

School-to-Work Transition in Jordan, 2010-2025

Marian Atallah and Halah Alattas





Wage Trends and Inequality in Jordan: 2010-2025

Marian Atallah* and Halah Alattas**

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Send correspondence to:

Marian Atallah
Fiscal Affairs Department, International Monetary Fund
marianabdelnour@gmail.com

** Economist, International Monetary Fund Fiscal Affairs Department. This work is unrelated to the author's IMF employment and was undertaken in her personal capacity. Any views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IMF, its Executive Board, or management. Email: marianabdelnour@gmail.com*

*** Assistant professor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Administration; King Abdulaziz University (KAU), Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Email: heaalattas@kau.edu.sa*

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Abstract

This paper investigates the school-to-work transition in Jordan using three waves of the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) conducted in 2010, 2016, and 2025. It focuses on young people aged 15–34 and examines changes in key labor market outcomes, including labor force participation, unemployment rates and duration, and the characteristics of first employment. The analysis highlights substantial demographic shifts, most notably the growing presence of Syrian youth alongside Jordanians, as well as rising educational attainment, particularly among women. Despite these advances, youth labor force participation has declined, unemployment remains high, and many young people are not in education, employment, or training (NEET). Recent graduates are taking longer to land a first job on average, and first jobs are increasingly informal. The paper also evaluates the extent of educational mismatch, documenting the shares of overeducated, undereducated, and well-matched workers. The findings underscore persistent gender disparities and structural misalignments between education and labor market demand, which continue to shape youth employment trajectories.

Keywords: Youth, Labor force participation, Unemployment, NEET, School-to-work transition, Educational mismatch, Jordan

JEL Classifications: J13, J21, J6, J64

ملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في التحول من المدرسة إلى العمل في الأردن باستخدام ثلاث موجات من المسح التتبعي لسوق العمل في الأردن (JLMPS) الذي أجري في الأعوام 2010 و2016 و2025. ويركز هذا التقرير على الشباب الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و34 عاماً، ويدرس التغيرات في نتائج سوق العمل الرئيسية، بما في ذلك المشاركة في القوى العاملة، ومعدلات البطالة ومدتها، وخصائص التشغيل الأول. ويسلط التحليل الضوء على تحولات ديموغرافية كبيرة، أبرزها الوجود المتزايد للشباب السوري إلى جانب الأردنيين، فضلاً عن ارتفاع التحصيل العلمي، وخاصة بين النساء. وعلى الرغم من هذه التطورات، انخفضت مشاركة الشباب في القوى العاملة، ولا تزال البطالة مرتفعة، والعديد من الشباب لا يتلقون التعليم أو العمل أو التدريب (NEET). يستغرق الخريجون الجدد وقتاً أطول للحصول على وظيفتهم الأولى في المتوسط، وأصبحت الوظائف الأولى غير رسمية بشكل متزايد. وتقوم الورقة أيضاً بتقييم مدى عدم التوافق التعليمي، وتوثيق حصص العاملين المتعلمين بشكل مفرط، وغير المتعلمين بشكل كافٍ، والمتوافقين بشكل جيد. وتؤكد النتائج استمرار الفوارق بين الجنسين والاختلالات الهيكلية بين التعليم والطلب في سوق العمل، والتي لا تزال تشكل مسارات تشغيل الشباب.

1. Introduction

The transition from school to work in Jordan has undergone profound changes between 2010 and 2025. Drawing on the Jordan Labor Market Panel Survey (JLMPS) waves of 2010, 2016, and 2025 (Krafft & Assaad, 2021, Krafft et al., 2026, OAMDI, 2026), this paper investigates how youth aged 15–34 have navigated increasingly complex demographic and economic realities. The aim is to provide a comprehensive account of the pathways and obstacles young Jordanians face when moving from education into the labor market, while also assessing the extent to which education has translated into productive employment opportunities.

Several important patterns emerge from the latest data. Demographically, the population aged 15–34 has continued to expand in absolute terms between 2010 and 2025. This growth occurred alongside broader population expansion, resulting in a slight decline in the relative share of youth aged 15–34 within the total population over time. Jordanian nationals remain the dominant group within this age cohort, although the mid-2010s witnessed a visible increase in non-Jordanian youth—particularly Syrians—reflecting regional displacement and migration dynamics. Educational attainment has also improved over time, with rising shares of youth aged 15–34 completing secondary and tertiary education. The expansion of university education in particular has led to a growing cohort of highly educated adults entering the labor market, while the proportion of youth with only basic schooling has declined steadily.

Unemployment and inactivity remain pressing concerns. By 2025, around 40 percent of Jordanian youth aged 15–29 were not in education, employment, or training (NEET), with the burden falling disproportionately on young women and those aged 25–29. Recent graduates are taking longer on average to secure a first job compared to older cohorts, and initial jobs are increasingly informal. Among those who are employed, there has been a noticeable improvement in job–education alignment over time, representing a relative bright spot against an otherwise grim picture of the Jordanian youth labor market. However, a substantial proportion of young workers remain either overeducated or undereducated for their roles. This suggests that even when youth succeed in entering employment, alignment between educational qualifications and job requirements continues to pose a challenge—particularly for those with higher levels of education, those employed in high- and medium-skilled occupations, and those working in the informal private sector.

Against this background, the paper is organized into three parts. The first section reviews the evolving socio-demographic and labor market characteristics of youth, with particular attention to education, labor force participation, current unemployment rates and duration, as well as the share of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET). The second section delves deeper into the school-to-work transition, analyzing the time taken to find a first job after leaving school, first job status, and early employment experiences by cohort of school exit. The final section examines the extent of educational mismatch among employed Jordanian youth, covering the shares of overeducated, undereducated, and well-matched workers.

2. Socioeconomic characteristics and youth labor market outcomes

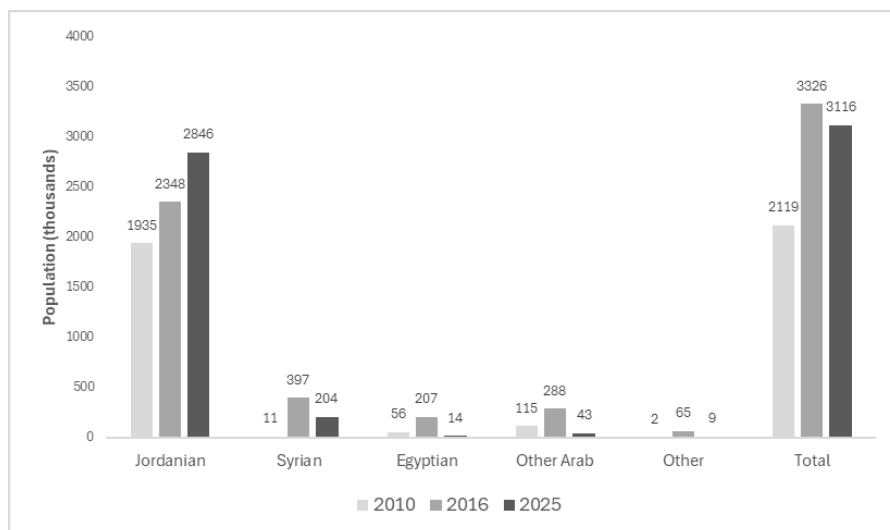
2.1. Demographics of youth

From 2010 to 2025, Jordan has experienced a sharp rise in the number of youth across all nationalities. In 2010, the total population stood at 6.02 million, with 1.7 million individuals aged 15–29 years. By 2016, the total population had grown to 9.5 million, of which 2.6 million were youth—an increase of 53 percent compared to 2010. In 2025, the total population reached 11.7 million, and the number of youth rose to 3.04 million, representing a cumulative increase of about 79 percent since 2010. A similar trend is observed for the 15–34 age group: their number rose from 2.1 million in 2010 to 3.3 million in 2016 (a 57 percent increase), and further to 3.9 million in 2025, reflecting an overall increase of 84 percent. Despite this considerable growth in absolute size, the relative share of youth has slightly declined over time. Those aged 15–29 comprised 28 percent of the total population in 2010, 30 percent in 2016, and 26 percent in 2025. Likewise, the 15–34 age group accounted for 35 percent in both 2010 and 2016, and 33 percent in 2025. This pattern indicates that although the youth population continues to grow in numbers, its proportion as a share of the overall population is gradually shrinking.

Figure 1 shows the size of the youth population (aged 15–34) in Jordan by nationality in 2010, 2016, and 2025. Across all three waves, Jordanian nationals account for the vast majority of the youth population, and their numbers have increased steadily over time. Non-Jordanian youth constitute a smaller but visible component of the population, particularly during the mid-2010s, a period marked by heightened regional mobility. The size of these groups appears more sensitive to broader geopolitical and migration dynamics than to long-term demographic trends.

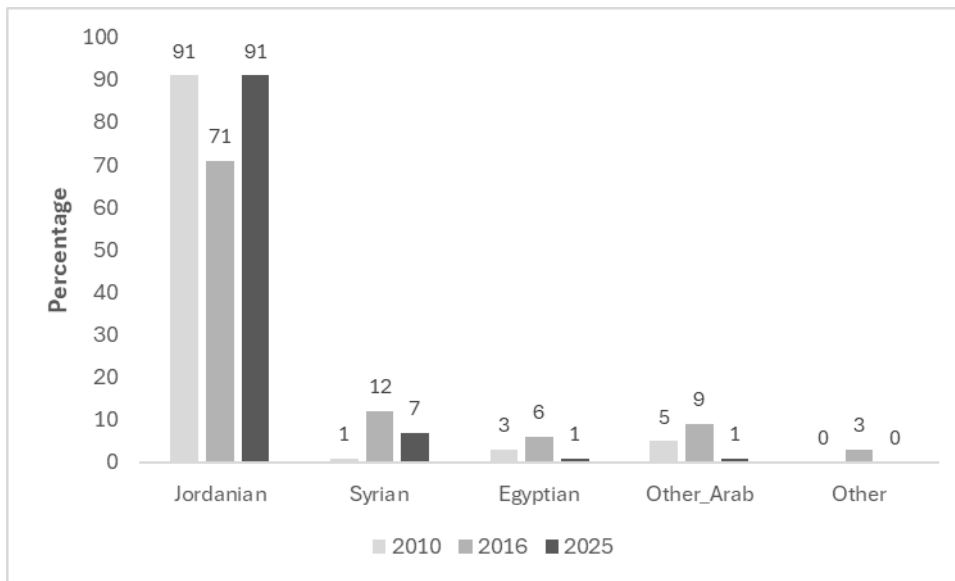
Figure 2 provides a broad overview of the distribution of the youth population aged 15–34 in Jordan across survey waves. Overall, the figure illustrates that the youth population remains predominantly composed of Jordanian nationals (especially in 2010 and 2025), with non-Jordanians accounting for a

Figure 1. Youth population in Jordan by nationality, ages 15–34, 2010-2025 (thousands)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

Figure 2. Distribution of the youth population by nationality in Jordan, ages 15–34, 2010-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

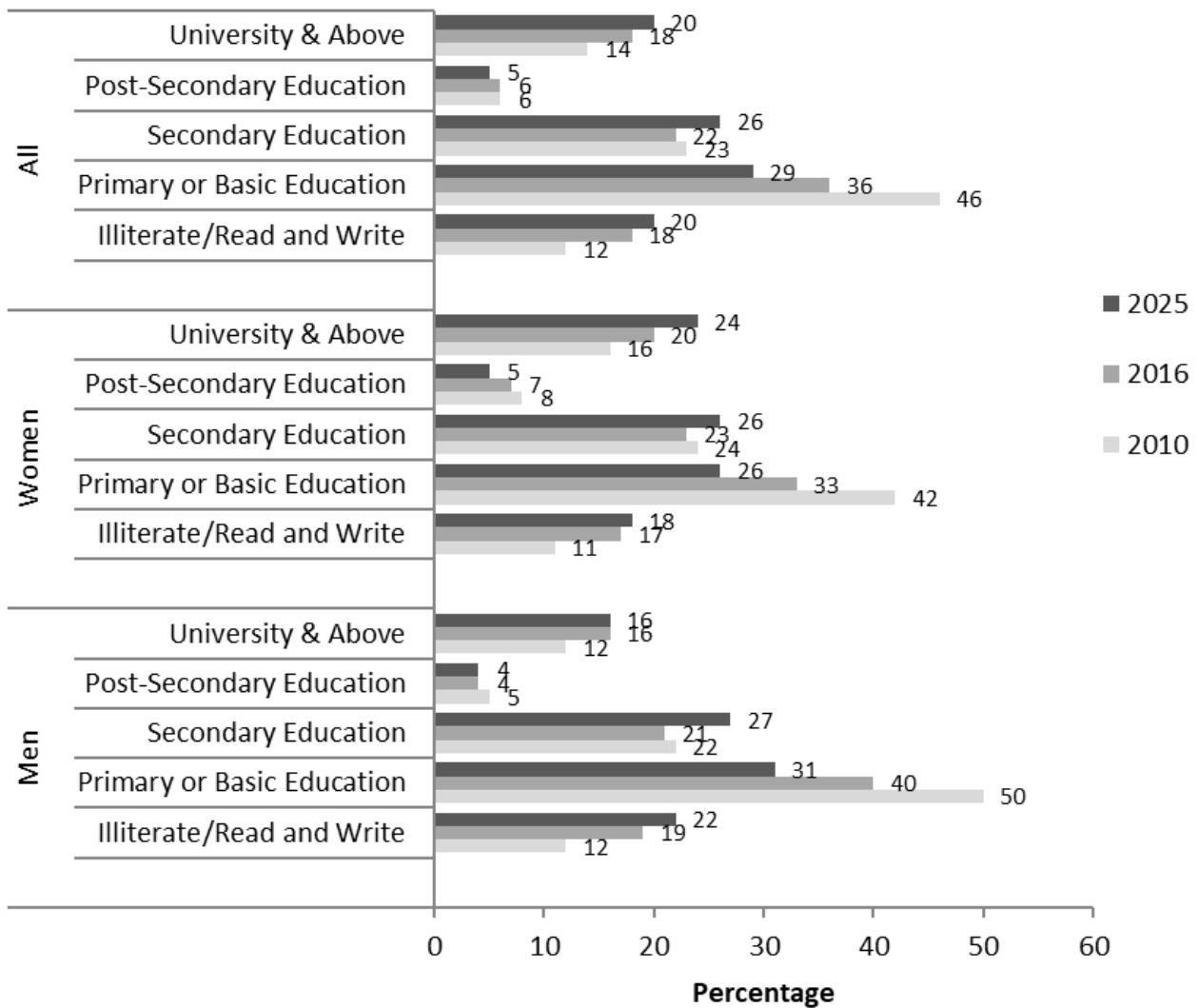
relatively smaller share. By nationality, Syrians made up the largest share of non-Jordanian youth in both the 2016 and 2025 surveys.

