



Youth Career Initiative

Jordan River Foundation



Youth Career Initiative¹

مؤسسة نهر الأردن
Jordan River Foundation

Region	MENA
Country	Jordan
Organization	Jordan River Foundation
Name	Youth Career Initiative (YCI)
Category	Skills development
Start date	2007
End date	Ongoing
Partners	Businesses in the community and the international tourism sector
UN involvement	World Tourism Organization funded the programme through cycles 6 and 7 in 2012-2013
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1. Background and description

Between 2003 and 2014, the overall unemployment rate in Jordan fluctuated between 11 and 14 per cent.² Current statistics for the fourth quarter of 2014 reveal that the highest rate of unemployment was recorded in the age groups 15-19 (35.4 per cent) and 20-24 years (29.3 per cent).³

Given that Jordan has limited natural resources, the tourism sector remains one of the key potential contributors to the country's economy. This sector has 1,500 potential new jobs available annually in hotels and restaurants alone. Although this sector offers various opportunities, Jordanian youth lack the skills needed for this industry and there is a social stigma related to working in hotels and restaurants. As a result, Jordan employs foreigners from countries such as Egypt⁴ to work in its tourism industry.

There are thus opportunities to encourage Jordanian youth to work in the tourism industry⁵ and for investment in providing them the skills needed to work in this sector.⁶ A programme that provides the necessary training and skills, creates awareness and changes both mind-sets and the status quo associated with working in the tourism industry is very much needed.

1 Desk Review (May-September 2014); Inquiry form (21 August 2014); Interview (11 November 2014 and 28 December 2014); Write up (21 January 2015); Internal Validation (21 January-6 February 2015); Implementer Validation (12 February 2015); Final validation (October 2015).

2 Quarterly report on Unemployment Rate in 2014-Department of Statistics-The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

3 Ibid.

4 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November 2014.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.



Organization profile ⁷

The Jordan River Foundation (JRF) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization, established in 1995 and chaired by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah. The Foundation's mission is to "engage Jordanians to realize their full economic potential and overcome social challenges especially child abuse". Since its inception, the Foundation has initiated numerous socioeconomic projects for women which aim to provide employment opportunities that in turn enhance their livelihoods. In essence, these projects work towards enhancing women's knowledge and skills in the production of traditional handicrafts and in entrepreneurial skills. Such initiatives have benefited thousands of individuals, directly and indirectly, and today continue to generate income for vulnerable communities and families across the Kingdom.

As JRF grew and the concept of 'development' in Jordan evolved, JRF widened its approach to include sustainable community investments for women and communities, through implementing income-generating businesses with different community-based organizations across the Kingdom. The organization channels grants to community-based organizations which in turn provide loans to community members either to establish or develop an existing micro-business to give them a livelihood. In addition, for the infrastructure component, JRF introduces and implements interventions that support and improve accessibility to better transportation, health and education services. For example, in 1997, on the level of social investments, JRF launched the first programme in Jordan to address protection of children from all kinds of abuse. The

programme proved to be a success in Jordan and the region. JRF is recognized nationally, regionally and internationally and has gained a number of local, regional and international awards. Some of its programmes have been replicated regionally and internationally, a testament to its growing recognition and implementation of programmes perceived to be relevant and effective.

The Youth Career Initiative (YCI) programme⁸

YCI was created to empower disadvantaged and vulnerable youth from households facing economic challenges that hinder their academic advancement and may prevent them from enrolling in higher education. Many of the youth who joined the programme are from areas identified by Jordan's Department of Statistics as 'poverty pockets'. YCI opens the door for these youth to join the work force by equipping them, through a six-month training programme, with relevant life and work skills and exposing them to a successful business environment and successful professionals, enabling them to make informed career choices and become employable. The JRF implements YCI in coordination with local businesses in the community and the Jordan Tourism Board and in partnership with five-star hotels.

Pilot programme⁹

The pilot programme conducted in 2007 indicated that 7 per cent of participants dropped out of the programme. Only three five-star hotels in Amman participated in the pilot phase, and 13 students graduated from the programme. JRF applied a number of adjustments in the following years to increase and sustain the participation of youth and expand the number of partnering hotels. These adjustments included conducting orientation meetings with families to highlight

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Inquiry Form completed on 21 August 2014.

