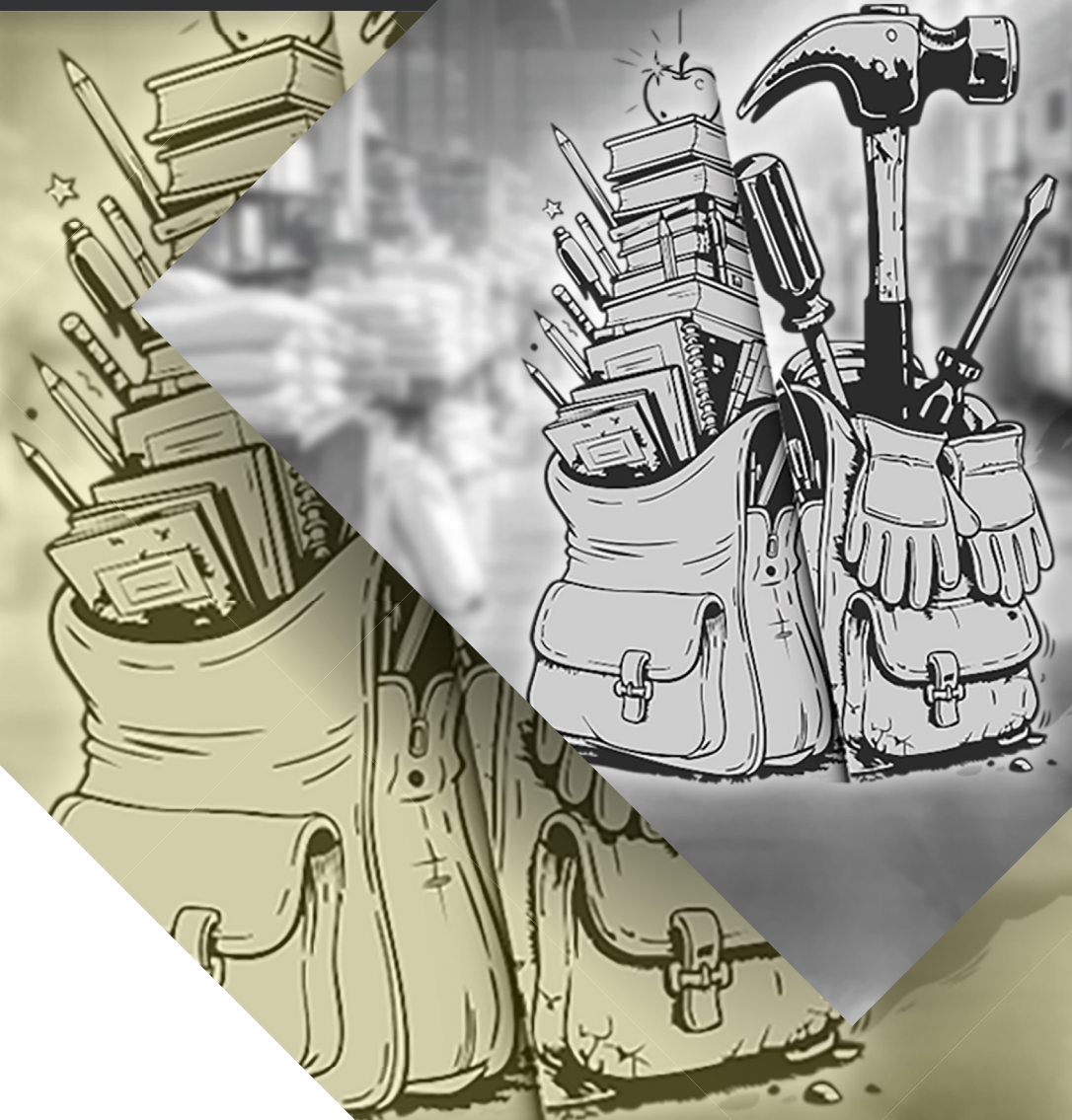


Closed Books and Weary Bodies

School Dropout and Its Relationship to
Child Labour in Jordan



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Executive Summary

This position paper, issued by Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights, examines the complex and intertwined relationship between school dropout and child labour in Jordan—two of the most pressing educational and social issues with far-reaching impacts on children’s rights, human development, and social justice.