2.2. Educational attainment

As shown in Figure 3, the educational attainment of Jordanian nationals aged 15–34 has continued to improve over time, reflecting a gradual shift toward higher levels of schooling. The share of youth with a university education increased steadily between 2010 and 2025, from 14 percent to 20 percent, indicating sustained expansion in access to higher education. At the same time, the proportion of youth with primary or basic education declined markedly over the period from 46 percent to 29 percent, suggesting a gradual upgrading of educational attainment across cohorts. The share with secondary education remained relatively stable, moving from 23 percent in 2010 to 26 percent in 2025.

Gender differences are also evident. Women experienced faster educational advancement than men, particularly at the tertiary level. Between 2010 and 2025, the share of women with university education rose from 16 percent to 24 percent, compared with an increase from 12 percent to 16 percent among men. As a result, educational attainment gap between men and women have widened in favor of women, highlighting stronger gains in female participation in higher education among younger cohorts.

Figure 3. Distribution of the Jordanian national population aged 15–34 by educational attainment and sex, 2010, 2016, and 2025 (percentage)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

2.3. Youth labor market outcomes

This subsection provides a brief overview of the two main performance indicators in the labor market: labor force participation¹ and unemployment rates by gender, age group and educational attainment.

2.3.1. Labor force participation

The Jordanian national labor force aged 15–34 has increased from approximately 793 thousand individuals in 2010 to 920 thousand in 2016, growing at an average rate of about 2.5 percent per year. Between 2016 and 2025, the youth labor force continued to expand, reaching 985 thousand individuals.

¹ The analysis in this section relies on the standard market definition of labor force participation. Under this definition, individuals are classified as part of the labor force if they are either employed in the past week or unemployed, with unemployment requiring active job search during the preceding four weeks.

This corresponds to a slower average annualized growth rate of approximately 0.8 percent, reflecting a deceleration in youth labor force growth over the latter period. Men consistently accounted for roughly three-quarters of the youth labor force across all three waves, indicating a persistent gender imbalance in labor force participation among young individuals.

In contrast, the overall labor force including all nationalities expanded much more rapidly between 2010 and 2016, increasing at an average annual rate of approximately 5.4 percent. This trend reversed in the subsequent period: between 2016 and 2025, the total labor force contracted at an average rate of about 1.1 percent per year. This pattern indicates that the growth in the Jordanian youth labor force between 2016 and 2025 occurred alongside a substantial decline in non-Jordanian participation, resulting in both a contraction of the total labor force and an increase in Jordanians' share.

Jordanians' share of the total youth labor force declined from 90 percent in 2010 to 76 percent in 2016, before rising sharply to 91 percent in 2025. Among men, the share of Jordanians fell more substantially, from 89 percent in 2010 to 72 percent in 2016, followed by a strong recovery to 91 percent in 2025. In contrast, the Jordanian share among women remained consistently high, declining only slightly from 95 percent in 2010 to 94 percent in 2016 and further to 92 percent in 2025. These trends suggest that fluctuations in Jordanians' overall share were driven primarily by changes in male participation, while women's nationality composition remained relatively stable.

Despite these shifts in nationality composition, women consistently represented only about 22 percent of the youth labor force throughout the 2010–2025 period, underscoring the persistence of structural gender disparities in labor force participation. Structural barriers—including restrictive gender norms, limited access to affordable childcare, transportation constraints, and concentration of employment opportunities in male-dominated sectors—continue to hinder women's labor market engagement and limit their contribution to the youth labor force (UN Women, 2017; Youssef et al., 2023).

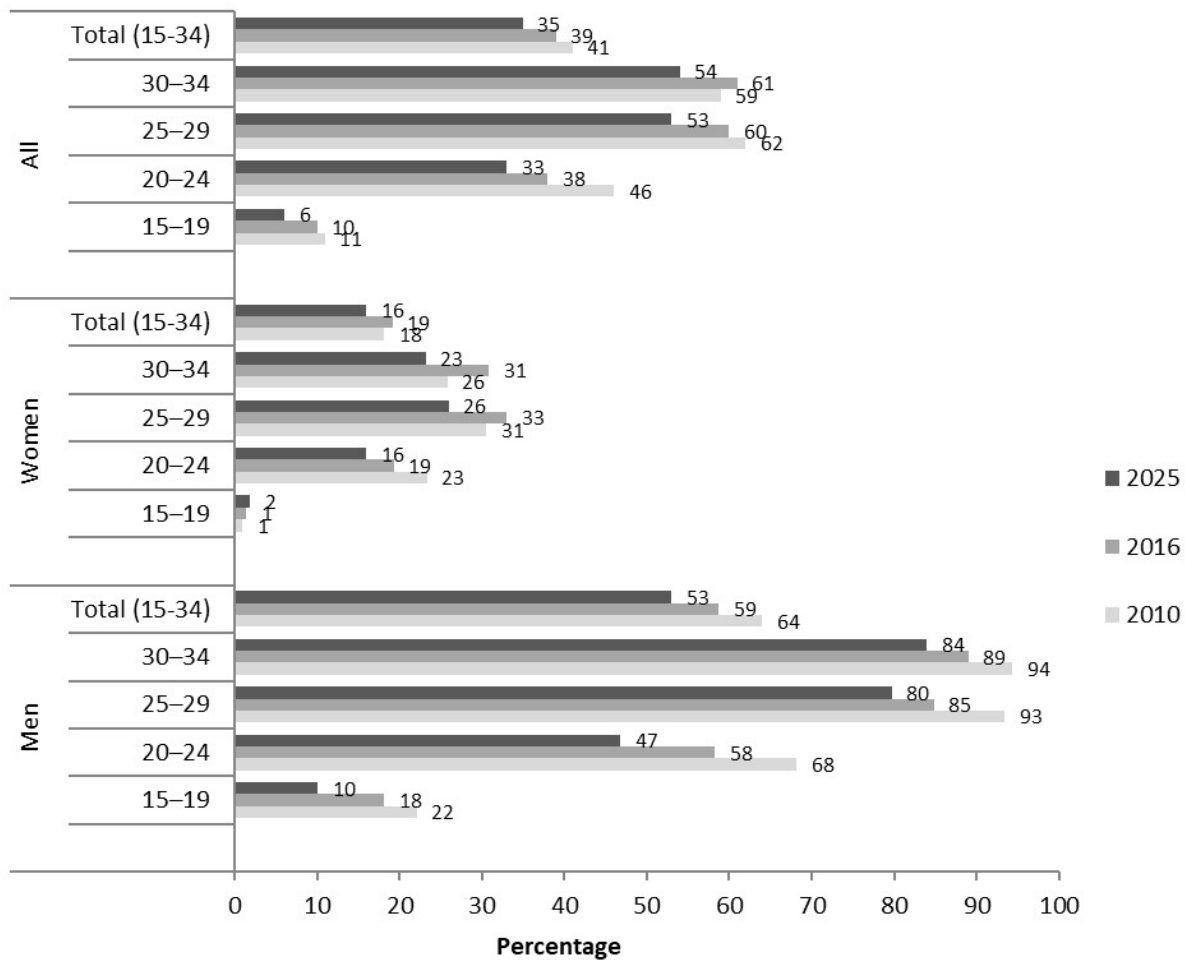
Figure 4 presents labor force participation rates among Jordanian nationals aged 15–34² by sex and age group in 2010, 2016, and 2025. Overall participation declined over the period, falling from about 41 percent in 2010 to 39 percent in 2016, and further to 35 percent in 2025. Throughout all survey waves, labor force participation remained markedly higher among men than women. In 2025, male participation among youth aged 15–34 stood at 52 percent, compared with only 16 percent among women. This large gender gap is observed across all age groups and remains persistent over time.

Participation rates tend to increase with age for both men and women, reflecting delayed entry into the labor market. Participation is particularly low among those aged 15–19, as most individuals in this age group are still enrolled in education. Participation rises substantially in the 20–24 age group and reaches its highest levels among those aged 25–29 and 30–34, especially for men.

Despite this age gradient, labor force participation has declined for most age groups between 2010 and 2025. Among men, participation fell from 64 percent in 2010 to 59 percent in 2016, and further to 53 percent in 2025. Among women, participation has increased slightly between 2010 and 2016,

² Hereafter, analyses focus on Jordanian nationals in order to compare a consistent population over time.

Figure 4. Labor force participation rate (standard definition) by sex and age group, Jordanians aged 15–34, 2010-2025 (percentages)



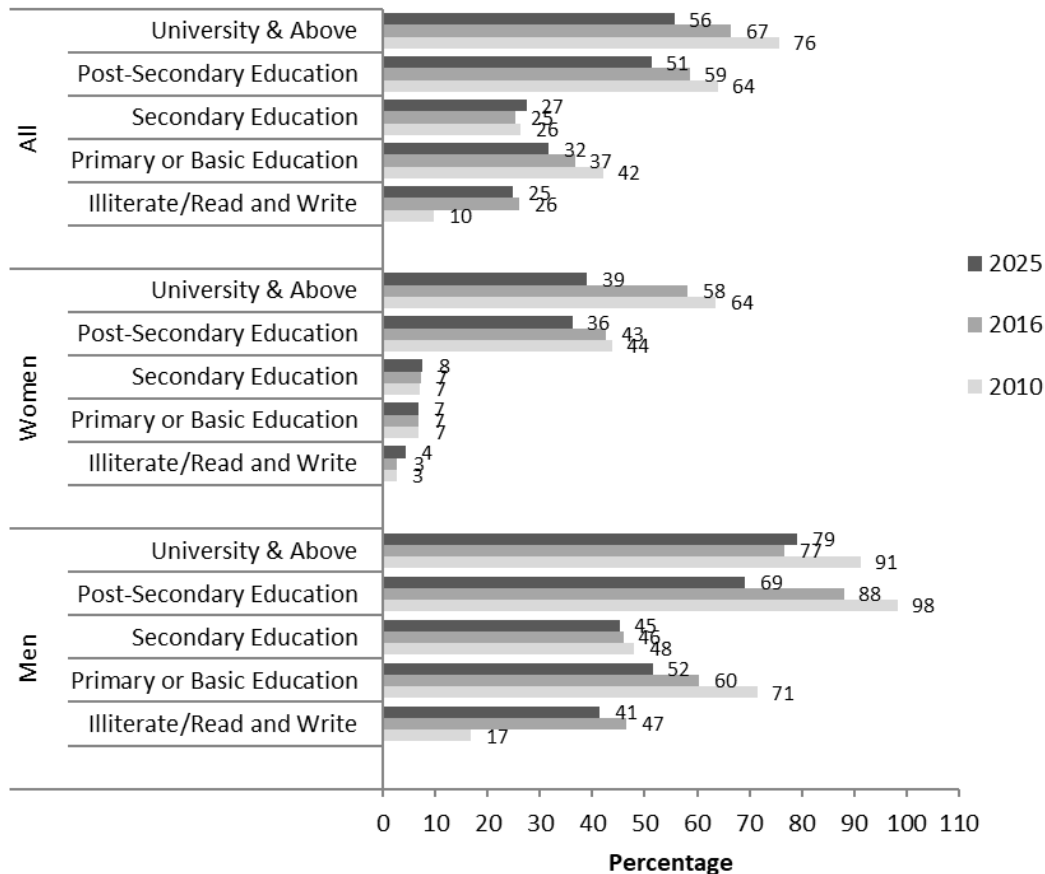
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

before declining again by 2025. Participation rates among women aged 30–34 rose between 2010 and 2016, but fell back in the most recent wave, while participation among women aged 20-24 declined steadily over the period. Overall, Figure 4 highlights both a persistent gender gap in youth labor force participation and a general decline in participation over time, alongside clear differences by age group consistent with prolonged transitions from education to work.