⁹ Ibid.



the programme's impact on their children and how it could increase their employability. This was considered necessary given the stigma associated with hotel and tourism work in Jordan. Additionally, JRF introduced preparatory training for youth which included an in-depth orientation to the programme and its objectives, introducing information on work ethics and the hotel sector work environment. These two specific adjustments contributed substantially to the increase in youth enrolment in the programme, which required inviting more hotels to become partners, so that currently the partnership includes 10 five-star hotels in Aqaba and Amman. Today the programme is in its eighth cycle and since its inception has graduated 174 youth in Amman and Aqaba, 39 during the seventh cycle alone.

2. Goal and objectives

2.1. Goal

The aim of the programme is to empower youth to make informed career choices and to be aware of the options available to them, allowing them to improve their employability and their long-term social and economic opportunities.¹⁰

2.2. Objectives

Short-term objectives:¹¹

1. Increase the qualifications and employability skills of youth;
2. Increase employability of the participants in the hotel sector;
3. Motivate youth to reach their goals and equip them to make their own decisions about matters that influence their future.

Long-term objectives:¹²

1. Supply the tourism sector with skilled workers;
2. Increase family incomes'
3. Allow youth to take on responsibilities and become more committed to their society.

3. Target group

3.1. Age group

A summary of the selection criteria is as follows:

- A minimum of 18 years of age and a maximum of 22 years of age;
- Coming from a low-income community;
- Recently completed high school; passing secondary school final exam is not a must;
- Commit full time for the six-month duration of the programme;
- The youth have no other opportunities to improve their employability;
- Jordanian nationality;
- Pass the interview and programme requirements;
- Have no university degree;
- Unemployed.

¹⁰ <http://www.youthcareerinitiative.org/about-us/>

¹¹ Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November 2014.

¹² Ibid.





3.1. Gender considerations

The programme targets both males and females. Implementers noted that they are trying to enhance equity between males and females by attempting to increase the number of female participants every year by adjusting activities accordingly. Generally, the orientation sessions target families of both females and males since there is a culture of shame about working at a hotel or in the tourism sector. However, JRF has started to organize specific orientation meetings for families of females which include presentations by female graduates about their experiences in the programme.

In previous years, only 3 per cent of participants were female, but the seventh cycle showed a 20 per cent increase in the graduation rate for females, reflecting that female participation is increasing. The JRF aims to continue increasing the participation and graduation of young women.

3.2. Ethnic/disability considerations

The programme does not discriminate against any ethnicity or people with a disability. As long as the participant is a high school graduate (or equivalent) and between the ages of 18 and 22 years, there is no reason to exclude him/her. On the contrary, the programme encourages inclusiveness and focuses on vulnerable populations.

3.3. Targeting the most marginalized/ most at risk

The programme targets young people aged 18-22 years who have completed high school and are unable to continue to a university education. The members of this group are vulnerable and at risk, and are unable to compete in the labour market.

3.4. Human rights programming

YCI promotes human rights by enhancing opportunities for youth employment. The programme treats all participants professionally and equally and provides opportunities for them to express themselves. These principles are discussed in the training process and are followed up during the on-the-job training. Empowering youth, developing their skills and building their capacities in different contexts ensures the promotion of the participants' dignity.

YCI employs a human-rights based approach whenever there may be any one issue arising with the youth participants.

3.5. Youth involvement

Youth are involved by being asked to complete three questionnaires at the beginning, midterm and end of the programme. The results are used to evaluate and develop the programme further. JRF organizes focus group discussions with the participants to extract lessons learned and identify challenges, benefits and opportunities which can lead to corrective actions and/or activities in later cycles. Youth are sometimes involved in guiding the activities of the sessions implemented in the hotels.





4. Strategy and Implementation

4.1. Strategies/theoretical approaches/ methodologies

The programme responds effectively to the JRF strategic objective of creating employable youth, i.e., youth who are able to function in the work environment. In addition, the programme responds nationally to the Jordanian employment strategy through increasing employment and capacity-building. By raising the capacities of the target group and allowing them to accept new ideas and new job sectors, the programme contributes to the development of Jordanian society.¹³

The programme's strategy focuses on raising awareness about available employment opportunities for youth in the hotel industry, and encouraging them and their parents to consider work in hotels. The programme combines both theoretical and practical instruction including personal finance, interpersonal skills and personal health and well-being. It also exposes participants to a successful business environment and a wide variety of workplace situations¹⁴ by placing them in different departments of the hotel, e.g., the kitchen, front office, laundry room, room service, etc..

The programme strategy also includes partnering with the five-star hotels as programme stakeholders. They are actively involved in suggesting adjustments to the programme. Hotels participate or have a say about the design of each cycle since they are in contact with the youth on a daily basis and contribute many lessons learned and adjustments for the design of the subsequent cycles. The hotels also participate through meetings with the JRF

team held throughout the programme cycle and through council meetings at the beginning and end of each cycle.

