

# Improving Leadership & Employability of Underserved Populations in Jordan

## Program Impact & Investment Brief

**Donor:** The Elsa & Peter Soderberg Charitable Foundation  
**Implementing Lead:** Pathfinder International  
**Local Partner:** GreenTech: Inspiring Environment  
**Duration:** September 2024-August 2026

## Executive Program Overview

Jordan faces one of the highest youth and female unemployment rates in the MENA region, compounded by prolonged economic pressures, climate vulnerability, and the continued impact of displacement and regional instability. Young people and women, particularly from refugee communities, remain disproportionately excluded from meaningful employment opportunities, despite their strong motivation to participate in the economy.

In response to these challenges, Pathfinder International launched the *Improving Leadership & Employability Among Underserved Populations in Jordan* program, designed to strengthen employability, leadership, and economic resilience among youth and women, with a strong focus on green economy sectors aligned with the WEFE nexus (Water, Energy, Food, Environment).

By combining soft skills development, market-driven training, entrepreneurship support, and real economic infrastructure, the program moves beyond traditional training models to deliver sustainable pathways into employment and income generation.

## Context & Needs

### Youth in Jordan

Youth unemployment in Jordan remains critically high, with nearly 50% of young people aged 15–24 unable to find work. Even among university graduates, joblessness and underemployment persist due to:

- Limited exposure to labour market-relevant skills
- Weak private sector linkages
- Low confidence and professional readiness
- A mismatch between education and market demands

Many young Jordanians express strong interest in emerging sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and cleantech, yet lack access to structured pathways into these industries.

### Women in Jordan

Women face even greater barriers. Female unemployment reached 31.2% in early 2025, driven by:

- Restricted mobility and social norms
- Limited access to finance and markets
- Care responsibilities and lack of childcare
- Few income-generating opportunities in rural areas

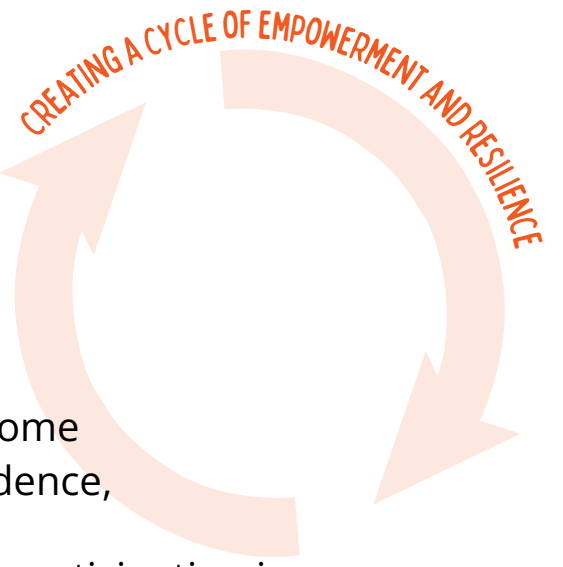
For refugee and host community women alike, economic exclusion directly impacts household wellbeing, food security, and long-term resilience.

## Program Design

**IF** youth and women are empowered with employability and entrepreneurial skills,

**THEN** they can access sustainable income opportunities and economic independence,

**BECAUSE** these skills enable participation in local economies, strengthen confidence, and improve household financial stability



## The 2-Track Model

### Track 1: Youth Track – Green Employability

The Youth Track targets young people aged 18–30 across northern, central, and southern Jordan, with a focus on enhancing employability in cleantech and green economy sectors. The project includes nationwide outreach and orientation sessions, needs and market assessments, a five-day intensive soft skills training, personalised work-readiness and career coaching, exposure visits to private sector companies, as well as mentorship and entrepreneurship support. Its core focus areas are professional communication, leadership and teamwork, employment readiness, and entrepreneurship and innovation.

500 YOUTH ORIENTED INTO THE PROJECT

200 YOUTH COMPLETED 5-DAY SOFT SKILLS TRAINING

100 YOUTH RECEIVE PERSONALISED MENTORSHIP



### Track 2: Women Track – Sustainable Agribusiness

The Women Track focuses on creating real economic opportunities for women through a market-based agribusiness model centred on pickle production and sustainable farming. It includes the establishment of a cucumber pickling production line, alongside the selection and engagement of women farmers and production workers across the value chain. Participants receive targeted skills training and financial literacy support to strengthen their technical and business capacities, and are connected to both local and international buyers to facilitate market access and income generation. This model creates a full value chain:

women-led farming → sustainable vegetable supply → women-led food processing → market sales → income generation.