Figure 5 presents Jordanians' labor force participation by sex and educational attainment in 2010, 2016, and 2025. Across all three waves, labor force participation generally rises with increasing levels of education for both men and women. A notable exception is observed at the secondary education level, where participation rates are lower, likely reflecting the fact that many individuals at this stage remain enrolled in education and have not yet fully transitioned into the labor market.

At every level of educational attainment, men exhibit substantially higher participation rates than women. However, the gender gap narrows at higher levels of education. In 2025, for example, participation among individuals with primary or basic education stood at around 52 percent for men

Figure 5. Labor force participation rate (standard definition) by sex and educational attainment, Jordanians aged 15–34, 2010–2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

compared to about 7 percent for women. Among university graduates, participation was considerably higher for both sexes, reaching around 79 percent for men and 39 percent for women.

Over time, men's labor force participation has declined across all education categories, with the largest reductions observed among those with basic and post-secondary education. Male participation among university graduates remained high, but declined from 91 percent in 2010 to 77 percent in 2016, before stabilizing at 79 percent in 2025.

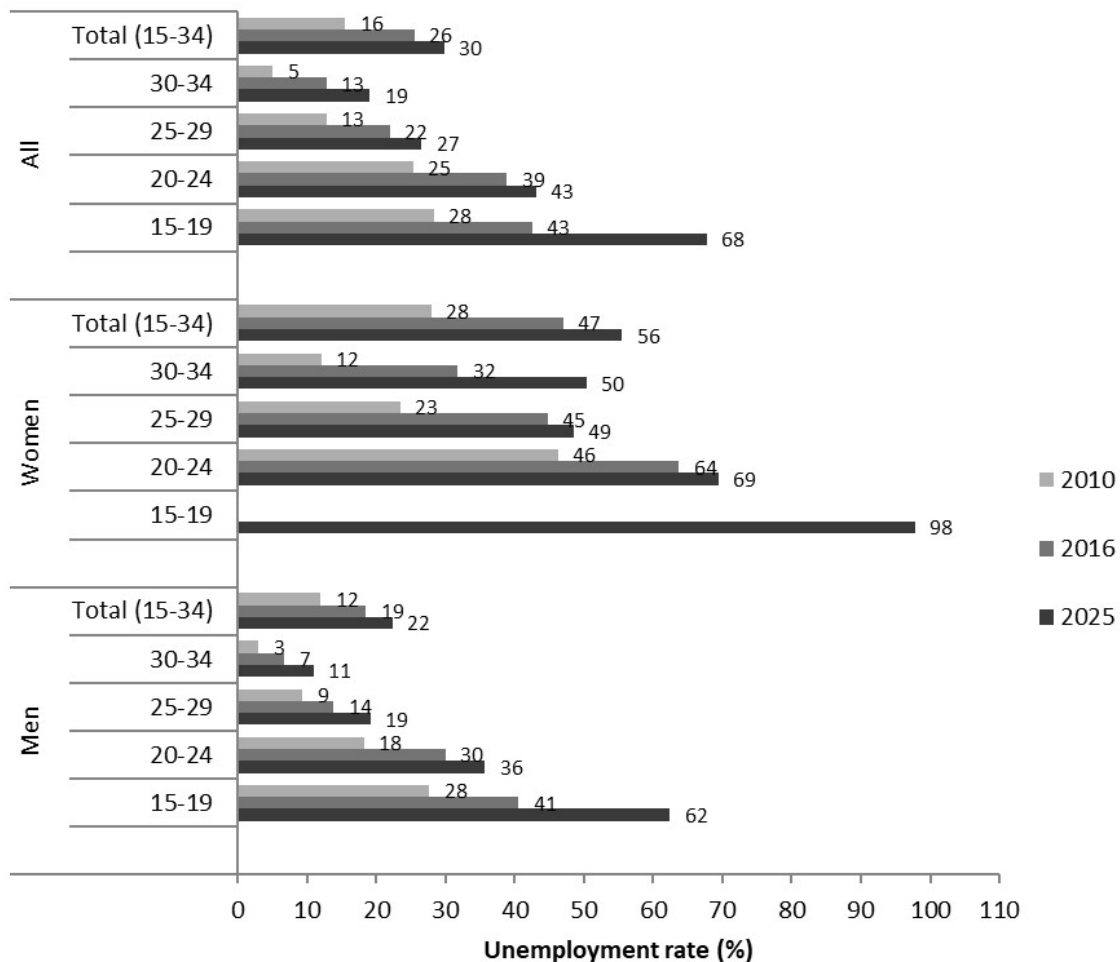
Women's participation remains substantially lower than male participation at every education level. Among women with basic and secondary education, participation is persistently low and largely unchanged, remaining around 7–8 percent across the three waves. In contrast, participation is much higher among women with post-secondary and university education, although it has declined markedly over time. Female participation among post-secondary graduates decreased from 44 percent in 2010 to 36 percent in 2025, while participation among female university graduates fell sharply from 64 percent in 2010 to 58 percent in 2016 and 39 percent in 2025.

2.3.2. Unemployment

The unemployment rate (as a percentage of the labor force) among young Jordanians aged 15-34 has visibly risen over 2010-2025, going from 16 to 26 percent between 2010 and 2016, and reaching 30 percent in the 2025 wave (Figure 6). The youngest age group (15-19) showed the largest increase in unemployment, from 43 percent in 2016 to 68 percent in 2025. By gender, young women had consistently higher unemployment rates than young men. At 56 percent, the female unemployment rate in 2025 was substantially higher than that of the male unemployment rate which stood at 22 percent, although both have increased relative to the previous waves. For example, the unemployment rate among Jordanian women aged 30-34 showed a substantial increase from 12 percent in 2010 to 32 percent in 2016 and 50 percent in 2025.

By education level, the unemployment rate was highest among those with a university education, reaching 34

Figure 6. Unemployment rate, standard definition, by sex and age group, Jordanians aged 15-34, 2010-2025 (percentage of the labor force)

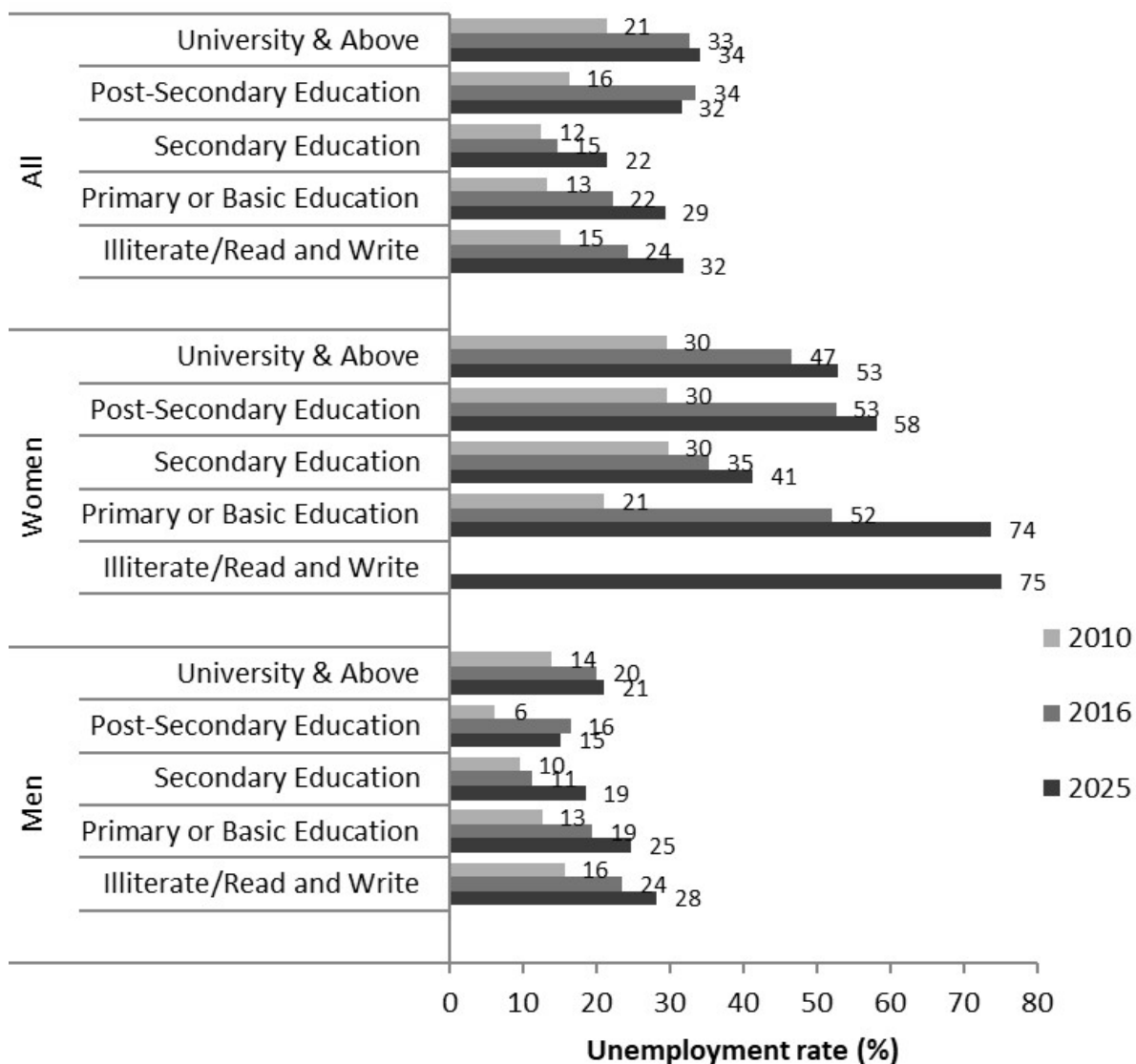


Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016 and 2025

Note: The female unemployment rate among those aged 15-19 is suppressed in 2010 and 2016 due to insufficient sample sizes ($n < 30$). In 2025, it is estimated using only 32 women in the labor force.

percent in 2025 and displaying little change relative to the 2016 wave (Figure 7). On the other hand, unemployment rates rose by 7-8 percentage points among young Jordanians with lower levels of education between the two waves, suggesting that it has recently become harder for the less educated to find jobs. Unemployment was also more prevalent among young women compared to young men at all levels of formal education, peaking at 74 percent for women with primary or basic education (up from 52 percent in 2016 and 21 percent in 2010). Higher educational attainment does not appear to close the gender gap in unemployment.

Figure 7. Unemployment rate, standard definition, by sex and education level, Jordanians aged 15-34, 2010-2025 (percentage of the labor force)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016 and 2025

Note: Some educational categories (female "illiterate/read and write" in 2010 and 2016) are not displayed due to few observations (N<30).

Figure 8 reports the median length of unemployment duration among those Jordanians currently unemployed, displaying an increasing trend over survey waves. In 2010, median current unemployment duration among Jordanians aged 15-34 stood at around one year (12 months) regardless of education level. In later waves, however, those with relatively lower education were experiencing longer unemployment, with a median of 51 months of unemployment to date among those with below-secondary education in 2025, compared to 37 months for those with secondary or above-secondary education. The education gradient was more obvious among men, with a median unemployment duration of 51 months among young men with lower-than-secondary schooling, compared with 37 months for secondary-degree holders and 29 months for those with above-secondary education. For this latter group, unemployment duration has increased for both sexes between 2016 and 2025, particularly among men. Among the least educated, unemployment duration has increased for men but the opposite was true for women. Men with intermediate education witnessed a decrease in unemployment duration from 42 months in 2016 to 37 months in 2025. On the contrary, women with secondary schooling saw a rise in the median length of current unemployment spells by 9 months between the two waves.