Through an in-depth analysis of statistical data and legal and operational contexts, the paper demonstrates that school dropout cannot be understood merely as an educational challenge; rather, it represents a genuine reflection of a broader crisis in which economic, social, political, and educational factors intersect.

The paper reveals that, despite international commitments and domestic legal frameworks, current systems remain unable to provide effective and sustainable responses to protect children from leaving school and entering the labour market prematurely—especially in poor and marginalized communities. It also highlights the structural challenges that hinder educational institutions’ ability to retain students, including weak coordination between relevant stakeholders, low effectiveness of penalties, and the limited scope of protection and conditional support programs—all of which contribute to an environment ill-equipped to prevent dropout or reintegrate those who have left school.

The paper proposes a set of practical recommendations, starting with the adoption of a national, multi-sectoral approach that combines educational policy reform, the expansion of social protection coverage, and the linking of education to the labour market. It also stresses the need to provide flexible alternative pathways for vulnerable groups, and to engage civil society and the private sector in the response.

In light of the rising rates of school dropout in recent years, this paper serves as an urgent call to develop fairer and more effective policies that guarantee the right to education and protection, and that break the vicious cycle linking poverty, dropout, and child labour.

Introduction

School dropout is one of the most serious educational and social challenges facing education systems in many countries, including Jordan, due to its wide-ranging negative impacts on children, families, and society as a whole. The Jordanian Ministry of Education defines dropout as the permanent discontinuation of a student's studies before completing the compulsory education stage, which spans from grade one to grade ten.

The danger of this phenomenon lies in its role as a direct gateway to child labour, turning it from a purely educational concern into a human rights and development issue with multiple economic and social dimensions.

Although Jordan has ratified a number of core international conventions that guarantee every child's right to education, the reality shows clear shortcomings in implementation, alongside a growing number of dropout cases—especially among economically marginalized groups. National statistics indicate that in the 2023/2024 academic year, more than 11,720 students dropped out of basic education. Boys accounted for 58% of all dropouts, reflecting economic and social pressures that push them into the labour market at an early age. Girls, on the other hand, often face different drivers, such as early marriage or the absence of a safe school environment.

These figures highlight a structural gap in the education system's ability to retain students, particularly in disadvantaged areas where the quality of education declines and psychosocial support services are lacking. The Ministry of Education has acknowledged this gap and adopted a two-pronged approach to address dropout:

- **Preventive measures**, by strengthening the role of counsellors and teachers in monitoring absenteeism.
- **Remedial measures**, through operating **204 centres across the Kingdom** to target school dropouts, alongside the introduction of a "fourth track" equivalent to grade ten, and the provision of direct financial assistance to students.

However, despite their importance, these official efforts remain insufficient in the absence of institutional coordination, effective oversight, and meaningful penalties for employers of child labour. In addition, conditional cash assistance programs such as Takaful remain limited, failing to cover the actual costs of school attendance, as noted by UNICEF and the International Labour Organization.

Against this backdrop, this paper by Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights seeks to analyse the intertwined relationship between school dropout and child labour in Jordan, identify the structural causes of this phenomenon, and assess the effectiveness of official responses. It concludes with a set of comprehensive recommendations based on an integrated human rights and development approach, aiming to promote fairer and more inclusive educational and social policies for vulnerable groups.