130 WOMEN FARMERS

16 WOMEN IN PICKLE PRODUCTION

## What Has Been Achieved - Youth Track

### Outreach & Scope

During Q1 and Q2 2025, the project reached 569 youth through comprehensive outreach activities. Of these, 520 submitted applications to join the cohort. A total of 238 youth were selected for participation, including 205 primary participants and 33 alternates. The cohort also incorporated 12 graduates from Pathfinder International's Jordan-based 'Act With Her' project. Of the 205:

**~72% FEMALE**  
**~28% MALE**  
**~65% UNEMPLOYED**



### Needs Assessment

The needs assessment conducted at the project's outset revealed critical skills gaps among the target population. Over 90% of youth reported significant deficiencies across four key areas: professional communication, leadership and interpersonal skills, employment readiness, and entrepreneurial knowledge. These findings not only validated the programme's design but also confirmed the strong demand for such capacity-building interventions among Jordan's youth. These identified focus areas were corroborated by interviews with private-sector companies in the cleantech sector.

### 5-Day Soft Skills Training

In Q3 2025, we delivered eight 5-day soft skills training sessions for the 205 beneficiaries. The day-to-day curriculum focused on the following priority area topics:

- Day 1:** Exploring career and entrepreneurship pathways in the cleantech sector
- Day 2:** Employability skills E.g., CV writing, LinkedIn profiles, and interview techniques
- Day 3:** Entrepreneurship essentials E.g., design thinking, business modelling, and pitching
- Day 4:** Labour laws, workplace protection, and gender inclusion and equity
- Day 5:** Emotional intelligence, teamwork, and external expert talks

### Training Results

Pre- and post-training assessments revealed substantial improvements, with 97% of participants achieving higher scores than their baseline. Critically, the training reduced performance disparities by lifting participants from the lowest score ranges into competitive mid-to-higher bands, indicating that the intervention particularly benefited those with the greatest foundational deficits rather than reinforcing existing advantages.

Participants showed consistent gains across all assessed competency areas, with the largest improvements in immediately applicable skills such as professional communication, CV writing, and interview readiness. Beneficiaries also demonstrated increased understanding of workplace norms, job search strategies, and employer expectations—foundational knowledge critical for those with limited formal employment exposure.

**97%!**

### 1:1 Mentorship Sessions

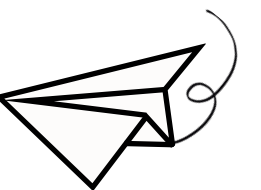
Launching in Q1 2026, the virtual mentorship phase provides each beneficiary with two individual 1:1 sessions with experienced sector professionals, delivering tailored support aligned with career aspirations and business objectives. By project end, participants will have validated business concepts, clear growth pathways, and foundational tools to progress toward launch and scale. Of

the youth selected for mentorship (100 primary participants and 33 alternates):

**~77% FEMALE**  
**~23% MALE**  
**~79% JOB-SEEKERS**  
**~21% ENTREPRENEURS**



INCLUDING 30 DEVELOPED BUSINESS PLANS



### Let's Hear From Our Beneficiaries...

"For the first time, someone explained LinkedIn in a way I could actually understand. Our trainer taught us how to network effectively, speak about our achievements, and build a personal brand."

"I once thought starting a business was impossible. But after learning about design thinking and developing [...] my idea, I now believe I can build something for myself."

"The sessions were great, and I thought the materials were really well put together...from the design to how relevant they were to my needs. I have taken part in similar workshops in the past where I wasn't able to gain as much knowledge because the materials hadn't been well thought out, and were far too basic."

"The mock interview made me nervous at first, but it helped me grow - I didn't realise I could speak that confidently!"

"I came to the launch by chance thanks to a friend, and having listened to the project overview I was really excited to see a specific track dedicated to entrepreneurship. As an entrepreneur myself, it was a no brainer!"

