and decision-makers within the MHPSS ecosystem. Governments and donors should consider establishing national and regional funding mechanisms that directly support youth-led and peer-based mental health initiatives, particularly those designed by and for vulnerable populations. This includes formalizing the role of youth through advisory councils embedded within ministries of youth, health, and education, ensuring their voices shape policy, programming, and accountability structures. Equally important is the recognition and scale-up of grassroots, community-driven approaches, especially in refugee and displacement contexts, where conventional systems may not reach. Programs such as EFE-Palestine's trauma-informed care in Gaza and Youth Business International's integration of mindfulness into entrepreneurship training highlight how locally rooted, youth-owned models can build trust, relevance, and impact from the ground up.



Programs such as EFE-Palestine's trauma-informed care in Gaza and Youth Business International's integration of mindfulness into entrepreneurship training highlight how locally rooted, youth-owned models can build trust, relevance, and impact from the ground up.

Recommendation 4: Governments should consider improving data protection and legal frameworks for MHPSS to encourage utilization of available services.

Protecting the privacy, dignity, and rights of young people accessing mental health support is fundamental to building trust and encouraging help-seeking behavior, particularly in conflict-affected or high-stigma environments. To achieve this, governments must prioritize the development of youth-specific data privacy and protection regulations tailored to both digital and in-person MHPSS services. These regulations should be supported by clear, standardized protocols for informed consent and confidentiality across schools, health centers, NGOs, and digital platforms. In parallel, policies should promote secure yet coordinated data-sharing systems among service providers to ensure continuity of care while upholding young people's right to autonomy and confidentiality. Without such legal and procedural safeguards in place, youth may continue to avoid seeking the support they need, undermining both individual well-being and broader public health goals.

Recommendation 5: Government and civil society should consider launching national and regional anti-stigma campaigns for MHPSS.

Shifting public attitudes toward mental health is critical to fostering a supportive environment in which youth feel safe to seek help and access care. To normalize help-seeking and reduce stigma, governments and civil society must partner with trusted messengers, including youth influencers, religious leaders, educators, and community figures, to promote open dialogue about mental well-being. These partnerships should be leveraged to deliver evidence-based messaging through diverse channels such as television, radio, social media, and school programming, ensuring broad reach and cultural resonance. Additionally, institutionalizing

mental health awareness through government-led observances, such as World Mental Health Day and regional equivalents, can elevate the importance of mental well-being in the public agenda. Such campaigns not only foster greater understanding, they also serve as catalysts for shifting public discourse, mobilizing resources, and generating the political will necessary to enact lasting policy change.



As reflected in a closing statement during the track discussions, “Mental health is not a side issue, it’s the foundation of everything else we’re trying to build.” These recommendations represent a call to governments, donors, and implementers to walk alongside youth in designing systems of collective care, resilience, and dignity.

Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy

The MENA YES! Green and Circular Economy technical track focused on solutions to building inclusive, sustainable green economies across MENA by addressing systemic barriers in education, financing, and behavior change. Participants agreed that despite the significant climate change-related challenges and risks, there is reason to be hopeful. They further agreed that collective action involving governments, academia, and the private sector, along with workers’ and employers’ organizations, can support a just transition. This collective action could shift the balance in favor of environmental sustainability through the rapid expansion of the green and circular economy that is supported by targeted upskilling, reskilling, and social protection initiatives to meet emerging labor market demands.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that across MENA, more than 10 million jobs may be created through climate-friendly government and industrial policies that drive sustainable economic development. The Government of Jordan is driving support for green growth through the Economic Modernization Vision 2033 (EMV), which places sustainable practices and green investment at the core of Jordan’s economic future. Furthermore, through the Ministry of Labor’s latest strategy, the National Employment Plan, the government aims to support sustainable job creation and has set a goal of 10% of jobs being green jobs by 2030. Complementing and in alignment with the EMV 2033 are the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Law of 2012 as well as the Waste Management Framework Law of 2020. Additionally, the National Green Growth Plan (2021 to 2025) supports Jordan’s climate and sustainable development goals under the EMV and the above-referenced policies.

The solutions identified during the discussions MENA YES! included integration of green education across schools, universities, and TVET programs to prepare youth for green jobs, training youth and refugees in green entrepreneurship, linking skills to livelihoods, and building stronger employer partnerships to create pipelines for green jobs. Participants emphasized localizing the green economy, aligning educational curricula with labor market

demand, and channeling finance to community-led initiatives. As one participant explained, “It’s not just about learning green skills, it’s about learning how to apply them.”

