

Policy Brief

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Adolescent education and *Makani* integrated programming

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Introduction

Implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and its national partners, Makani ('My Space') Programme has been providing young people living in Jordan with a variety of age-tailored programming since 2015. Originally designed to provide child protection and informal education to the 100,000 school-aged Syrian refugee children who were not able to attend school – because government schools had not yet been scaled up to meet needs – Makani centre programming evolved as Syrian children were gradually included in the Jordan education system, including through a double-shift system (UNICEF Jordan, 2015; 2022). Today, 114 centres serve disadvantaged young people of all nationalities and offer an array of integrated programming encompassing children's rights, life skills, job skills and learning support designed to complement formal education and recreational opportunities (UNICEF Jordan, 2022). This brief, which draws on data collected by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme in late 2022 and early 2023, aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence that Makani centres support young people to aspire and learn.

Sample and methods

GAGE is a mixed-methods longitudinal study following approximately 3,000 Syrian, Jordanian and Palestinian young people living in Jordan as they move through adolescence and into young adulthood. Our sample is approximately half female and half male and is divided into two age cohorts: a younger group (mostly aged 10–12 years at baseline, in 2018), and an older group (mostly aged 15–17 years at baseline). This brief draws on midline data, which was collected in 2022 and 2023, and focuses on the experiences and outcomes of young people who had taken part in Makani programming since 2019 when the programme was re-organised to serve a broader population.

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Of the just over 1,000 sampled young people who had participated in Makani programming since 2019, a minority (21%) were still participating in programming at the time midline data was collected. The average young person, who was aged 16 at midline, had attended a Makani centre for approximately 8 months, starting when they were 12.5 years old. Most (72%) were Syrian; the remainder were either Jordanian (13%) or Palestinian (14%). Approximately half (49%) of the Syrian young people in the sample lived in formal refugee camps run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The other half lived in Jordanian host communities (47%). Of all the participants sampled, 10% reported having a disability¹. Participants' families were socially and economically disadvantaged in myriad ways. Most owned few household assets (7.5/18 on an index) and there were relatively high rates of female-headed households (17%) and illiteracy (14%).



A 10-year-old Syrian boy with down syndrome's parents were unable to send him to formal school or Makani, Jordan © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2024

Findings

On the midline survey, young Makani participants reported taking part in a variety of courses aimed at supporting education and skills development. More than half, for example, had taken courses in Arabic (55%) and maths (54%), with a similar proportion having taken courses in computer skills (47%) and English (44%) (see Figure 1). Most likely because Jordanian schools have limited instructional time – and because quality deficits are significant², especially for the Syrian students who attend afternoon shifts – 37% of young participants, when asked what they like best about Makani, replied '*learning new skills*', while 20% replied '*help with homework and learning*'. Computer skills courses were particularly valued. Critically, given that in Jordan disability is highly stigmatised and poorly accommodated, 37% of young participants reported interacting with peers with disabilities, and nearly all (87%) reported that Makani centres are disability friendly.

Regression analyses found that recent Makani participation is associated with a wide variety of improved educational and economic outcomes. Compared with their peers who have never attended Makani centres – and when controlling statistically for important background differences such as age, gender, nationality and economic status – those who recently attended Makani programming had better educational aspirations, enrolment and learning outcomes. More specifically, they were significantly³ more likely to aspire to secondary (5 percentage points) and university (8 percentage points) education, to be enrolled in school (9 percentage points), and to be literate (6 percentage points) and numerate (11 percentage points)⁴. They had also completed an additional three-quarters of a grade of formal education. Young participants were also more likely to aspire to skilled or professional work (7 percentage points) and to have ever taken a skills training course (37 percentage points). In addition, in terms of attitudes towards girls' education, they were more likely to believe that a girl's marriage can wait until after she has completed secondary school (3 percentage points) (see Figure 2).

¹ Disability status is determined by using the Washington Group Questionnaire: https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/fileadmin/uploads/wg/Washington_Group_Questionnaire_1_-_WG_Short_Set_on_Functioning__October_2022_.pdf

² Jordan's 15-year-old students perform poorly on the Programme for international Student Assessment (PISA). https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pisa-2022-results-volume-i-and-ii-country-notes_ed6fbcc5-en/jordan_d1c865b3-en.html

³ All differences are significant at the $p < .01$ level except for 'a girl's marriage can wait', which was significant at the $p < .1$ level.