"I've picked up so many skills throughout the training. The problem solving skills I've picked up have been helpful in so many parts of my life, beyond just my search for full-time employment."

"After the workshops, the biggest change I've noticed is my ability to present myself and my skills in a more professional and persuasive way."

"The training was very thorough and detailed, with intensive workshops. Since the workshops, I had a chance to present my project to a panel of donors, and thanks to my new skills, we got the funding we wanted."



## What Has Been Achieved - Women Track

### Outreach & Scope

The project's activities specifically targeting women, encompassing both the Pickling Line and Farmers initiatives, demonstrated an exceptionally high level of interest, far exceeding the available selection capacity. For the Pickling Line project alone, 74 women registered their interest, despite only ~15 places being available. As a result of this strong interest and limited capacity, 16 women were selected to enter the training. Similarly, 170 women applied for the role of female farmers — growing and harvesting the cucumbers that will be used for pickling — exceeding the 130 available positions. Of the total selected 146 female beneficiaries:

### PICKLING LINE BENEFICIARIES

~38% SYRIAN  
~62% JORDANIAN

### FARMING BENEFICIARIES

~20% SYRIAN  
~80% JORDANIAN



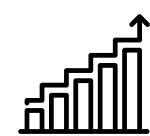
- Day 1:** Crop and market understanding
- Day 2:** Production pathways e.g., how to adjust production processes to different types of cucumbers and other vegetables
- Day 3:** Food safety, hygiene, occupational health and safety, and export requirements
- Day 4:** Post-harvest handling, processing methods, and quality control
- Day 5:** Packaging, labelling, branding, and product presentation

### On-the-Job Training

Following the theoretical training, in December and January 2025 the women participated in on-the-job training that translated technical knowledge into daily practice. The on-the-job training reinforced food safety, quality assurance, and market compliance, ensuring consistent adherence to operational protocols and standards of excellence. Through practice and supervision, participants strengthened their confidence, accuracy, and readiness to meet buyer and regulatory requirements.

### Needs Assessment

The socioeconomic context in the Mafraq region highlights significant challenges and unmet needs in the labour market, particularly for women and rural populations. National labour statistics show persistently high unemployment rates in Jordan, with Mafraq consistently recording one of the highest levels across the country — around 23 to 28.7% in recent years. This is notably above the national average, underscoring the deep-rooted employment challenges in the region. In this context of widespread joblessness, especially in rural communities highly dependent on agriculture, the informal sector and home-based businesses (HBBs) are critical livelihood avenues. Traditional agricultural activities and agro-processing e.g., pickling offer accessible entry points for women's economic engagement. Pickling requires relatively low capital investment, aligns with existing caregiving roles and time constraints, and leverages locally available raw materials, making it a suitable pathway for women's entrepreneurship within informal and home-based contexts.