General Context of the Phenomenon in Jordan

Despite Jordan's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly Goal 4 on quality education—the problem of school dropout remains alarmingly prevalent, especially among economically and socially marginalized groups. Official statistics issued by the Department of Statistics (2024) reveal that more than 11,720 students dropped out of school during the 2023/2024 academic year, marking a significant increase in dropout rates, particularly in the upper grades.¹

Statistics show that males account for 58% of total school dropouts, compared to 42% for females, reflecting economic and social pressures that particularly affect boys, within a societal culture that pushes them toward early employment. Meanwhile, girls' dropout is linked to factors such as poverty, early marriage, or withdrawal due to the absence of a safe and engaging educational environment.²

This reality reflects structural challenges within the Jordanian education system, manifested in schools' inability to retain students and the declining motivation among students to continue their education—particularly in rural areas and refugee camps—where the quality of education is low and psychological and support services for students are lacking.³

In this context, the Ministry of Education defines school dropout as a student leaving or repeatedly being absent from school without completing the compulsory basic education stage, which extends from the first to the tenth grade, in accordance with the provisions of the Education Law. The Ministry notes that the causes leading to this phenomenon vary between economic factors—such as poverty and families' inability to cover indirect education expenses—and social and family factors related to living conditions. Cultural and educational factors also play a role, most notably poor academic performance and students' inability to keep up with learning outcomes. The Ministry estimates the school dropout rate in Jordan to be between 3 to 4 per thousand, figures it considers within the normal range adopted in educational systems.⁴

1 Department of Statistics, 2024.

2 Ministry of Education, 2024.

3 UNICEF, 2023.

4 [Ministry of Education. \(2024\). Official statements on school dropout rates, causes, and the Ministry's efforts in addressing them. Jordan News Agency "Petra"](#)

In response to this challenge, the Ministry has adopted two integrated approaches to address it. The first is preventive, aimed at creating an attractive educational environment by strengthening the role of teachers and school counselors in monitoring absenteeism, in cooperation with the administrative governor, in line with the compulsory nature of education at this stage. The second is remedial, which involves operating a total of 204 centers across the Kingdom targeting school dropouts aged 12 to 18 for males and 12 to 20 for females. These centers serve approximately 4,000 students, distributed across three educational cycles lasting eight months each. They provide students with the opportunity to resume their education either through home study programs or vocational training courses.⁵

To strengthen this remedial approach, the Ministry of Education issued new regulations, published in the Official Gazette, establishing a “fourth cycle” equivalent to the tenth grade. This cycle allows students to continue their education with additional support, including the provision of transportation allowances and a daily meal valued at 3 Jordanian dinars, with the aim of encouraging them to remain in the educational process and alleviating the financial burdens that might otherwise push them to drop out⁶, these measures reflect a serious official commitment to reducing the phenomenon; however, their impact will remain limited unless they are complemented by genuine integration with social protection policies and child labor reduction programs, within the framework of a comprehensive developmental vision.

“ School dropout is one of the serious educational and social phenomena facing educational systems, due to its negative impacts that affect the child, the family, and society as a whole.”

⁵ [Ministry of Education. \(2024\). Official statements on school dropout rates, causes, and the Ministry's efforts in addressing them. Jordan News Agency "Petra"](#)

⁶ [Ministry of Education. \(2024\). Official statements on school dropout rates, causes, and the Ministry's efforts in addressing them. Jordan News Agency "Petra"](#)

Legal Framework: The Gap Between Law and Practice

At the legislative level, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has ratified key international conventions on the protection of children's rights, foremost among them the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which in Article (28) guarantees the right to free and compulsory education for all, without discrimination. The state has also committed to implementing the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Employment and No. 182 on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, both of which prohibit employing children under the age of sixteen, particularly in hazardous or unsafe conditions.⁷

In the legislative context, it is also important to mention Instructions No. (10) of 2024 – Instructions for Learning Centers for School Dropouts for the Year 2024, issued pursuant to paragraph (y) of Article (6) of the Education Law No. (3) of 1994 and its amendments.⁸

Instructions No. (10) of 2024 on Education and Learning Centers for School Dropouts represent a significant step toward promoting the right to education and combating school dropout. These instructions are based on the provisions of the Education Law No. (3) of 1994 and its amendments, while also taking into account international commitments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They target males aged 12 to 20 and females up to the age of 22 who have been out of formal education for no less than one year, with flexible criteria for integrating persons with disabilities in line with the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The educational program includes four learning cycles equivalent to grades one through ten and relies on diagnostic testing and flexible teaching methodologies that take individual differences into account, including the use of e-learning during emergencies. The instructions also provide both vocational and academic pathways for successful learners, granting equivalent certificates that allow them to continue to secondary education. This model reflects a practical application of the principles of educational justice and positive discrimination, demonstrating the Jordanian education system's commitment to providing sustainable and inclusive learning opportunities.

