

Enabling Social Innovation in Jordan

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ↓

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Jordan’s social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation 🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK



Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗

No formal definition of "social innovation" exists in Jordanian law. A prime ministerial committee formed in 2020 has been working to formulate an official definition as part of a draft social entrepreneurship policy framework, but as of 2025, no government-adopted definition is in place (i.e., the concept remains undefined in legislation).



Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship (MoDEE) serves as the lead government body coordinating social innovation efforts. In July 2020, the Prime Minister established a Social Entrepreneurship Advisory Committee to develop a supportive legal and regulatory environment. Other ministries (e.g., Industry & Trade, Social Development) and the Legislation Bureau are involved in this inter-ministerial effort.



Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

There is no dedicated national strategy exclusively for social innovation or social entrepreneurship yet. However, related elements are embedded in broader policies – for example, the “Jordan 2025” vision and recent Economic Modernisation plans emphasize entrepreneurship and innovation culture as drivers of growth. MoDEE and partners have drafted a Social Entrepreneurship Policy Framework (initiated at a 2021 summit) to outline a future strategy and roadmap for the sector, but this has not been formally adopted as of 2025.



Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗

Jordan currently lacks any specific laws or legal form for social enterprises. Social ventures must register under existing frameworks (non-profits, charities, or ordinary companies), which offer no special tax incentives or benefits. The absence of a tailored legal status and policy support means social enterprises navigate complex general regulations (e.g., lengthy registration and compliance procedures) without recognition of their dual mission. Recognizing this gap, the government (through MoDEE’s committee) has been drafting legislation to formally define and regulate social enterprises, but no such law has been passed by 2025.



Official Statistics

The government does not collect official statistics on social innovation activities or social enterprises. Data on the number, size, or impact of social enterprises is not systematically tracked by national statistical agencies. This lack of unified, accessible data is a noted challenge – it makes it difficult to measure the sector’s contribution and tailor evidence-based policies.



Government Programs

The Jordanian government has engaged in programs (often in partnership with international organizations) to support social innovation. For example, MoDEE helped mobilize a US\$200 million World Bank project to boost entrepreneurship and digital jobs, which includes components benefiting young social entrepreneurs. The Ministry of Social Development has also collaborated on initiatives like the EU-funded Social Innovation Challenge (2022–2023), which incubated youth-led projects in local communities (with 500+ young participants in pilot areas). In addition, the government works with UNICEF through the UPSHIFT program to provide social entrepreneurship training and seed funding to vulnerable youth (with a focus on women, refugees, and persons with disabilities).

ECOSYSTEM



Stakeholders

Jordan’s social innovation ecosystem comprises stakeholders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Key players include civil society organizations and NGOs (often pioneers in introducing the concept of social enterprise at the grassroots), international donors (UNDP, GIZ, EU) that fund capacity-building and seed-funding programs, and educational institutions (universities and NGOs like INJAZ) that promote entrepreneurship education. Corporate actors also contribute through CSR-backed incubators and innovation hubs; for instance, telecom companies such as Orange and Zain have supported startup programs.



Support Initiatives

A variety of initiatives provide support to social innovators, though most are donor-driven or part of broader entrepreneurship programs. EU-funded projects like MedUP! (2018–2020) and others have offered training, grants, and networking specifically for social enterprises. Local competitions and hackathons have been organized by foundations and NGOs (for example, youth innovation challenges under the Crown Prince Foundation and design-thinking bootcamps by IBTECAR) to inspire social entrepreneurship at the community level. Nevertheless, these support measures remain relatively small-scale. International agencies often step in with targeted programs – for instance, the EU’s “Support to Social Protection” programme and UNICEF innovation labs – because there are few permanent domestic funding schemes or incubators dedicated solely to social enterprises. Overall, while support initiatives exist, they tend to be project-based and not yet part of a sustained national support system.



Collaboration

Collaboration among ecosystem players has begun to improve via multi-stakeholder platforms and events. Notably, in 2021, the “Heart of Amman II” program, led by MoDEE (with UNDP and Impact Hub), convened policy dialogue workshops that brought together government officials, social entrepreneurs, investors, academics, and NGOs to discuss challenges in the social enterprise ecosystem. This process facilitated joint identification of issues (e.g., funding barriers, impact measurement, regulatory gaps) and the co-creation of draft policy recommendations for the government. Such forums indicate a growing collaborative ethos, with public and private stakeholders beginning to work together on enabling the “social innovation” environment. Still, beyond these occasional summits and committees, ongoing coordination (e.g., networks or associations for social enterprises) is limited, pointing to an opportunity to establish more permanent collaboration mechanisms.

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



There are currently no specialized financing schemes or government-run funds dedicated to social enterprises in Jordan. Social innovators generally rely on traditional SME financing channels, which can be challenging due to high borrowing costs and collateral requirements in the mainstream finance system. Commercial banks and investors remain cautious and often do not distinguish social enterprises from other businesses. As a result, many social entrepreneurs depend on grants, philanthropy, or prize competitions for seed capital. Donor-funded programs have stepped in with some financing support (e.g., offering small grants or incubator funding under EU or GIZ projects), but these are temporary solutions. Unlike some countries, Jordan has not yet introduced incentives like tax breaks for impact investment or a dedicated social investment fund, so access to patient capital for social innovation remains limited.