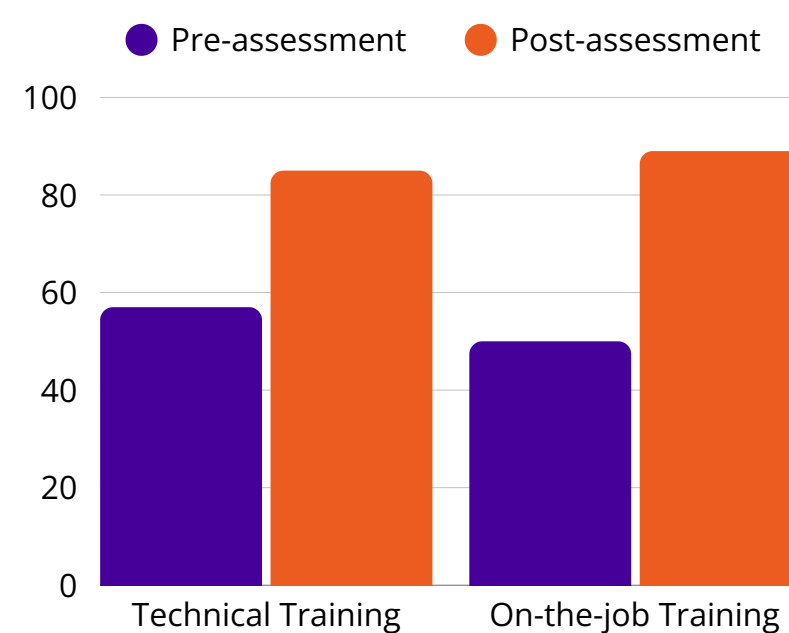
### Training Results

The results below demonstrate that the project successfully strengthened both participants' theoretical understanding and practical skills in pickling production, with high levels of engagement and completion. Participants showed substantial gains in technical knowledge and consistently improved compliance with safety, quality, and standard operating procedures. Overall, the results indicate that the intervention effectively enhanced women's capabilities and preparedness for participation in agro-processing value chains, while laying a positive foundation for improved market access and economic inclusion.

### Theoretical Training

Held at Smart Desert Company's Mafraq production facility in December 2025, the theoretical training equipped women participants with practical, end-to-end skills in integrated cucumber crop management, covering production, post-harvest handling, and basic processing. Delivered over 5 days, the training linked agricultural practices directly to food safety, quality standards, and market requirements, enabling participants to improve both product quality and income potential. The curriculum covered the following key topics:

7/1



### Let's Hear From More Beneficiaries...

"Throughout my life, many people have told me and other women like me that I couldn't work, that I wasn't capable enough. Projects like this allow me to prove them wrong."

"Before the project I had little knowledge about pickling, and there wasn't anywhere locally for me to gain such skills. My knowhow has been significantly broadened both theoretically and practically. There was so much I didn't know, and the training has filled so many of those gaps."

"The experience that we have had here - learning how to produce these products to the highest standard - has been incredible. *People just wouldn't have believed before that we were capable of working to this level and taking in all of the training we have received.*"

"Projects like this are so important, particularly in this part of the country, because so many women spend their days stuck at home. We have a culture of shame that surrounds women working, and projects like this are an opportunity to change that outdated idea."

"Once I turned 40, nobody was interested in hiring me. There also weren't any opportunities for me to learn new skills, so I was stuck at home without work. This project has provided a way out of that."

"This project has been a new chapter for me: new challenges, new friends, new skills, and a renewed sense of hope."

"In a few words, *this project is my life*. When I came from Syria with my family, there was no escape from our situation, and very little social outlet or opportunities. This project has been a breath of new life and comfort for me. I come here, I meet new people, I learn new things - it's been beneficial in ways I can't describe."



## Human Impact

Behind every statistic is a life trajectory being reshaped. The impact of the program goes far beyond numbers, touching the personal and professional lives of each participant. Vulnerable youth and women who took part in the program report significant personal growth and empowerment. Many describe increased confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to take on challenges with greater assurance. Participants also report a clearer sense of career direction, helping them set goals and pursue meaningful opportunities.

In addition, the program has strengthened essential soft skills, with beneficiaries noting marked improvements in communication, collaboration, and leadership abilities. Many express greater motivation to explore entrepreneurial ventures, turning their skills and knowledge into viable income-generating activities. Importantly, participants also report enhanced decision-making power within their households, reflecting broader social and economic empowerment.



**THESE OUTCOMES DEMONSTRATE THAT THE PROGRAM IS NOT ONLY BUILDING TECHNICAL EXPERTISE BUT ALSO FOSTERING PERSONAL GROWTH, AGENCY, AND LONG-TERM OPPORTUNITY FOR PARTICIPANTS.**

## Why This Model Works

This program is effective because it successfully integrates:

- ✓ Linking training to real market demand
- ✓ Connecting youth and women pathways
- ✓ Building on existing private sector infrastructure
- ✓ Focusing on green and future-oriented sectors
- ✓ Creating income, not dependency
- ✓ Embedding sustainability and scalability

It moves from:

**Training → to employability → to economic participation**

## Key Takeaways

The *Improving Leadership & Employability of Underserved Populations in Jordan* project has demonstrably strengthened participants' skills, confidence, and readiness for the job and labour market. Across both the Youth and Women tracks, assessment results show substantial and consistent gains in knowledge and practical competencies.

This is not just a program, it is a **platform for economic inclusion, leadership, and sustainable livelihoods** in one of the most challenging employment contexts in the region. By investing in this initiative, partners are supporting real jobs, real business, and real futures for Jordan's next generation.