⁴ Literacy and numeracy were measured with the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER): https://img.asercentre.org/docs/ASER%202022%20report%20pdfs/All%20India%20documents/About%20the%20survey/ASER_2022_AssessmentTasks.pdf

Figure 1: Courses attended at Makani centre

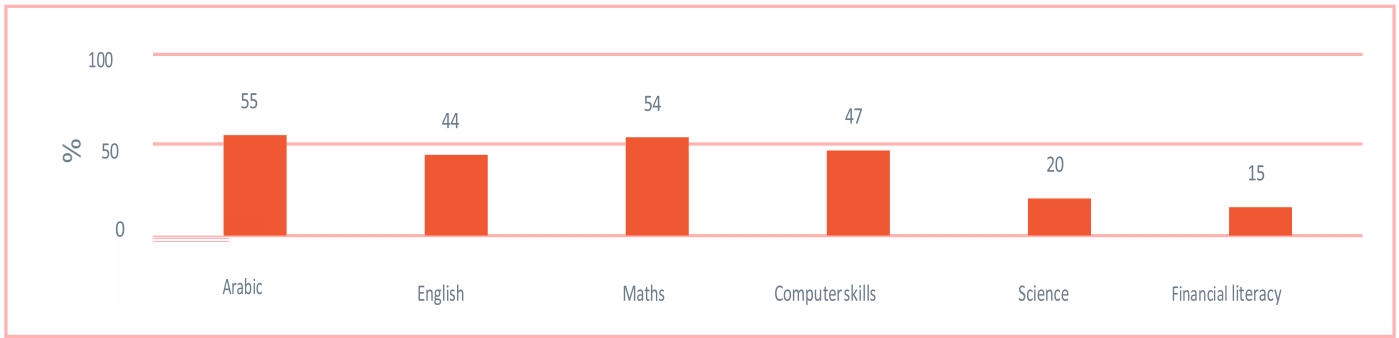
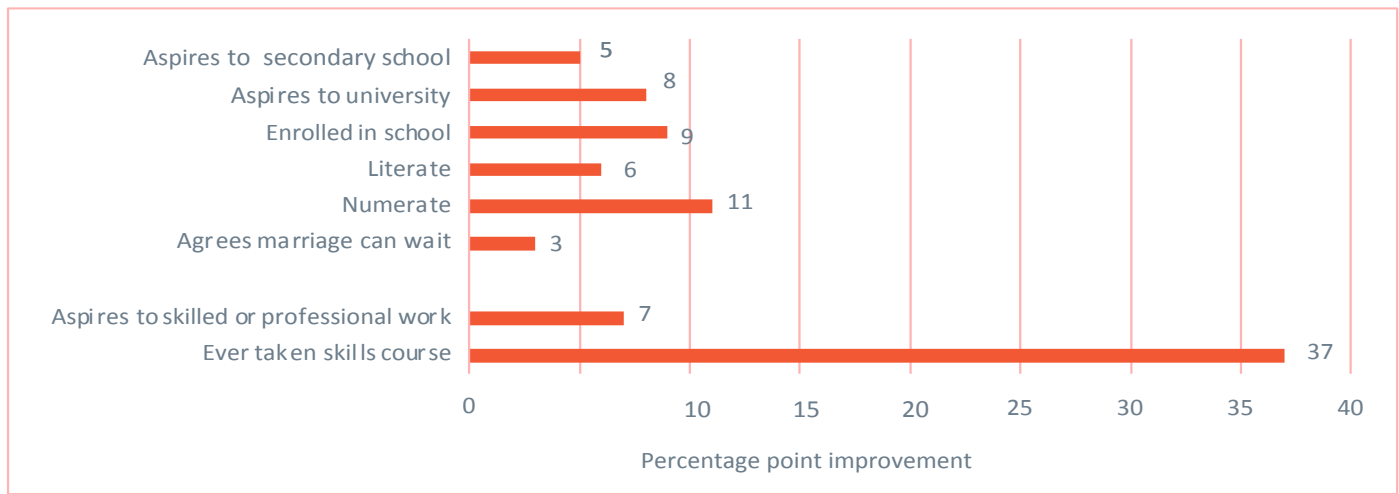


Figure 2: Percentage point improvement of recent Makani participants, compared with non-participants



► The teachers at Makani make the students love the subject.

(A Jordanian mother)

Stratified regression analyses highlight differences in the association between recent Makani participation

Among girls, those who recently participated in Makani were 6 percentage points more likely to aspire to secondary school than girls who never participated in Makani⁵. However, recent Makani participation was not associated with increased aspirations for secondary school among boys. Girls who recently participated were also 41 percentage points more likely to have attended any skills training classes, while boys who recently participated were 32 percentage points more likely to have attended a skills training class, compared with their peers of the same gender who never attended Makani.

Among young people with a disability, those who recently participated in Makani were not more likely to have completed more schooling, be literate or numerate than young people with a disability who never participated in Makani. However, young participants with a disability were 45 percentage points more likely to have attended any skills training class than their peers with a disability who never participated in Makani, while recent participants without a disability were 35 percentage points more likely to have attended a skills training course than their peers without a disability who never attended Makani.