Because the training takes place at the hotels, the programme implementers have to adhere to the hotels' agendas. The hotels work with the JRF implementers in setting the agenda for the six months of the cycle and on any adjustments to the training material. They also develop the criteria for recruitment by developing an interview form and asking questions that measure the youths' willingness to join the programme. Although these criteria and the interview guide are generally standard from cycle to cycle, specific additions (for example a question in the interview) might be added in a particular cycle based on lessons learned in previous cycles. In addition, they develop on-the-job-training which last for six months in each hotel and has the youth rotating between different departments. This process of engagement by the hotels in each step (interviewing, recruitment, on-the-job training, etc.) occurs in each cycle.

4.2. Activities

The programme's activities are implemented in collaboration with all potential partners. The programme usually starts in July of every year, when JRF announce the programme in every governorate through orientation meetings with community-based organizations and youth centres, as well as through advertisements in newspapers and through television ads and different TV shows. Social media are also utilized: a Facebook page has been created and announcements are sent on Twitter. These spread the word about the introductory community meetings held in the governorate to announce the programme and recruit participants. JRF particularly encourages

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*





females to join by having a female graduate of the programme present her story at every introductory meeting. JRF also organizes meetings with the parents of females to create awareness about the programme and the importance of their daughters' participation. The involvement of parents was evident during the seventh cycle as they participated in the preparation camp, although for the current eighth cycle, they did not participate in the preparatory training but did attend the introductory meetings at the beginning of the cycle.

Implementers also hold council meetings with their partners (partnering hotels and the YCI global team) where they share their success stories and speak about implementation procedures and future steps.¹⁵

The applications received are screened at three different levels. The first screening is done by the programme staff (the coordinator and the manager) and focuses on the main criteria as mentioned earlier (age, employment status, educational background etc.). During the second stage, the selected youth are interviewed and asked about their interest in the programme. At this stage, a committee comprising the YCI coordinator and human resources representatives from JRF and the hotels, is formed to interview the youth to assess their willingness, reasons for joining, family conditions, ability to work under pressure, etc.. The youth who demonstrate a real need and interest and the ability to learn and work under pressure will be selected. The third level of screening is done by the hotels, which conduct another interview and ask more detailed questions about the candidates' future plans, willingness to work in different departments, etc.. This

process aims to ensure that the selected youth are committed to the programme. Participants then join the partner five-star hotels, beginning in November until May. The youth will be trained based on a specific plan provided by the hotels to experience different departments.

The programme consists of two levels of training. The first training begins after the second round of screening for youth who have been selected by the committee but prior to the hotel interviews. This preparatory training includes an introduction to the programme and its objectives and provides an opportunity to develop interview skills for the hotel interviews. The second training is conducted at the hotels and includes the technical, on-the-job training in different departments of the hotels, which lasts for six months. This training equips the youth with the needed skills to make them eligible to enter the labour market and also boosts their confidence and self-esteem by helping them to change their attitudes and mind-sets. Youth receive both theoretical and practical training by working in different departments of the hotel (laundry, kitchen, etc.) so they will have experience in almost all of the hotel's facilities.¹⁶ At the same time, they attend training sessions conducted by JRF and expert volunteers on 'soft skills', ICT and English language. These training sessions last for the six months of the youths' placement in the hotels. During the soft skills training sessions, issues such as self-esteem, self-confidence, communication with the community and behavioural change are addressed in order to enhance participants' awareness. This experience in itself provides these young individuals with dignity and the feeling of being heard and valued.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.



The implementers recruits specialized staff who follow up closely with the hotels, particularly if there are any dropouts.

Phases of YCI

MOBLIZATION AND LAUNCHING PHASE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This stage is conducted through TV and newspaper advertisements, TV programmes and social media. 2. Conduct introductory meetings with youth centres, youth clubs and community-based organizations in the 12 governorates of Jordan. 3. Receive applications from youth.
SCREENING AND RECRUITMENT	<p>Applicants undergo three levels of screening:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Application screening according to the programme's main criteria. 2. Applicants who pass the first stage undergo an interview with a committee that includes the technical programme staff and human resources representative from RJF and hotels. 3. Youth who are selected from this phase undergo preparatory training which equips them with skills related to job interviews in preparation for the final selection interview with the hotels. 4. Hotels interviews will define which youth who are selected for placement.
HOTEL PLACEMENT	<p>Selected youth will be placed in the different hotels, where the technical on-the-job training starts in the different departments of the hotel, accompanied by sessions on life-skills, English language and ICT. This period last for six months</p>
GRADUATION	<p>Upon completion of the hotel placement phase, youth graduate from the programme.</p>
COUNCIL MEETINGS and YOUTH INPUT	<p>During the programme cycle, two council meetings are conducted, one at the beginning of the programme and the second after the graduation ceremony. These meetings include top management of hotels, the YCI global team and JRF and highlight success stories, achievements and challenges, and identify asset measures and actions for correction.</p> <p>In addition, youth who participate in the training provide feedback about their experiences which also feeds into success stories, lessons learned and corrective actions.</p>