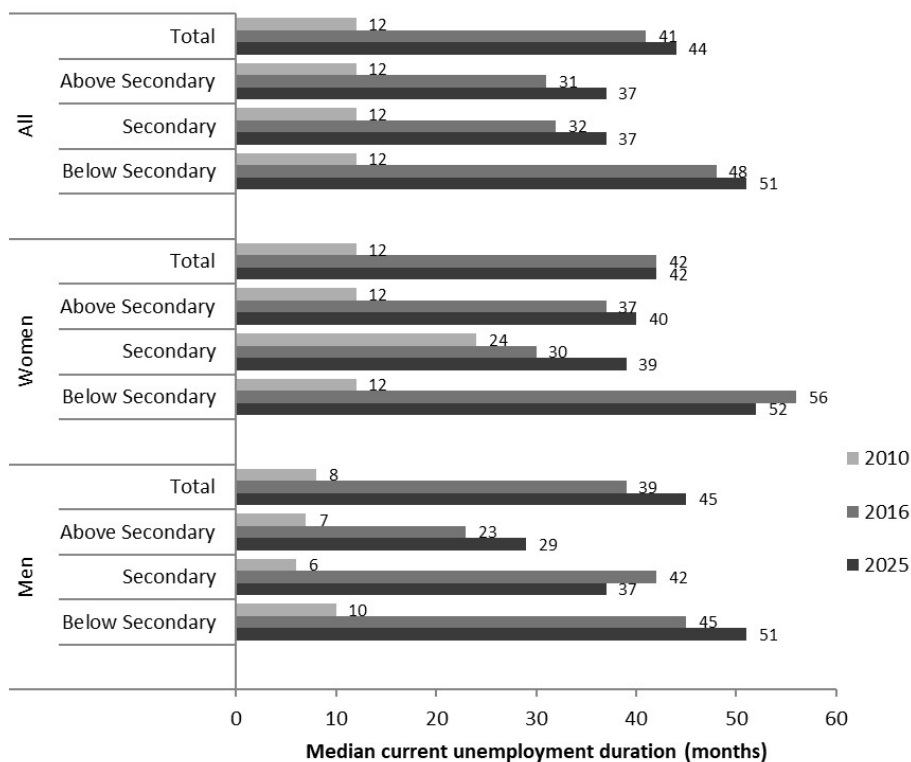
2.3.3. NEET rates

Focusing on those aged 15-29, 39 percent of Jordanian youth were not in education, employment or training³ (NEET) in 2025, down by 2 percentage points from 2016, and still considerably higher than their initial share of 31 percent in 2010 (Figure 9). The share of NEET youth rose considerably among those aged 25-29, with 58 percent of youth in this age group reporting NEET status, up from 50 percent in 2016 and 44 percent in 2010. Young women were also more likely to be NEET than young men, especially at older ages.

Figure 10 depicts the distribution of labor market status among Jordanian NEET youth. Around 70 percent of NEET youth were out of the labor force in 2025, down from 72 percent in 2016 and 75 percent in 2010. In 2016, this was due to more unemployed youth actively looking for a job. Between 2016 and 2025 however, the share of NEET youth in discouraged unemployment -those who were available for work but not actively searching- almost doubled from around 2 percent to 4 percent. This increase was driven by male NEET youth, for whom the share of discouraged unemployment rose from 3 percent in 2016 to 8 percent in 2025. Gender differences could also be observed in inactivity, with 82 percent of NEET women out of the labor force in 2025 compared to only 49 percent of NEET men. On the other hand, 44 percent of NEET men were actively looking for a job in 2025 compared to only 16 percent of women.

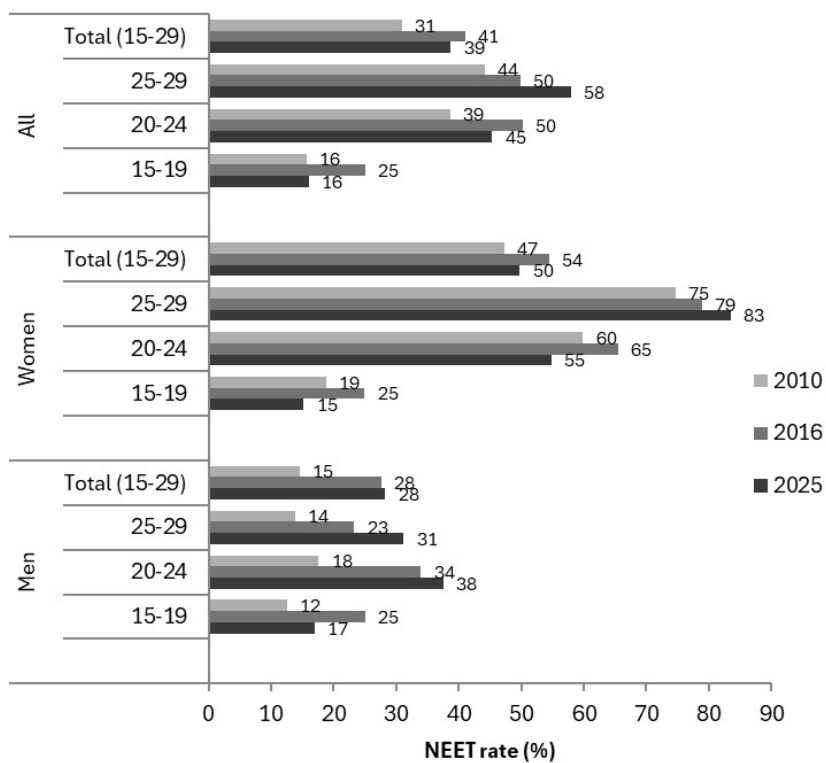
³ The 2025 wave was the first to include a module that enables the identification of those in training, which was unavailable in earlier waves. However, with only 19 out of 9,485 Jordanians aged 15-29 reporting being currently in training, it makes virtually no difference to NEET rates whether we include them.

Figure 8. Median current unemployment duration (months), standard (search required) unemployment, by sex and educational attainment, Jordanians aged 15–34, 2010-2025



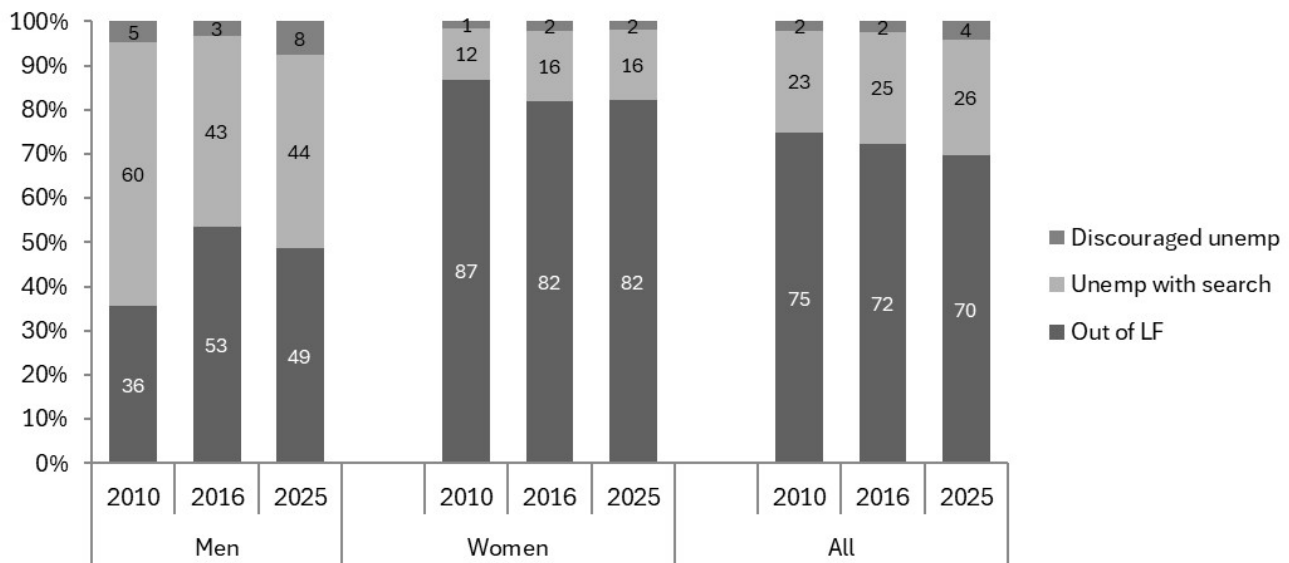
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016 and 2025

Figure 9. NEET rate by sex and age group, Jordanians aged 15-29, 2010-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016 and 2025

Figure 10. Distribution of labor market status among NEET youth by sex, Jordanians aged 15-29, 2010-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, 2016 and 2025

3. Survival analysis and first job status

This section uses survival analysis to examine the time taken by Jordanian national youth to land a first job after completing their education⁴, which could be spent in either unemployment or inactivity. Unemployment duration to first job only considers the time spent actively searching for work and is calculated from the job mobility module for those who have ever worked. The module provides information on the start date (month and year) of the first job, the date (month⁵ and year) of leaving school and whether the individual experienced an unemployment spell between completing education and starting a first job. For youth who have never worked, if they report being unemployed then unemployment duration is set to that of their current (right-censored) unemployment spell. Finally, for those who never worked but are not currently unemployed, we use questions on when they started and completed their job search to capture their first unemployment spell.

In 2025, only one in four Jordanians aged 15-34 reported having ever worked, compared to one in three in 2016. Additionally, according to the job mobility module of the 2025 survey, 47 percent of those who had ever worked spent longer than 6 months without work immediately after leaving school, and only 4 percent had already worked a first job (for longer than 6 months) while they were still in school. Of those who had ever worked but were not working after leaving school, 74 percent reported that they were wanting and able to work following school exit, and within this latter group, 94 percent were actively searching for a job. For the minority of those who ever worked but did not want to work upon leaving school, the most commonly reported reason was being too young.

⁴ For individuals who have never attended school (4 percent of Jordanians aged 15-34 in 2025) or those who have left the education system before age 15, the end date of schooling is set to the date when they turn 15.

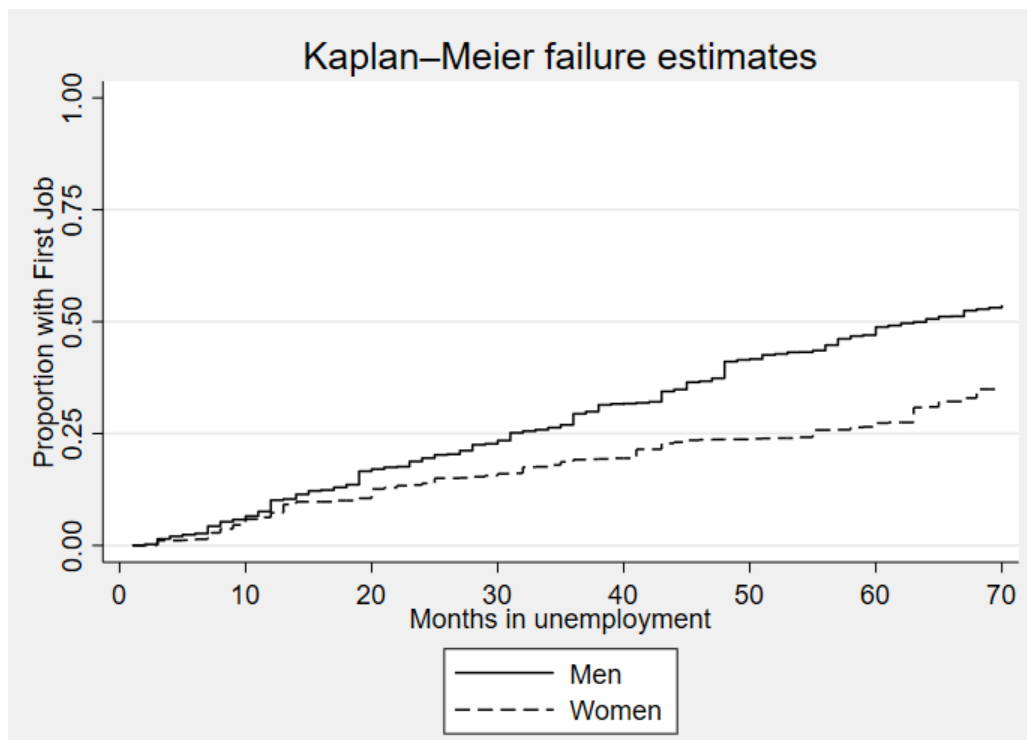
⁵ If the year of leaving school is reported but the month is missing, the latter is set to June.

3.1. Unemployment duration to first job

Figure 11 shows the probability of obtaining a first job by months spent in unemployment for out-of-school Jordanians aged 15–34 in 2025. Although the probability of finding a job generally increases with unemployment duration, it does so faster for men and remains fairly low even years into unemployment. The probability of exiting unemployment was similar between men and women for the first 12 months but diverged for longer unemployment spells, with men being more likely to eventually leave unemployment into a first job. Nevertheless, even 60 months later, less than half of young men and less than a third of young women were likely to have found a job.

Figure 12 depicts the probability of finding a first job by unemployment duration and education level for men and women separately. Education appears to play a role in exiting unemployment especially among young men with higher education and after longer unemployment spells. For women, the pattern was less pronounced. A year (12 months) into unemployment, 11 percent of men with above-secondary degrees have found a job compared to 8 percent of women with the same education level. At the 24-month mark, this share rises to 24 percent for men and 15 percent for women with above-secondary education. The lower exit probabilities among young women at all education levels and even after protracted unemployment spells suggests structural barriers for young women’s access to the labor market compared to their male counterparts.