Furthermore, participants noted that the concept of the “green economy” often feels abstract, limiting youth, refugees, and marginalized communities from participating meaningfully in related discussions. As one participant explained, “We can’t expect people to join the green transition if they don’t know what it is or how it affects them.” Another participant noted, “You’re talking to me about ice melting and we don’t have water to drink,” in reference to the lack of connection that some feel regarding discussions about melting icecaps. Refugees and internally displaced people face additional barriers to building fluency related to the green economy, including parental hesitancy towards “non-traditional” career paths for their children, unequal access to funding, and lack of recognition of informal or community-led training programs. Other structural gaps include underdeveloped curricula, limited employer knowledge of green skill requirements, and insufficient technical support for community-driven innovations.



By 2030, summit participants envisioned a world in which economies are sustainable and inclusive, with youth and refugees engaged as co-creators rather than passive participants. Participants committed to advancing the piloting of two initiatives in Jordan with the aim of scaling them regionally: building the capacity of business support organizations (BSOs) to enable them to provide green start-up programming for youth-led organizations, and working with sustainability clubs within universities to promote green capstone project concepts among students.

Organizations and individuals participating in MENA YES! committed to the following:

- A representative from the Jordanian Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) committed to support the broader effort to advance green jobs based on their experience as an ecosystem and community builder.
- EFE joined the Green Jobs for Youth Pact, an initiative by the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Under the Pact, EFE committed to equipping a total of 20,000 young people with the skills and mindsets needed to succeed in green jobs or to be change leaders by creating their own green businesses, in addition to advancing advocacy for green jobs through the MENA YES! platform.
- A representative from Leaders International committed to supporting BSOs in tailored trainings and capacity development toward the green economy.

- A representative from the WEF Global Shapers Community – Tunis Hub committed to considering sustainability and championing green jobs when working with youth on re-skilling for the future within the hub.
- A representative from Youth Business International (YBI) committed to sharing learning tools around sustainable entrepreneurship and green businesses.

Policy Recommendations: Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy

In addition to the commitments above, the discussions generated the following policy recommendations to advance green economy initiatives:

Recommendation 1: Establish government-supported public/private apprenticeship programs focusing on green jobs in partnership with the private sector and academic and vocational institutions. Programs should provide post-apprenticeship employment.

This approach will support skills acquisition, workforce development, and meaningful employment. Youth entering the workplace need sector-specific skills training and access to quality employment opportunities to enter the green economy. Apprenticeship programs will provide both training and access to workplace opportunities that lead to meaningful employment and drive green growth. The program will also provide an opportunity for the current workforce to gain the skills needed to be active participants in the green economy. Through this multi-partner engagement, youth will not only gain the skills needed to support national green growth programming, but will also be introduced to employers working in green economy-focused sectors. In the case of Jordan, this programming approach will support the aspirations set forth in EMV 2033.

Recommendation 2: Governments should consider integrating green education (climate change/environmental sustainability) across all academic fields and levels as well as in informal education settings.

Building the green economy requires more than just skills development, it requires an understanding of and appreciation for the value that will be derived from the green economy, including economic, livelihood, and quality of life aspects. Further, greater exposure to green issues will help unlock innovation in the marketplace that is required to advance the growth of the green and circular economy. Transitioning to and building the green economy requires behavior change enabled by broad-based knowledge and understanding of “green growth” and why it is important for the future economic security of the MENA region. The integration of green education throughout education systems will therefore play a key role in supporting the expansion of jobs in green sectors.



Recommendation 3: Establish public-private partnerships for youth and refugee populations

focused on green entrepreneurship to drive innovation and employment in the green and circular economy.

The transition to the green economy is not solely the responsibility of or in the hands of governments. The private sector has a significant role to play, ranging from innovation and shifts in production to low-carbon based systems. The proposed green entrepreneurship program would support greater engagement and investment by the private sector to support the just transition and a shift in approaches to production toward the green economy. Green entrepreneurship programming can increase innovation, access to finance, and the expansion of the green economy by supporting youth with needed seed funding and mentorship. Consideration should be given to supporting BSOs to enable them to provide green start-up support for youth-led organizations.

Conclusion

The MENA YES! 2025 Summit generated a strong collective commitment to translating dialogue about youth economic opportunities into concrete action. Over two days of collaboration, participants identified systemic barriers, shared innovative practices, and co-created actionable roadmaps across four thematic tracks, including Artificial Intelligence and the Digital Economy, Women's Economic Opportunity and Labor Market Participation, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, and Jobs in the Green and Circular Economy, while centering refugee and migrant inclusion throughout.

The event not only facilitated meaningful exchanges between youth, policymakers, and private sector leaders, but also built momentum toward system-level change by aligning diverse stakeholders around a shared vision for inclusive, sustainable employment in the MENA region. The more than 90 commitments made reflect both the diversity and determination of participants to carry forward the summit's priorities through continued partnerships and implementation beyond the summit. MENA YES! stands as a catalyst for long-term transformation, nurturing a growing community of changemakers committed to creating dignified, future-ready opportunities for young people across MENA.