Youth can contact JRF at any point during their on-the-job training to discuss any issue they may face at the hotels. JRF either coaches them and explores solutions with them, or communicates with the management on their behalf if need be. JRF has a full-time dedicated coordinator for this work so that youth feel they have one person whom they can trust. Staff members who work on YCI should have voluntary work experience and must have worked at JRF for at least for six months.



4.3. Innovativeness

The intervention is innovative in that it targets a sector that Jordanians have long avoided. The programme acts as a bridge between vulnerable youth and their communities.¹⁷

4.4. Cost and funding

The total cost per youth in this programme is 2,091 Jordanian dollars (approximately \$2,950) including training, incentives, transportation, etc. for each young person. The intervention adheres to a budget plan, but there is a different budget every year, depending on the available funds.

The task of identifying funding resources is not easy and JRF continuously seeks funding from donors. Funds have been obtained from different organizations and after finishing each cycle, implementers search for new sponsors. The programme received funds from the World Tourism Organization in 2012-2013 and from the King Abdallah II Fund for Development in 2014. In 2015, partial funding was received from the Employment, Technical and Vocational Education Training Fund (ETVET), a governmental entity that supports such programmes. The programme funded itself once.¹⁸

4.5. Sustainability

The programme is ongoing, having been sustained since its inception in 2007 and replicated seven times.²⁰ The eighth cycle is currently under way.²¹

*Means of sustainability*²²

Sustainability has been made possible by the programme's engagement with stakeholders such as the five-star hotels that employ the youth.

4.6. Replicability

After the programme was implemented in Amman, the capital, for five years, JRF expanded the programme to include the hotels in Aqaba, in the south of Jordan. JRF is now implementing the second cycle of YCI in Aqaba. It is worth mentioning however, that the participants in both cities are recruited from all Jordanian governorates.²³

The programme has also been implemented in other countries including Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Mexico and Poland.

5. Evaluation of effectiveness

Monitoring and evaluation

The programme is evaluated monthly and annually by the JRF monitoring and evaluation department. Implementers have internal monthly and quarterly (technical and financial) reports that clarify the objectives and outcomes from each cycle. On an institutional level, the programme adheres to the same unchanged objectives, but occasionally, depending on particular funding agencies and their requests, there are changes to specific indicators and figures. The implementers also have documentation and data available on all participants, including those who have secured a job and those who have not.



17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 28 December 2014.

20 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November 2014.

21 Ibid.

22 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 28 December 2014.

23 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November 2014.





Briefly, until the end of the seventh cycle, the programme achieved 60 per cent employment (not necessarily in the tourism sector) for the participants and 11 per cent of the youth participants went back to university²⁴ (19 out of the 174 who graduated).

*Implementation evaluation*²⁵

YCI evaluation data are disaggregated by sex, age and geographic region. The evaluation process for the programme is continuous and tracks the following indicators:²⁶

- Percentage increase in the number of applications received from year to year:
 - o 80 applications were received in 2012 compared to 190 in 2013, an increase of 42 per cent, and 406 in 2014, an increase of 47 per cent;
- The number of youth graduated: over the past seven years, 174 of 203 enrolled youth graduated, representing a graduation rate of 86 per cent;
- The number of youth employed in the hospitality and other sectors in the seventh cycle: 22 were employed (18 in hospitality and four in other sectors) out of 49 enrolled; 39 graduated out of 49 enrolled, a graduation rate of 80 per cent;
- Percentage of youth returning to educational system over the past seven years: 11 per cent;
- Number of partnerships forged with the private sector:
 - o Memorandum of understanding signed between JRF, Global Communities (an NGO) and the private sector, i.e., hotels and restaurants, during the seventh cycle;
 - o One new hotel joined the programme in the fifth cycle and two in the sixth cycle;
- Percentage increase in female participation: two females joined in the fifth and sixth cycles respectively and eight for the seventh cycle.