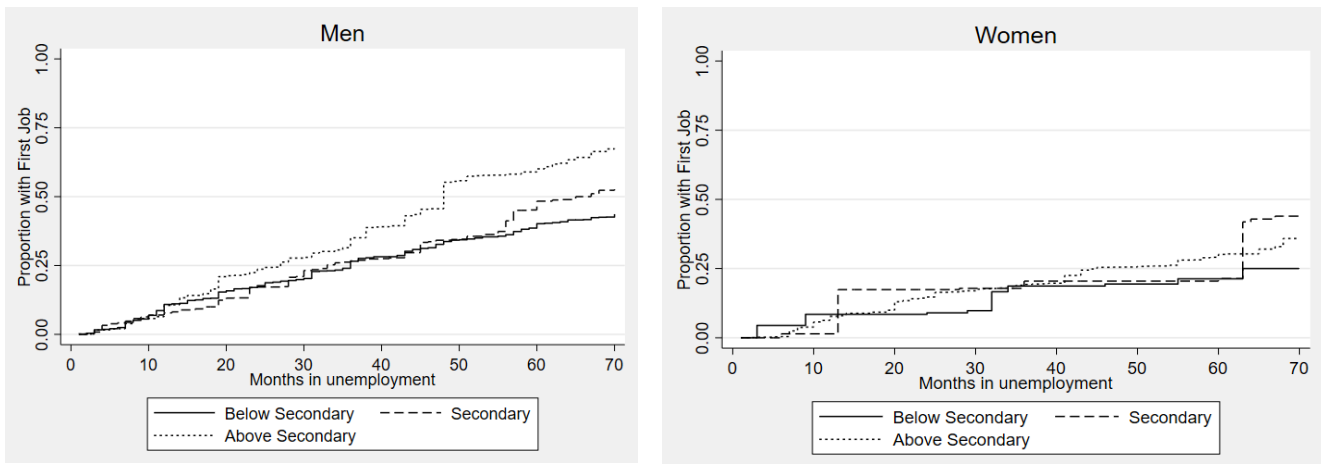
Figure 11. Proportion obtaining a first job by unemployment duration to first job (months) and sex, Jordanians, ages 15–34, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Notes: (i) Kaplan–Meier failure curves. (ii) standard (search required) unemployment definition.

Figure 12. Proportion obtaining a first job by unemployment duration to first job (months), sex and educational attainment, Jordanians, ages 15–34, 2025



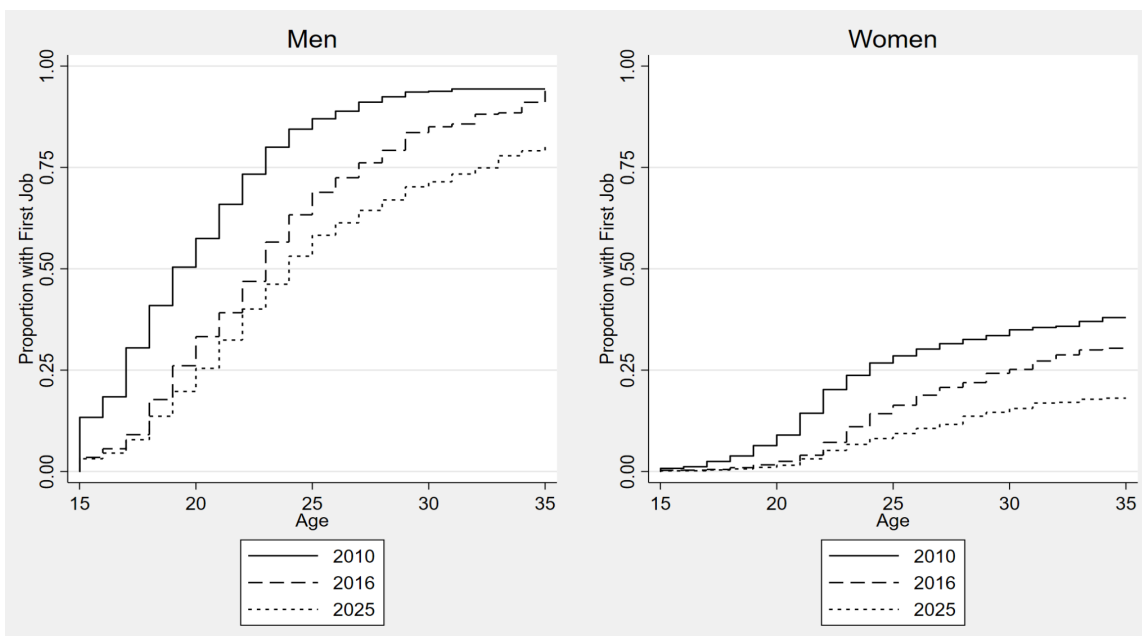
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Notes: (i) Kaplan-Meier failure curves. (ii) standard (search required) unemployment definition.

3.2. Age at first job

Figure 13 shows the evolution of age at first job across the three JLMPS waves by gender, revealing a rise in the age at first job over survey waves for both young men and women. By age 34, 94 percent of young men had gotten a job in 2010 versus 91 percent in 2016 and 79 percent in 2025. The corresponding shares for young women were much lower; 38 percent in 2010, 30 percent in 2016 and only 18 percent in 2025.

Figure 13. Proportion obtaining a first job by age and sex, Jordanians, aged 15–34, 2010–2025



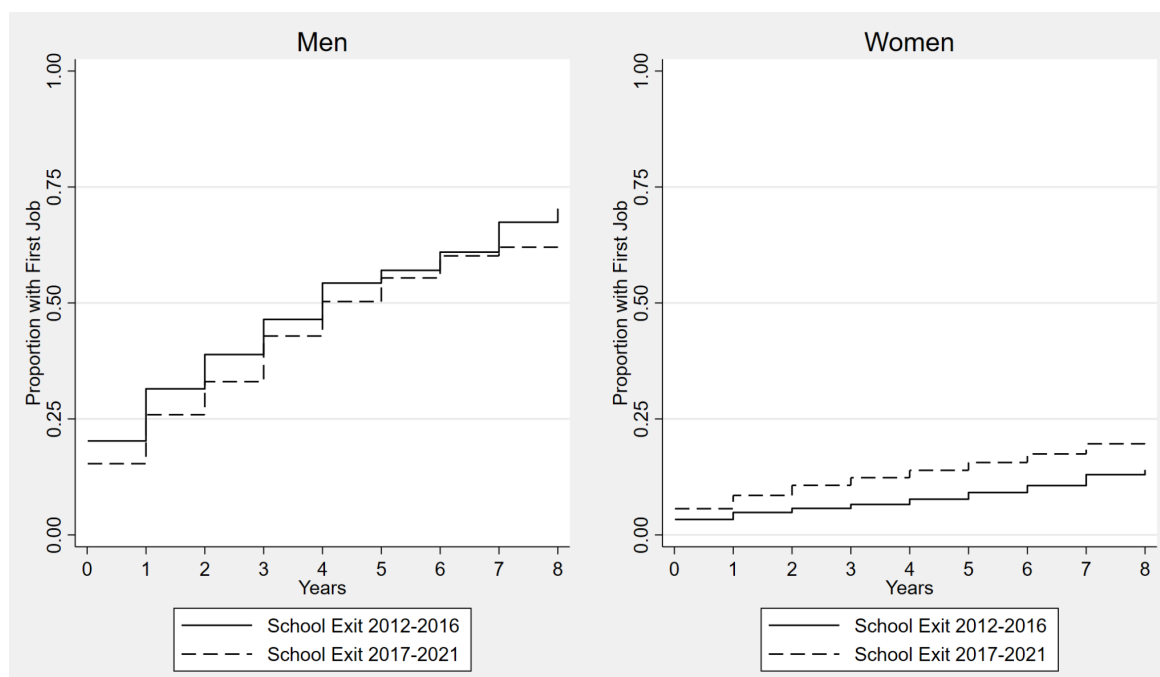
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2010, JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

Note: Kaplan-Meier failure curves

3.3. Time to first job

Figure 14 complements the age at first job analysis by presenting the duration⁶ (in years) between the end date of schooling or turning 15 (whichever comes later), and the start date of first job by sex, distinguishing between two cohorts of school exit– those who left school between 2017-2021 and those who graduated earlier between 2012-2016. For men, those who graduated school in 2012-2016 took less time on average to find a job compared to those who exited in 2017-2021, For example, four years after graduation, 54 percent of men had obtained a first job in the older cohort compared to 50 percent in the younger cohort, with the difference between the two cohorts doubling to 8 percentage points after eight years. The reverse was true for women, with 14 percent of those who graduated between 2017 and 2021 finding a job four years after graduation, as opposed to only 8 percent of women who left school between 2012-2016. Women also had much lower job finding rates compared to men in general for both cohorts.

Figure 14. Proportion obtaining a first job by time to first job (years), sex, and school exit cohort, Jordanians, 2025



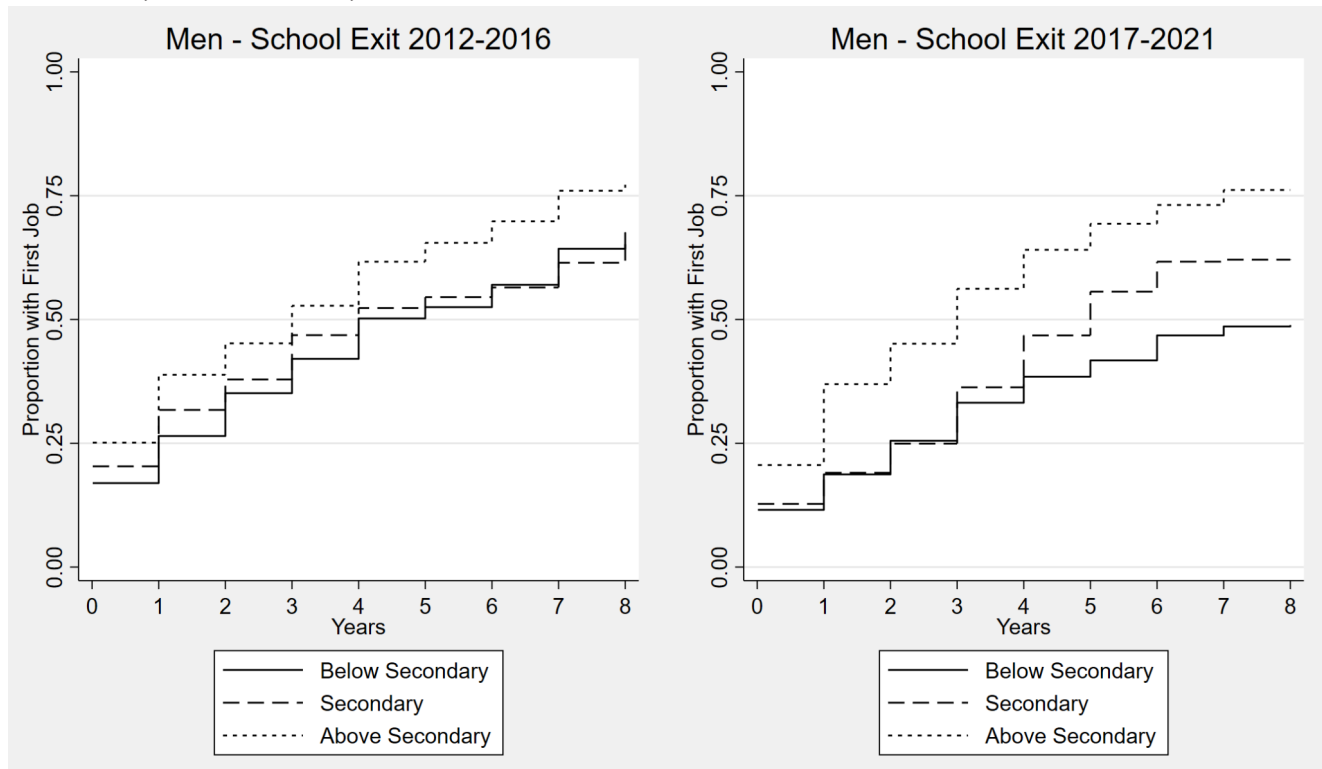
Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
 Notes: Kaplan-Meier failure curves.

Figures 15 and 16 break down the time to first job by education level and school exit cohort separately for men and women. Figure 15 shows that for Jordanian men, the time between graduating and securing a first job increased among more recent graduates with lower levels of education, widening the gap

⁶This duration may be spent in unemployment or inactivity or a combination of both.

in job finding rates between them and those with above-secondary education, a pattern that was not as pronounced for the older cohort. For example, 52 percent of men with secondary education in the older cohort found a job four years following school exit, compared to 47 percent of men in the recent cohort.