Qualitative findings speak to how Makani programming is supporting young people to aspire and learn. In individual and group interviews, young participants – and their parents – reported that **Makani facilitators, unlike most school teachers, help students feel that they are capable, teach them that failure is an important part of learning, and encourage them to stay in school.** For example, an 11-year-old Syrian girl reported that their facilitators are such a source of support that she now aspires to become a teacher herself: *‘The teachers at Makani support me ... I want to study for the rest of my life and to teach others in the same way.’* A 13-year-old Syrian girl added that she has learnt in her life-skills class that failing often precedes success and is not a reason to drop out: *‘The makani teacher told me that when we fail, we’ll succeed ... and even if I fail, I must continue.’* A 14-year-old Palestinian boy, who had planned on leaving school after basic education, reported that he had been encouraged to set his sights higher and attend secondary school by a Makani facilitator who explained that the credential could change his future: *‘She [the boy’s facilitator] said that a degree is the most important thing. You shouldn’t quit school or stop studying, succeed and manage things in the future.’*



A 15-year-old Syrian boy living in an ITS in Jordan– is not able to attend a formal school but attends Makani every day © Nathalie Bertrams / GAGE 2024

⁵ Among those who never participated: 86% of girls aspired for secondary school, 30% of girls took a skills training class, 33% of boys took a skills training class, 31% of young people with disability took a skill training class, 32% of young people without a disability took a skills training class.

⁶ Differences were not significant at the p<.1 level

Box 1 Literacy and numeracy gains over time among new Makani participants

Young people who reported on the midline survey that they had begun participating in Makani between 2019 and 2023 significantly improved their literacy and numeracy scores—as measured by the ASER—since they were tested at baseline (2018-2019) and midline (2022-2023) surveys.

While new Makani participants had a lower mean literacy at baseline compared to never Makani participants (43% vs. 48%), by midline new participants are on average more literate than/compared to those young people who had never participated (65% vs. 48%). This implies new participants' scores increased by 23% compared to 17% by non-participants. New Makani participants had a higher mean numeracy than those who had never participated at baseline (on par with those who had always participated) and continue at midline to have higher mean numeracy than those who had never participated.

	New Makani participants	Never Makani participants
Baseline literacy	43%	48%
Midline literacy	65%	62%
Baseline numeracy	44%	36%
Midline numeracy	55%	44%

A 21-year-old Jordanian young woman, who admitted that she had thought more than once about giving up on university because classes were difficult, reported that she stuck with them largely because of what she had learnt at Makani: *'They educated us to have will and persistence. Each one has a goal. We should insist until we can achieve it.'* A 14-year-old Syrian girl added that lessons on perseverance are especially important to girls, who *'must know how to claim their rights, such as the right to education,'* if their parents insist that they drop out.

Makani's learner-centred teaching methods were also singled out by qualitative research participants for their impacts on learning. A Jordanian mother summarised, *'The Makani teachers make the student love the subject.'* A 15-year-old Syrian girl explained that she appreciates that Makani teachers allow students to ask questions and discuss topics until they feel they understand the topic at hand:

At government schools, they write on the board ... The board will be cleaned and the teacher will then explain a new subject. But in Makani it is different. We can ask questions and discuss what we don't understand from school.' A 13-year-old Syrian boy added that what he likes best is the hands-on opportunities, especially as they relate to using computers: 'At school they just explain ideas... Here, the teacher explains and then we directly apply.'

A Jordanian mother noted that even high achieving students benefit from Makani learning sessions, because they are encouraged to deepen their mastery by teaching their peers, *'The teacher ... educates my daughter to explain the lesson to the other students to see her capabilities, she teaches her how to explain and how to stand in front of students.'* A Makani facilitator observed that parents' appreciation of Makani methods grew during pandemic-related school closures, as parents were able to see how learning-centred approaches work: *'Parents used to think that we play with*

their children. During the Corona period, the parents found out that we adopt recreational activities as a way of learning.' A Palestinian father agreed, *'During school closures, the Makani centre was a blessing from God, for the Gaza camp children.'* Quantitative findings complement the qualitative findings, highlighting gains in literacy and numeracy among new Makani participants (see Box 1).

Many adolescents also reported that they feel they learn more in Makani centres because they are not afraid of being hit when they make a mistake. A 14-year-old Palestinian girl stated, *'The teachers here are not scary, they do not hit us.'* This was particularly the case for students who were struggling. Several adolescents reported that they had learnt to read at Makani – not at school – because they were too afraid to let their school teachers know that they could not read. A 17-year-old Syrian boy summarised his experience: *'Makani teaching style is definitely the best ... You are able to enjoy it. Unlike school, where you go to learn and hate it.'*

In terms of content, **qualitative research participants spoke highly of the job-related skills provided by Makani centres.** Young people generally singled out computer courses as their favourite skills course. A 16-year-old Syrian girl explained that computer skills are the foundation of most twenty-first century employment opportunities: *'I didn't know how to read on a computer, but now I know how to write on a computer ... If I will become a doctor or a policewoman or an air hostess, it is necessary to know.'* A Jordanian father agreed: *'For me, they [Makani] are the best centre in Jordan. My son loves computer sciences and programming. He received a certificate for that.'* Several boys reported that while they had initially eschewed English tutorials in favour of computer classes, once they launched their own website, they had come to understand that English is also a critical skill and had begun attending that class as well.