⁷ [International Labour Organization – Labour Conventions No. 138 and No. 182](#)

⁸ [Instructions No. \(10\) of 2024 – Instructions for Education and Learning Centers for School Dropouts for the Year 2024, issued pursuant to paragraph \(y\) of Article \(6\) of the Education Law No. \(3\) of 1994 and its amendments.](#)

Despite these clear commitments, the practical reality reveals a concerning gap between the legal framework and actual on-the-ground practices, reflected in a range of institutional and operational challenges, including:

First: Weak institutional coordination and fragmented roles

Responsibility for child protection and preventing school dropout is distributed among multiple government bodies, chiefly the Ministries of Education, Labor, and Social Development. However, the absence of effective coordination mechanisms results in conflicting procedures, duplication, or absence of interventions. For example, some entities aim to reintegrate dropouts into the education process, yet these efforts are not matched by comprehensive measures to protect them from returning to the labor market or being exposed to exploitation—leading to a fragmented and ineffective response.

Second: Weak monitoring and reporting systems

The Ministry of Education relies on reports issued by schools to track school dropouts. These reports often lack accuracy or are not updated regularly, limiting the Ministry's capacity for early intervention. Conversely, the Ministry of Labor lacks sufficient inspection capacity to monitor the informal labor market, which, according to ILO reports, employs approximately 78% of working children in Jordan—allowing the exploitation of children in precarious work environments to persist without genuine oversight.

Third: Ineffectiveness of penalties

Article (73) of the Jordanian Labor Law stipulates a fine not exceeding 500 Jordanian dinars for employers who unlawfully employ children. These penalties, however, are relatively low and non-deterrent, especially in the absence of strict accountability mechanisms or regular legal prosecution. Furthermore, Jordan's education laws do not contain explicit provisions obligating parents to ensure their children's school attendance, creating an environment that enables impunity and perpetuates the illegal employment of children.

In the same context, Instructions No. (5) of 2015 on Financial Assistance for the Care and Protection of Needy Families, issued pursuant to the National Aid Fund Law, stipulate in Article 10(f)⁹, it stipulates that beneficiary families must send their children to school as a basic condition for receiving aid. The instructions provide for a deduction of 25% from the total aid granted to the family for each individual who is officially confirmed to have dropped out of school or failed to enroll upon reaching the legal age, except in cases where a documented medical excuse exists.

While linking financial aid to school enrollment is important, the challenge lies in the weak follow-up on the actual enforcement of this provision and in the fact that the financial deduction alone is not an effective deterrent—especially given the already limited income of these families. This requires a more comprehensive approach that focuses on support and monitoring, rather than solely on financial penalties.

These instructions essentially tie the government’s financial assistance for needy families to the requirement of sending children to school. If this is not done, part of the aid is deducted as a penalty. However, this penalty alone may not be sufficient, and there is a need for greater support and follow-up to encourage families to comply with education requirements.

Additionally, Instructions No. (10) of 2024 concerning Education and Learning Centers for School Dropouts represent a positive step towards enhancing educational opportunities for the targeted groups, as they offer flexible timeframes and age ranges that facilitate the enrollment of dropouts in the educational process. Nevertheless, these instructions may require legislative reinforcement to ensure that the certificates they issue are recognized in line with labor market requirements.

Moreover, there is a noticeable absence of clear provisions addressing the psychological and social aspects of learners—particularly those who have experienced violence or previous dropout—which calls for integrating comprehensive support programs for this group. The use of technological tools as a learning method in emergencies is a positive option, but it requires the provision of an integrated infrastructure and advanced training programs for teaching staff to ensure that the intended goals are achieved efficiently and effectively.