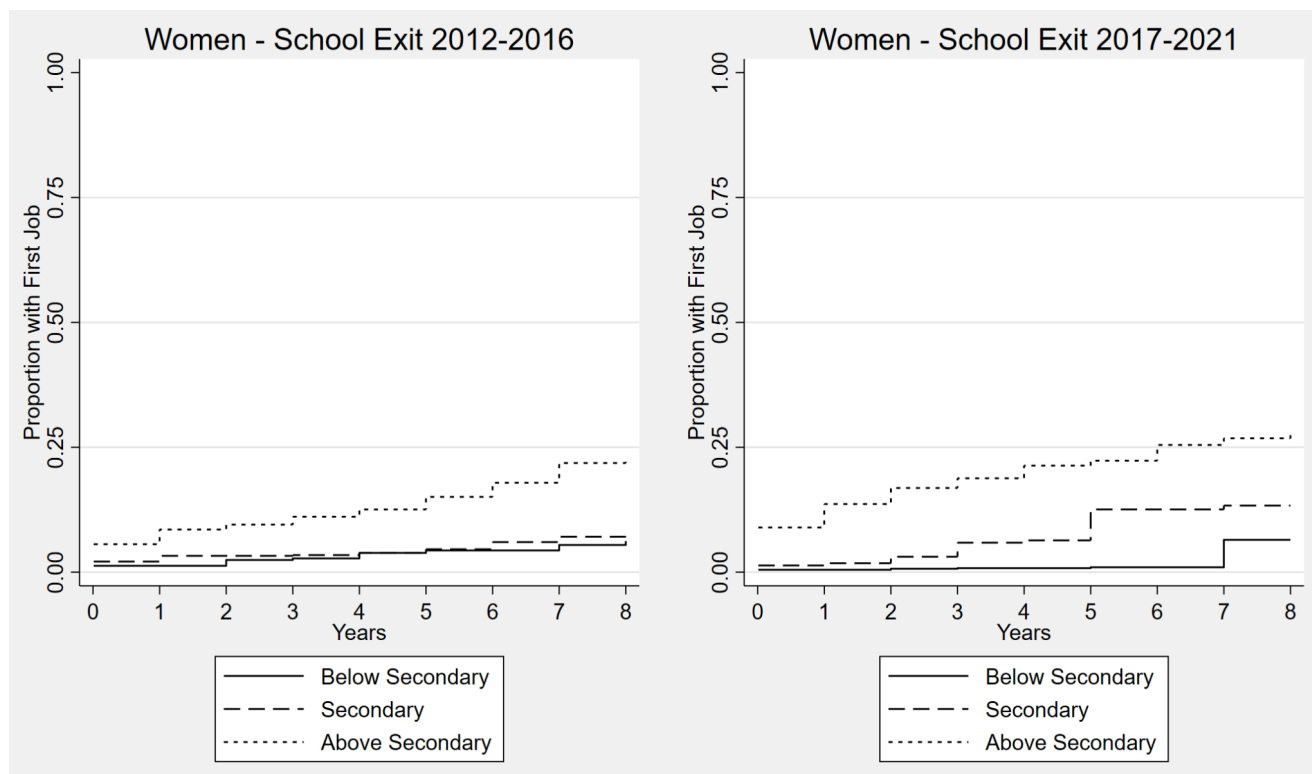
Figure 15. Proportion obtaining a first job by time to first job (years), educational attainment and school exit cohort, Jordanian men, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025
 Note: Kaplan-Meier failure curves

For women, Figure 16 demonstrates an improvement for secondary and above-secondary graduates in the 2017-2021 cohort, relative to their counterparts in the older cohort. While 13 percent of above-secondary graduates in the older cohort landed a job within four years of graduation, the corresponding share was 21 percent of women among more recent graduates. On the other hand, only 1 percent of women with below-secondary education had a first job at the 4-year mark, compared to 4 percent of women with the same education level in the older cohort.

Figure 16. Proportion obtaining a first job by time to first job (years), educational attainment and school exit cohort, Jordanian women, 2025



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Note: Kaplan-Meier failure curves

3.4. Trends in first labor market status

Following Assaad, Krafft and Salemi (2023), this section examines initial labor market status and first job, if any, within three years⁷ after school exit or age 15 (whichever comes later) to shed light on labor market insertion patterns of Jordanian youth. The first labor market status variable was created using retrospective⁸ information from the job history module of the 2025 JLMPS, which provides rich details on first job characteristics, including employment sector and formality status (social insurance coverage). For this analysis, we restrict our focus to those who graduated from 2012-2021 to uncover recent developments in the school-to-work transition, distinguishing between two five-year cohorts; those who left school between 2012-2016 and those who graduated more recently in 2017-2021. For individuals who have never been to school or those who left the education system before age 15, their school-leaving date is set to the year they turn 15, which is considered the minimum age for labor market entry.

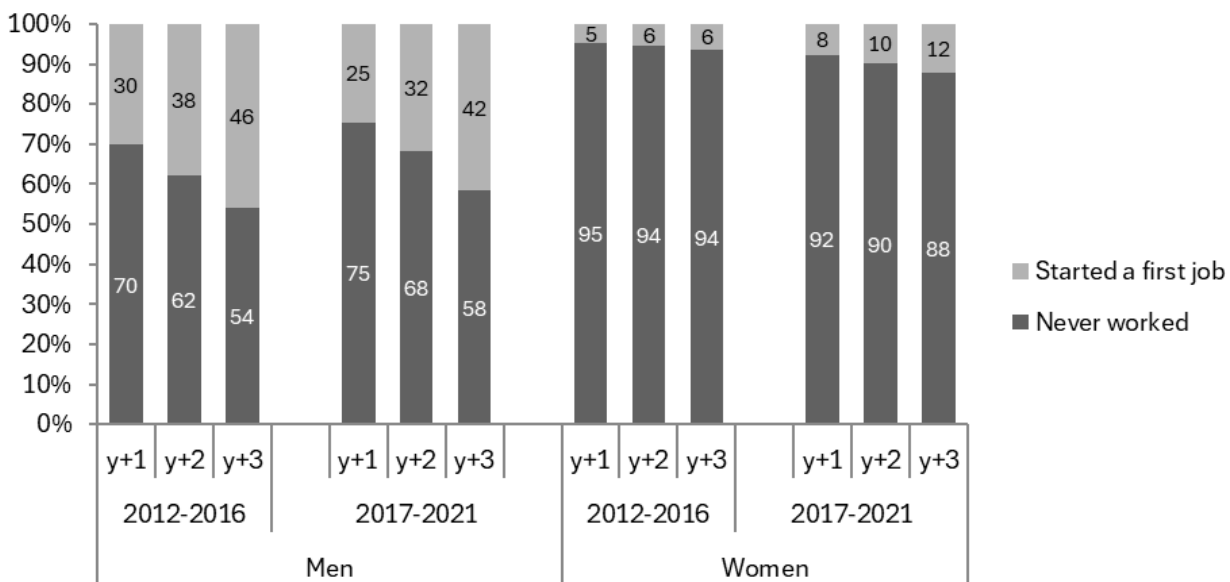
⁷ This window is chosen to give an adequate span to capture most initial transitions, to have a consistent time horizon after school exit across cohorts, and still be able to look at recent school-leaving cohorts.

⁸ One caveat of this approach is that responses may be subject to recall bias (see Assaad, Krafft and Yassin, 2018), especially among older cohorts.

We first look at the percentage of youth who had found a first job within three years of graduation by sex and school exit cohort. Then, among those with a first job, we look at first employment status which can be classified into: public employment (comprising employment in government bodies or public enterprises), private formal employment (private sector employment with social insurance), private informal employment (private sector employment without social insurance), non-wage work (encompassing employers and self-employed/own-account workers), and unpaid family work.

Figure 17 reports the share of individuals with a first job within a three-year window by sex and cohort of school exit. For men, it reveals a decline in job entry rates for the recent cohort compared with older graduates. For example, 42 percent of men who left school between 2017-2021 started their first job within three years of school exit, compared with 46 percent of men who graduated between 2012-2016. On the contrary, the share of women with a first job within three years of graduation doubled from 6 percent in the older cohort to 12 percent in the more recent cohort.

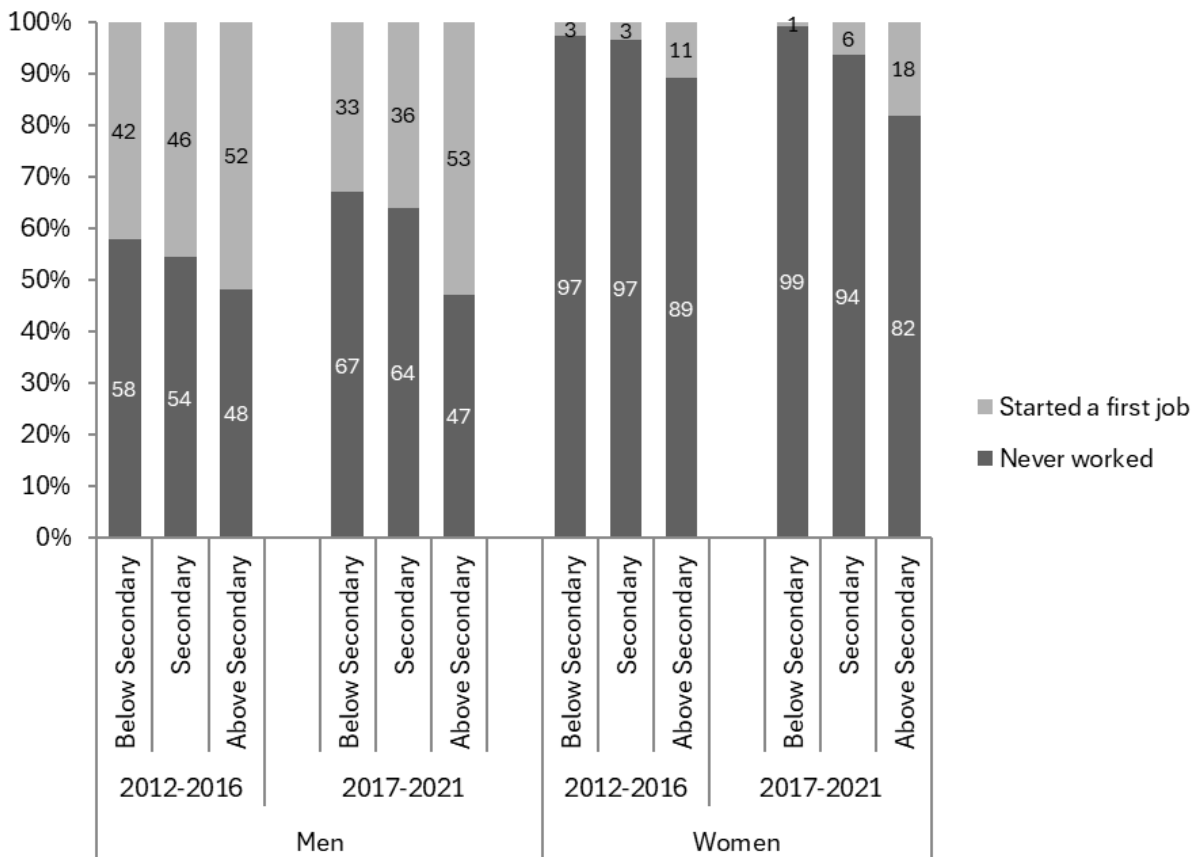
Figure 17. Labor market status within three years of graduation by sex and school exit cohort, Jordanians (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

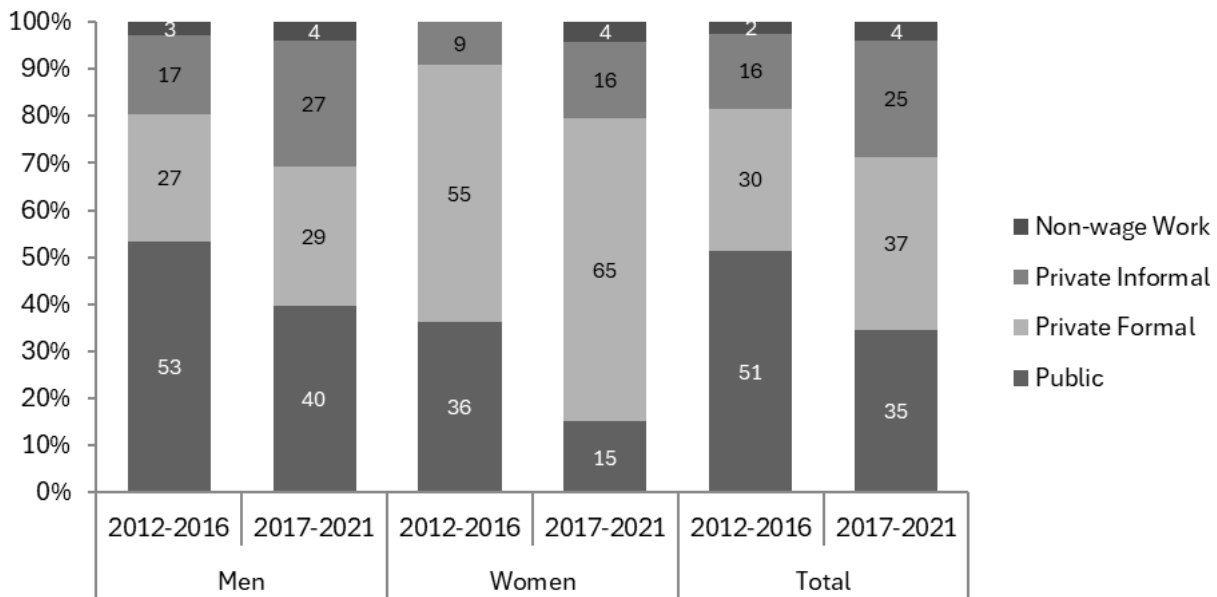
Figure 18 shows the share of individuals with a first job after three years of school exit by education level. For men with below-secondary schooling, 42 percent in the older cohort started a first job after three years, compared to only 33 percent in the more recent cohort. This share also declined among men with secondary education by 10 percentage points across the two male cohorts. However, the share of men with a first job after three years remained largely unchanged across cohorts for those with above-secondary education. For women, the share of secondary-degree holders with a first job doubled from 3 percent in the 2012-2016 cohort to 6 percent in the 2017-2021 cohort. Similarly, 18 percent of women with above-secondary education had started a job within three years of leaving school in the younger cohort, compared with only 11 percent of their counterparts in the older cohort.