For the budget, we made a plan, for a person who has a salary, how much he should spend in a month and how much is left. We made it in the shape of a timetable and filled it

(A 15-year-old Syrian girl)

Young participants, and their parents, also valued the financial education courses offered at Makani.

A 16-year-old Syrian boy reported that he had begun saving money since he was taught the difference between what he wants and what he needs: *'The desires are games, mobile phones, while the needs are clothes, food and water and also medicine.'* A 15-year-old Syrian girl added that she had been taught not only the importance of saving to cover needs, but also how to construct a home budget: *'For the budget, we made a plan, for a person who has a salary, how much he should spend in a month and how much is left. We made it in the shape of a timetable and filled it.'* Several parents noted that Makani's financial education courses had had tangible impacts on household spending patterns. For example, a Syrian mother stated that her children had *'stopped wasting money on lame things like chips.'*

Makani Social Innovation Labs are also changing young lives.

A facilitator reported that these courses, which are designed to support older adolescents to work together to solve community problems, serve as springboards to help some students enter university and TVET: *'I introduce them to more advanced things ...We were also able to send 7 students to study in an industrial school!'* Young participants noted that besides impacts on access to tertiary education, Social Innovation Labs are transformational in the way they help develop hard and soft employment-related skills. A 17-year-old Syrian boy explained:

A social innovation is a course, you enter it as a normal person, you emerge as a community leader. As a human being, you have skills that enable you to market. They enable you to speak with the public. They enable you to have a personal project that allows you to be independent, on your own, without needing any help from another person, and even if you need help, it will teach you how to develop it in the best possible way. It will teach you and give you sufficient skills so that you can focus on yourself and develop your skills in the best way possible.



An 11-year-old Syrian Makani participant, Jordan
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Conclusions and implications for programming

GAGE midline research in Jordan adds to the growing body of evidence that Makani centres are changing young people's lives. Programming is lifting adolescents' and parents' aspirations for education, supporting young people to stay in school, fostering a love of learning, improving learning outcomes across myriad subjects and providing young people with foundational employment and financial skills. What emerged out of a need to conserve resources by providing an integrated package of emergency services to traumatised, out-of-school refugee children- has evolved into a transformational programme with demonstrable impacts on the broader population of Jordan's adolescents. Indeed, it has become a model for how to improve the educational outcomes of young people in environments where school systems are overstretched and not able to deliver quality education (OECD, 2023). To sustain and further improve the impacts of Makani centres on adolescent education and learning, we suggest the following priority actions:

- Continue awareness raising about the importance of formal education at least through the end of secondary school, targeting parents and adolescent boys.
- Continue to support centres in communities that have significant populations of socially and economically marginalised young people, including Syrian refugees living in informal tented settlements, Palestinians living in formal refugee camps, and among Jordan's ethnic minorities.
- Strengthen outreach, with young people and their 'gatekeepers', to improve Makani enrolment of the most disadvantaged children and adolescents, including school dropouts, young people with disabilities, and girls who are (or have been) married.
- Replicate the success of helping out-of-school children enrol (or re-enrol) in basic education, by strengthening referral pathways – between Makani centres and Ministry of Education approved catch-up, non-formal and homeschooling programming, as well as TVET courses provided by the government, NGOs and private employers.
- Strengthen the relationship between Makani and schools, so that teachers, counsellors, and facilitators are better able to coordinate meeting students' educational—and broader— needs.
- Build on lessons learned in UNHCR run camps to expand skills programming – especially digital skills, given their popularity– in host communities, and link access to these sessions with participation in life skills programming. Young people with solid digital literacy skills could also be incentivised to support skills development of younger peers through a teaching assistant certification programme.
- Reinvigorate and expand Social Innovation Labs courses so that more older adolescents have access to hands- on skills building and problem-solving opportunities.
- Support older adolescents' and young adults' access to tertiary education and employment by providing them with support for the application process and opportunities to practice interview skills.
- Engage with older adolescents and young adults who are parents by first reaching them through child development and parenting-education courses, and then providing them with literacy, numeracy, budgeting and age-tailored life skills programming.
- Continue and step-up efforts to work with students and their families to report violence at school (by peers and teachers) to relevant authorities, and to work with principals and education officials to make sure that policies against violence are systematically implemented.

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