Objectives achieved:

The programme has achieved its objectives since its inception in 2007:²⁷

1. 174 youth participants graduated (42-50 youth each year, with a total graduation rate of 86 per cent); 82 per cent of females and 86 per cent of males successfully graduated from the training with improved employment skills to actively participate in the Jordanian workforce;²⁸
2. 105 youth participants, five of whom were females, were successfully employed in the hotel industry and tourism sector. The smaller percentage of females was due to family commitments;
3. 105 families are benefiting from the supplemental and regular income of their now employed youth;
4. 19 of 174 YCI graduates have resumed their education;²⁹
5. Although not an indicator, it has been noticed through word of mouth among the youth that the YCI graduates become role models for other young people in their families, peer groups and communities;
6. The participation of the five-star hotels was critical in increasing and qualifying young Jordanians to join the tourism sector. The hotels encourage the youth and build their capabilities through technical training;

24 Ibid.

25 Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 28 December 2014.

26, 27, 28, 29 Ibid.





7. Positive cultural change reflected in the increase of youth participation mainly females;
8. Although there is no specific indicator yet, there seems to be a positive cultural change among communities in accepting that their children work in the tourism sector.

Following up

JRF contacts former YCI graduates to follow up on their progress. Records are kept regarding the positions they occupy which allows implementers to monitor the success of the programme.³⁰

6. Strengths and opportunities

This intervention empowers the target group not only by working with the youth themselves, but also with their families through their involvement in some programme activities. Parents are made aware that their children are going through new experiences and exposure to new situations, which enables families to support them through this process. The intervention works at the level of both the youth and their parents, which further empowers the youth.³¹ The parents are involved in the introductory meetings held by JRF. In the seventh year of implementation, parents were involved in the preparatory camps.

JRF has established a partnership with the International Business Leaders Forum, which expanded the programme to other countries (e.g., Australia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ethiopia, Hungary, India, Mexico, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Thailand and Viet Nam). JRF works continuously international business leaders to adapt the programme to fit the standards of the various countries.³²

According to the implementers of YCI, the opinions and perspectives of stakeholders are continuously taken into consideration through the major activities of the programme, the council meetings and the daily correspondences and meetings with the human resources management at the hotels.³³

7. Challenges

YCI faces challenges related to:

- Commitment of youth who have been selected and recruited by the hotels. Attendance is taken by the hotels daily during the training. This is a major challenge as some donors restrict YCI to certain number of youth, and when a participant drops out, he/she cannot be replaced;
- The availability of programmes by other institutions which serve to provide employment.³⁴ For example, in Jordan, there are other programmes which provide on-the-job job training in the hotel sector. This affects the number of youth placed in hotels since they need to recruit youth from these other programmes as well;
- Female participation, which is opposed by their parents.

8. Next steps and the way forward

Currently, since this model has proven its effectiveness in providing and networking youth with employment opportunities in the hotel sector, JRF is considering having two YCI cycles per year. Additionally, JRF is considering replicating this model in other sectors such as car maintenance, restaurants and hospitals, in order to create an empowered group of youth in these areas.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November 2014.

³² Ibid..

³³ Interview with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 28 December 2014.

³⁴ Ibid.



9. Lessons learned and recommendations

A number of factors that contributed to the success of YCI would be valuable to include when implementing the programme.

- The involvement of and collaboration with the hotels was very important, not only for the sustainability of the programme but also for ensuring its proper implementation.
- Recruitment strategies and the selection process must be professional in order to avoid high dropout rates.
- A strong funding network proved to be very beneficial to the programme's sustainability.
- Evaluation and monitoring procedures are pivotal to the programme's success. YCI evaluated the programme with the youth at three levels of the programme (beginning, middle and end), conducting focus group discussions with them. The results of these evaluations are important for improving the programme.
- A pilot study: (1) allows the implementing organization to amend or improve the programme; and (2) provides a clearer image of the target audience.

10. Components to consider for scale-up in MENA

- The partnership established by JRF with the International Business Leaders Forum and the programme can be expanded to programme to other countries.

11. Resources

Operational and training manual for the programme. Interested parties are to contact implementers as there is a fee for this manual, which provides step-by-step details of how such a programme is run.

12. References

Inquiry Form about the programme completed on 21 August 2014.

Interviews with Laila Gharaibeh, Project coordinator, 11 November and 28 December 2014.

Quarterly report on Unemployment Rate in 2014-Department of Statistics-The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

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