Figure 18. Labor market status three years after graduation by education level and school exit cohort, Jordanians (percentages)



Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

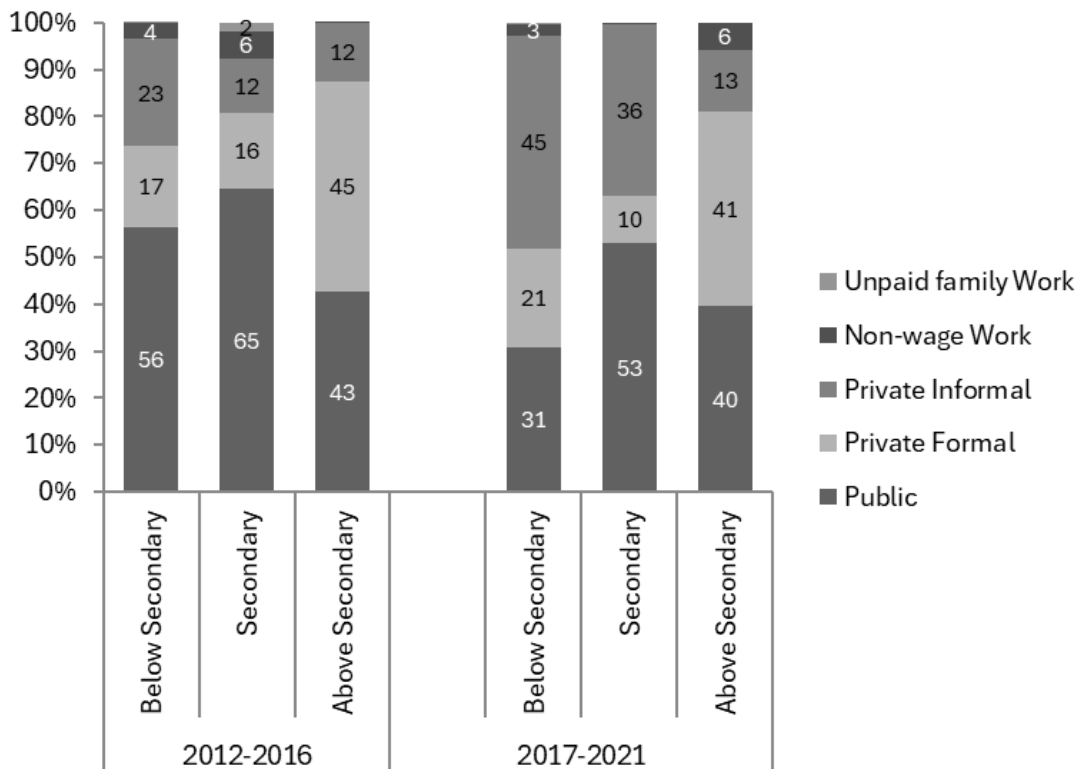
Among those with a first job within three years of graduation, Figure 19 shows the distribution of first jobs by institutional sector of employment across cohorts. For both men and women, it reveals a noticeable decline in public sector employment among recent graduates, especially women; from 36 percent in the 2012-2016 cohort to only 15 percent in the 2017-2021 cohort. On the other hand, the share of women with a first job in the formal private sector has increased from 55 percent to 65 percent between the two cohorts. Private informal employment as a first job also expanded between the two cohort groups, by 10 percentage points for men and 7 percentage points for women. Finally, while no women in the older cohort started their employment in non-wage work, the corresponding share was 4 percent for women who left school between 2017 and 2021.

Figure 19. Type of first job by sex and school exit cohort, Jordanians (percentages)

Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

Figure 20 shows the institutional sector of initial employment by educational attainment and male school exit cohort. Jordanian men with secondary education were the most likely to start a first job in the public sector, but this share declined from 65 percent to 53 percent across the two cohorts. The figure also reveals a substantial decline in public sector employment among men with below-secondary degrees, from 56 percent in the 2012-2016 cohort to 31 percent in the 2017-2021 cohort. On the other hand, private informal employment as a first job status almost doubled for the same education level between the two cohorts, from 23 percent to 45 percent, and tripled for men with secondary education, from 12 percent in the older cohort to 36 percent in the younger cohort. While non-wage work among men with higher education was negligible in the 2012-2016 cohort, it amounted to 6 percent of first jobs among more recent graduates.

Since the sample size of women with first jobs in the below-secondary and secondary education groups is insufficient ($n < 30$) for both cohorts, we do not display a similar graph for women. However, it should be noted that for above-secondary female graduates, public employment as a first job status declined from 43 percent in the 2012-2016 cohort to only 16 percent in the 2017-2021 cohort. On the other hand, private formal employment rose from 55 percent to 64 percent across cohorts, and informal private employment jumped from only 2 percent in the older cohort to 15 percent in the younger cohort. Non-wage work, which was absent among older female graduates, amounted to 5 percent of first employment among women with above-secondary education who left school in 2017-2021.

Figure 20. Type of first job by education level and school exit cohort, Jordanian men (percentages)

Source: Authors' calculations based on JLMPS 2025

4. Educational mismatch in the Jordanian labor market

This section examines educational mismatch among employed youth in the Jordanian labor market. Specifically, it analyzes the incidence of overeducation, undereducation, and well-matched employment, comparing these across survey waves of the JLMPS and by various individual and labor market characteristics—including sex, educational attainment, occupation and employment sector. The measurement of educational mismatch in this analysis primarily relies on the subjective approach (Capsada, 2019; McGuinness et al., 2018), based on the following questions in the JLMPS:

- What is the highest level of schooling you entered, and what grade did you complete successfully in that level?
- What are the minimum education requirements for your job?

Based on the comparison of these two responses, workers are classified as overeducated if their attained level of education exceeds the minimum level required for their current job, undereducated if their level of education is below what is required for their job, and well-matched if their educational attainment corresponds exactly to the job's self-reported requirement. This method is commonly referred to in the literature as indirect self-assessment, as workers are not directly asked whether they perceive themselves to be overeducated or undereducated. Unfortunately, the question on the minimum level of education required for a respondent's job is only available in the 2016 and 2025 waves of the JLMPS. As a result, the analysis of educational mismatch is limited to these two waves.

4.1. Incidence of overeducation, undereducation, and well-matched employment in the Jordanian labor market

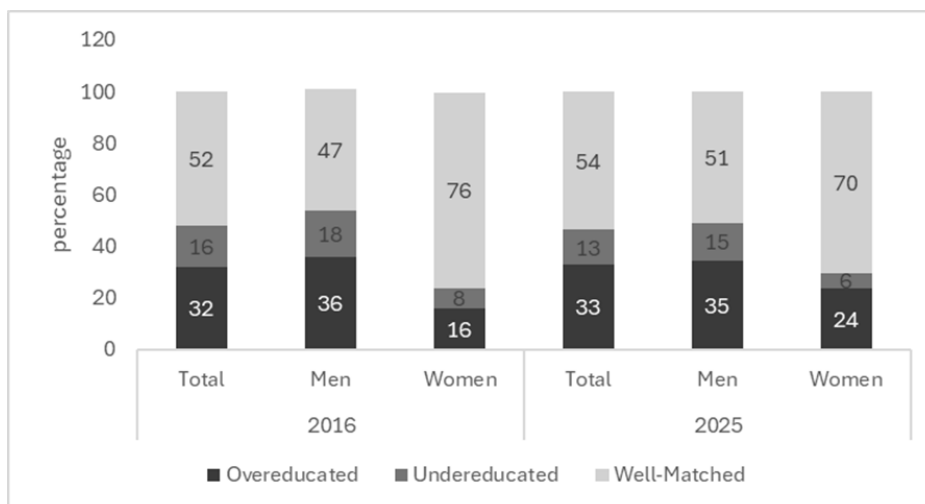
Figure 21 shows a modest improvement in job–education alignment over time. In 2016, 52 percent of Jordanian workers aged 15–34 reported being well matched, increasing to 54 percent in 2025. Overeducation remained broadly stagnant over the period, rising only marginally from 32 percent to 33 percent, while undereducation declined from 16 percent to 13 percent.

Among men, the proportion of well-matched workers rose from 47 percent in 2016 to 51 percent in 2025. Overeducation declined slightly from 36 to 35 percent, while undereducation also fell from 18 to 15 percent. These changes indicate that young men experienced an improvement in alignment, driven by a reduction in educational mismatches on both ends.

Among women, job–education alignment remained relatively high over the period, although it weakened somewhat between 2016 and 2025. The share of well-matched female workers declined from 76 percent to 70 percent, while overeducation increased from 16 percent to 24 percent. At the same time, undereducation fell slightly from 8 percent to 6 percent. Overall, these patterns suggest that women continue to display stronger job–education matching than men, but the decline in well-matched employment and the rise in overeducation reflect an underutilization of women’s rising educational qualifications over time.

This relatively favorable matching profile, however, should be interpreted with caution. Men, as primary breadwinners, are more likely to accept jobs that do not fully match their education or skill profiles, whereas women may be more likely to withdraw from the labor force altogether when suitable employment opportunities are lacking. As a result, improvements in observed matching among women can coexist with persistently low participation rates, reflecting selective labor force participation rather than broad-based improvements in employment quality (Selwaness & Krafft, 2021; Assaad & Krafft, 2022).

Figure 21. Distribution of overeducated, undereducated and well-matched Jordanian workers by sex, ages 15–34, 2016–2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on JLMPS 2016, and JLMPS 2025

4.2. Educational mismatch by educational attainment

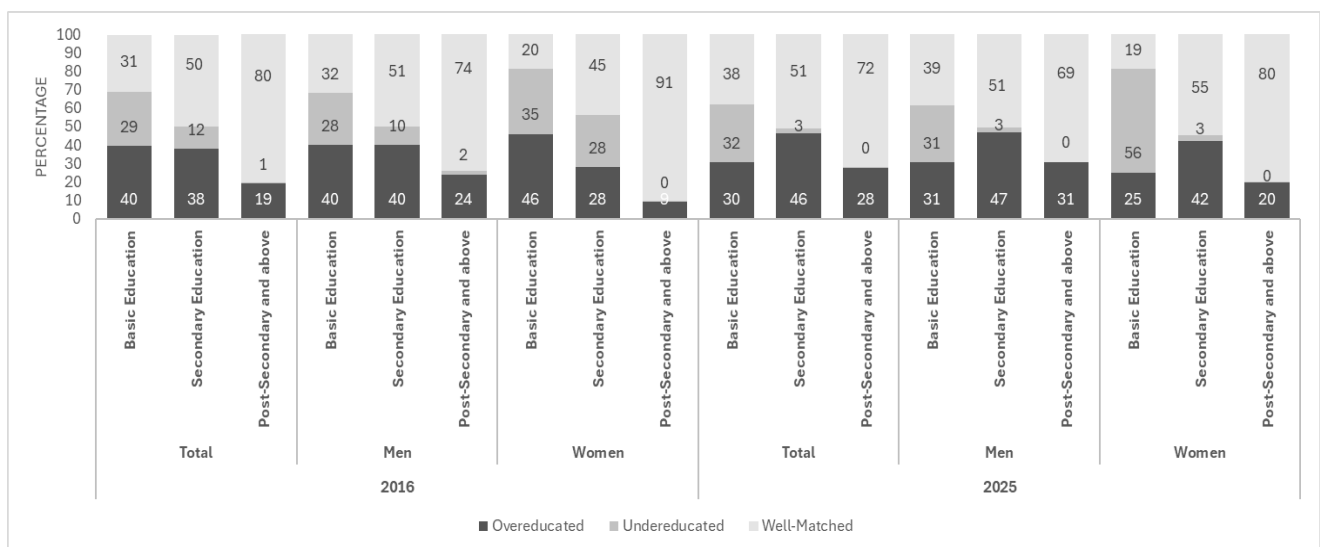
Figure 22 presents the distribution of overeducation, undereducation, and well-matched employment by educational attainment for Jordanians aged 15–34 in 2016 and 2025, disaggregated by sex. The results show notable shifts in job-education alignment over the two waves.

Overall, job–education matching changed unevenly across education levels. Well-matched employment improved among individuals with basic education (from 31 percent in 2016 to 38 percent in 2025) while overeducation declined among this group over the same period. In contrast, secondary and above-secondary education levels display a pattern of deterioration in job–education matching over time. For both groups, the share of overeducation increased between 2016 and 2025, while the share of well-matched employment either stagnated or declined.

For men, the share of well-matched employment improved between 2016 and 2025 among those with basic education, accompanied by declines in both overeducation and undereducation. However, this pattern reverses at higher levels of educational attainment. Among men with secondary and above-secondary education, overeducation increased substantially over the period, while the proportion of well-matched employment deteriorated.

A similar pattern is observed for women, for whom educational mismatch is most pronounced at higher levels of educational attainment. Overeducation increased markedly among women with secondary and post-secondary education, while the share of well-matched employment declined between 2016 and 2025. This parallel trend suggests that the Jordanian labor market has become increasingly unable to absorb youth with secondary and higher levels of education into jobs commensurate with their qualifications.