Financing Inclusivity



Ensuring funds reach women, youth, and marginalized groups is a concern. Women and young entrepreneurs in Jordan face barriers in accessing credit (e.g., lack of collateral or track record), and social enterprises operating in poorer or rural communities often struggle to attract investors. On a positive note, microfinance institutions have a strong presence and often target low-income and female clients, indirectly supporting social objectives. Moreover, international donors design programs to be inclusive; for instance, UNICEF's UPSHIFT and the EU Social Innovation Challenge specifically engaged young women, refugees, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups, providing them with training and seed-funding opportunities. These initiatives help broaden financial inclusion for early-stage social ventures.

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public awareness and understanding of social innovation in Jordan remain limited. The concept of a “social enterprise” is relatively new and niche; outside of engaged youth and NGO circles, most of the general public is not familiar with the term. Cultural expectations often separate “social work” (charity/NGO activities) from business, so a hybrid social-business model is not widely recognized. Surveys and stakeholder insights indicate that awareness is growing slowly; for example, as of 2018, only a minority of Jordanians (especially in older generations) had heard of or understood social entrepreneurship principles. Nevertheless, recent efforts are helping: media coverage of success stories, the introduction of social entrepreneurship concepts in some university programs, and high-profile events (such as the 2021 Social Entrepreneurship Summit in Amman) are starting to spark interest. Overall, however, public perception of social innovation is still at an early stage, and much work remains to mainstream the idea across society.

Research



Research on social innovation in Jordan is nascent and largely driven by external organizations. A few comprehensive studies have been published in recent years – for instance, the British Council's 2021 mapping of social enterprise in Jordan and similar ecosystem analyses by development agencies – providing initial data on the landscape. Local academic involvement is limited: there are no dedicated research centers for social innovation, and universities have produced only a handful of papers or case studies on Jordanian social enterprises. Most data and insights come from donor-commissioned reports rather than institutionalized research. This means there are knowledge gaps (e.g., on the sector's size, financial flows, and impact metrics) and a need for more home-grown research. Encouragingly, the government's interest in evidence (such as commissioning studies via MoDEE) and collaborations with universities could stimulate more research in the future. For now, publicly available information remains sparse, underlining the importance of expanding research capacity on social innovation.

Education & Human Capital



Education related to social innovation is gradually emerging, but not yet mainstream. Over the past decade, Jordan has increasingly emphasized entrepreneurship and innovation in education: programs like INJAZ have introduced entrepreneurship courses in high schools and universities, and some universities now offer modules on social entrepreneurship or social impact as part of business curricula. The government’s National Youth Strategy 2019–2025 also calls for cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset among youth, which aligns with fostering social innovation skills. Despite this progress, the formal education system still often prioritizes traditional career paths, and critical thinking or social problem-solving skills are underdeveloped. Many youth lack practical experience in launching ventures. Human capital for social innovation is thus still developing – there is a small pool of young social entrepreneurs and changemakers, often emerging from incubator programs or international training programs. Expanding entrepreneurship education (with a social impact focus) and vocational training can build a stronger pipeline of talent for the social innovation ecosystem in the coming years.

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

Jordan’s overall entrepreneurship environment provides a mixed foundation for social innovation. According to the World Bank’s Doing Business 2020 report, Jordan ranked 75th out of 190 economies in ease of doing business, indicating moderate regulatory ease (notably, starting a business in Jordan still involves several steps and significant time).



Innovation Capacity

In terms of innovation capacity, Jordan has shown improvement: it was ranked 78th globally in the 2022 Global Innovation Index and rose to 71st in 2023 , reflecting strengths in human capital and technology adoption despite limited research outputs.



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

The general entrepreneurial activity level is modest – for example, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor reported that about 7.9% of Jordanian adults were engaged in early-stage “social entrepreneurial” activity in 2019 (trying to start or running a venture with social/environmental goals). This suggests a nascent but existent community of social entrepreneurs. Overall, while Jordan’s business climate has room to improve (e.g., simplifying procedures, increasing access to credit), cultural attitudes toward entrepreneurship are slowly becoming more positive, which bodes well for social innovation endeavors in the long run.

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

Jordanian society shows a moderate level of social and environmental consciousness, though some indicators lag global averages. Interpersonal trust is relatively low, only about 14% of Jordanians agreed that “most people can be trusted,” according to the World Values Survey (2018) [1], reflecting cautious social capital.



Political participation

Politically, civic participation is limited as Jordan is classified as an “authoritarian regime” in the EIU’s Democracy Index (2022) with a low score (~3.6 out of 10), indicating constrained democratic freedoms and public voice.



Volunteering

Philanthropy and volunteerism levels are modest: Jordan ranked around 101st globally in the 2022 World Giving Index, with only 14% of people donating money and 9% volunteering in a typical month – suggesting that formal charitable engagement, while present, is not widespread.



Sustainability

On the environmental front, awareness and performance have been improving. Jordan jumped to 74th out of 180 countries on the 2022 Environmental Performance Index, and was noted as the top performer in MENA on climate change metrics (thanks to national efforts in renewable energy and pollution reduction). This climb in environmental ranking signals growing consciousness and policy attention to sustainability issues.

In summary, social consciousness in Jordan is developing (amid some cultural conservatism), and environmental consciousness is on the rise, but there remains significant scope to strengthen public engagement in social causes and collective action.