Figure 22. Educational mismatch among Jordanian workers by education level and sex, ages 15-34, 2016-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on JLMPS 2016, and JLMPS 2025

4.3. Educational mismatch by occupational groups

Figure 23 illustrates the incidence of overeducation, undereducation, and well-matched employment across major occupational groups for Jordanian workers aged 15–34 in 2016 and 2025, disaggregated by sex.⁹

Overall, the share of well-matched employment increased across all occupational groups between 2016 and 2025, but the magnitude of change differed. The increase was marginal among high-skilled occupations, rising from 80 percent to 81 percent, and modest among medium-skilled occupations, increasing from 39 percent to 41 percent. The most noticeable improvement occurred among low-skilled occupations, where well-matched employment rose from 34 percent to 40 percent.

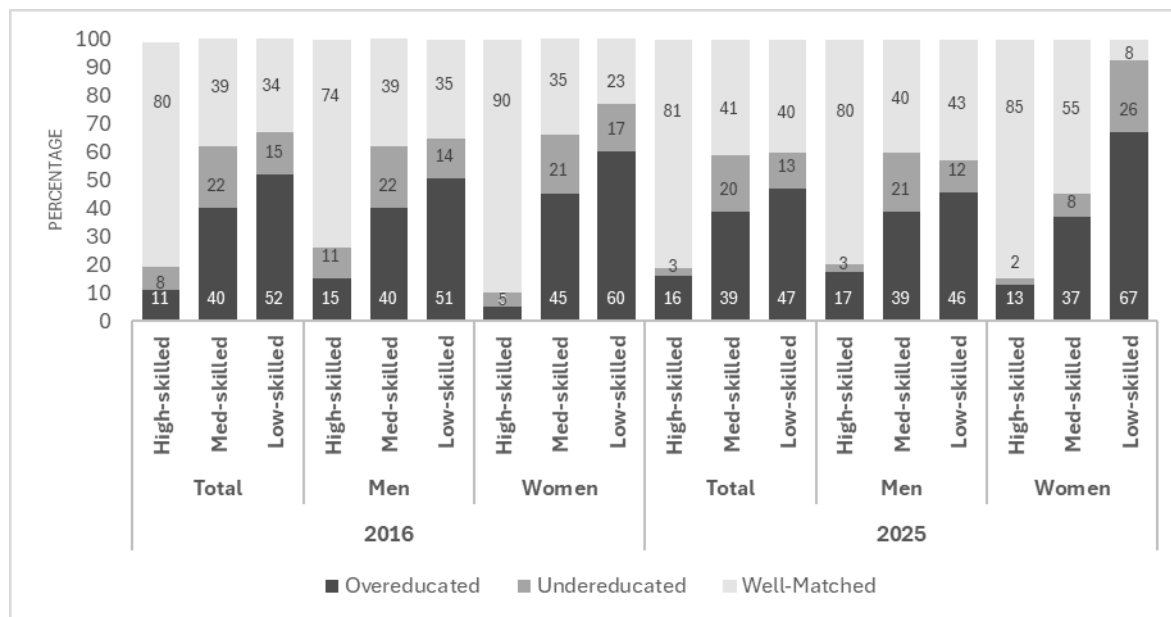
Among men, between 2016 and 2025, the share of well-matched employment increased across all occupational skill groups. However, the incidence of overeducation remained largely unchanged among high- and medium-skilled occupations, suggesting limited improvement in job–education alignment at the upper and middle segments of the occupational structure. In contrast, among low-skilled occupations, the improvement in well-matched employment was accompanied by a modest decline in overeducation, indicating a clearer adjustment at the lower end of the labor market.

For women, the pattern of adjustment was more uneven. Among high-skilled occupations, job–education matching declined between 2016 and 2025, alongside a rise in overeducation. This suggests that the labor market has become less able to absorb highly educated women into jobs that match their qualifications. A similar deterioration is observed among low-skilled occupations, where both overeducation and undereducation increased, while the share of well-matched employment declined. By contrast, the situation improved among medium-skilled occupations, where job matching increased and both forms of mismatch declined.

Taken together, the results point to a partial and uneven improvement in job–education matching between 2016 and 2025. While overall alignment has strengthened—driven in part by gains among men and improvements in medium-skilled occupations—these advances are not consistent across all groups. Women, in particular, continue to face greater challenges, with signs of worsening mismatch at both the high- and low-skilled ends of the occupational distribution. This suggests that, despite some progress, structural constraints remain in the labor market, limiting its ability to efficiently match workers to appropriate jobs across different skill levels.

⁹ In this section, the nine major occupational groups are aggregated into three categories based on skill requirements: high-skilled (managers, professionals, and technicians and associate professionals), medium-skilled (clerical support, service and sales, skilled agricultural, craft and related trades, and plant and machine operators), and low-skilled (elementary occupations), following the ILO ISCO skill-level framework (ILO, 2012).

Figure 23. Educational mismatch among Jordanian workers by occupation and sex, ages 15-34, 2016-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors' elaboration based on JLMPS 2016 and JLMPS 2025

4.4. Educational mismatch by type of employment

Figure 24 shows the rates of overeducation, undereducation, and well-matched employment across type of employment for Jordanian nationals aged 15–34 in 2016 and 2025, disaggregated by sex.

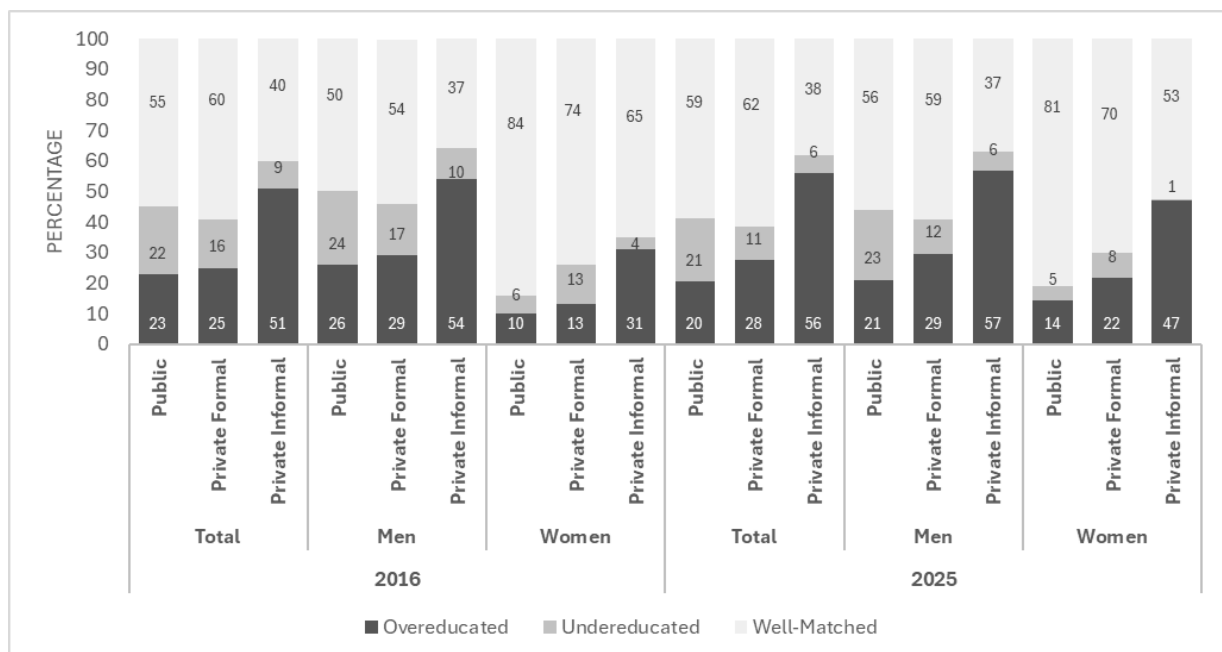
For the overall workforce, the clearest improvement occurred in the public sector, where the share of well-matched workers increased between 2016 and 2025, from 55 percent to 59 percent, alongside a decline in overeducation from 23 percent to 20 percent. In the private formal sector, well-matched employment rose only slightly, from 60 percent to 62 percent, while overeducation increased from 25 percent to 28 percent, suggesting limited improvement in overall alignment. By contrast, the private informal sector showed signs of deterioration, with a decline in well-matched employment from 40 percent to 38 percent and a rise in overeducation from 51 percent to 56 percent. This pattern reflects persistent challenges in aligning educational attainment with job requirements in informal employment. Among men, the share of well-matched workers increased in the public sector between 2016 and 2025 from 50 percent to 56 percent, largely reflecting declines in overeducation, from 26 percent to 21 percent. An improvement was also observed in the private formal sector, where well-matched employment rose from 54 percent to 59 percent, although driven by a decline in undereducation, from 17 percent to 12 percent. On the other hand, the private informal sector showed little improvement, with only 37 percent of workers being well-matched in both 2016 and 2025, while overeducation increased from 54 percent to 57 percent. This suggests that educational mismatch among men in informal employment remained persistent and largely unaddressed.

For women, the share of well-matched employment in the public sector declined slightly between 2016 and 2025, from 84 percent to 81 percent, apparently driven by a rise in overeducation over the

same period, from 10 percent to 14 percent. Outcomes in the private sector were less favorable. In the private formal sector, the share of well-matched workers declined, from 74 percent to 70 percent, while overeducation increased markedly from 13 percent to 22 percent. This pattern was even more pronounced in the private informal sector, where overeducation rose substantially between the two waves from 31 percent to 47 percent, indicating a growing mismatch between women’s educational attainment and job requirements.

Overall, the results show that job–education matching varies by type of employment. Improvements are mainly concentrated in the public sector, while the private formal sector shows more limited progress. The private informal sector remains the weakest segment, with persistent and worsening mismatch, especially among women.

Figure 24. Educational mismatch among Jordanian workers by type of employment and sex, ages 15-34, 2016-2025 (percentages)



Source: Authors’ elaboration based on JLMPS 2016, and JLMPS 2025

5. Conclusion

This paper has examined the evolution of labor market outcomes for young Jordanians aged 15-34, focusing on the nature and length of the school-to-work transition. Our findings echo those of Assaad et al. (2022) and Amer (2018), who find that the transition from school to work has become increasingly challenging and more protracted for youth in the MENA region, despite rising educational attainment. A large percentage of Jordanian youth are not in education, employment or training (NEET), reflecting untapped human capital. Youth unemployment is high and on the rise, which often leads to discouragement when job search efforts are fruitless. Age at first job has increased on average over survey waves. Jordanian men who graduated school in 2017-2021 -especially those with lower

education- were less likely to start a first job within three years of graduation compared to those who left school five years earlier in 2012-2016, while the reverse was true for women. Entry into public sector jobs has declined among both men and women in the 2017-2021 cohort while private informal employment has expanded, suggesting that a larger share of youth are entering the labor market for the first time in lower-quality precarious employment, potentially placing their future career trajectories at a disadvantage, as it often becomes harder to move to better quality jobs.

With respect to educational mismatch, the share of well-matched workers among Jordanian youth shows a slight improvement. However, this improvement is uneven. Around a third of Jordanians aged 15-34 were overeducated for their jobs in both 2016 and 2025, and overeducation has become more pronounced among youth with secondary and post-secondary education, suggesting that the labor market continues to struggle to absorb more educated young workers into jobs that match their qualifications. The analysis also shows important differences by sex, occupation, and type of employment: women face worsening mismatch in several segments, particularly in higher-skilled occupations and in private-sector employment, while the informal private sector remains the weakest segment, with persistent and rising overeducation. These patterns point to continuing structural imbalances between educational attainment and labor market demand, underscoring the need for stronger alignment between education, skills development, and quality employment opportunities for youth in Jordan.

Future research should investigate the drivers behind the trends uncovered in this paper, taking into account macroeconomic conditions, demographics, labor market and migration dynamics, as well as microeconomic factors such as income, socioeconomic status/family background and region of residence. An additional angle that deserves attention is the role of education and labor market policy in influencing youth labor market outcomes. Such deep dives need to take a gendered perspective as the influence of these dimensions could be different for men and women, who often have different preferences and priorities when entering the labor market.

Limitations of the paper include the use of retrospective data from the job history module to recover first labor market status and time to first job, as such data could be subject to measurement error and recall bias (Assaad, Krafft, & Yassin, 2018). Furthermore, the measurement of educational mismatch is based solely on the subjective approach, which depends on individuals' self-assessment of whether their education matches the requirements of their jobs. Such perceptions could vary across respondents and may not accurately reflect actual job requirements or skill use. Finally, subjective mismatch measures were not available in the 2010 wave of the JLMPS, limiting the analysis of changes in mismatch to the 2016–2025 period only.

Policymakers should closely monitor and actively respond to changes in the school-to-work transition, as these patterns of labor market entry can become entrenched trajectories that are harder to shift in the future. Emphasis should be placed on encouraging youth labor force participation and addressing structural barriers to labor market access, particularly among women, NEET youth and those in discouraged unemployment, as well as ensuring that those who do work are well matched to productive employment that makes the most use of their skills.

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