⁹ [Instructions No. \(5\) of 2015 on Financial Assistance for the Care and Protection of Needy Families, issued pursuant to the provisions of Article \(8/g\) of the National Aid Fund Law No. \(36\) of 1986.](#)

Fourth: Limited Preventive Programs and Weak Sustainability

Despite the existence of conditional cash transfer programs, they do not cover all indirect costs associated with children's school attendance, such as transportation fees, textbooks, and uniforms, which are estimated to average around 200 JOD per child annually—an amount that exceeds the capacity of many poor families. Furthermore, educational reintegration projects suffer from a lack of continuity, as UNICEF's 2023 report shows that around 60% of these projects cease immediately upon the end of international funding, without governmental adoption or the provision of local alternatives, thereby undermining their long-term impact.

Challenges Facing Dropout Education Centers in Jordan¹⁰

Dropout Education Centers are one of the key national tools for reducing school dropout rates in Jordan, offering a flexible educational alternative for students who have left formal schooling. However, these centers face multiple challenges that hinder their ability to fulfill their role effectively, necessitating an urgent and comprehensive institutional response.

First: Financial and Administrative Challenges

The centers suffer from chronic delays in disbursing financial support to students, creating instability and contributing to frequent withdrawals. Moreover, the daily support amount (3 JOD in cities and 1.5 JOD in camps) does not cover transportation or basic nutrition costs. This financial shortfall also affects infrastructure and support services within the centers, as there is no stable funding to ensure the continuity of programs.

Second: Weak Infrastructure and Limited Space

Many centers face space constraints, which prevent the effective implementation of curricular and extracurricular activities. Some centers have only two computers for more than 30 students, with no internet access or interactive whiteboards available. Additionally, essential cleaning supplies and basic equipment—such as vacuum cleaners—are lacking, which negatively impacts the learning environment.

¹⁰ Challenges Based on Interviews Conducted by the Tamkeen Team with Educational Staff in Dropout Education Centers During 2025.

Third: Outdated Curricula and Teaching Methods

The curricula used in dropout education centers have not undergone any significant development since 2004, rendering them unsuitable for current educational and societal changes. The absence of interactive teaching methods and play-based learning reduces program appeal and limits students' engagement and development.

Fourth: Lack of Psychological Support and Educational Guidance

One of the most pressing challenges is the suspension of school counselors in several centers for more than four months. This interruption has weakened the centers' ability to provide psychological support to students, particularly those affected by difficult family circumstances or impoverished environments. Moreover, facilitators are not sufficiently trained to provide this type of support, further exacerbating students' psychological challenges.

Fifth: Age Disparities and Weak Inclusion

Teachers struggle to manage the significant age differences among students in the same classroom, which complicates the learning process and increases pressure on educators. The absence of a clear plan for integrating children with disabilities, coupled with the lack of specialized facilitators, results in the marginalization of this group and adds to the educational burden.

Sixth: Weak Vocational Training and Extracurricular Activities

The centers lack in-school vocational programs during working hours, such as sewing, beauty, or handicrafts, despite the pressing need for them, especially for girls. Additionally, centers are not permitted to organize recreational trips, particularly in refugee camps, which deprives the program of one of its most important psychological and educational motivation tools.

Seventh: Additional Burdens on Facilitators

Facilitators are tasked with outreach activities to locate dropouts and persuade them to re-enroll—responsibilities that were previously assigned to specialized staff. These added duties have affected classroom performance and increased the psychological and professional pressure on teachers.

Eighth: Transportation Challenges for Girls

In areas such as Al-Dhulail, girls face difficulties returning home after school hours due to the lack of safe transportation, especially in the evenings. This challenge threatens girls' regular school attendance and increases the risk of dropout.

Ninth: General Recommendations

To address these multiple challenges, the centers recommend several urgent measures, including: reinstating the role of school counselors, updating curricula, providing computers, interactive boards, and internet access, equipping vocational workshops, expanding classroom spaces, and offering motivational extracurricular activities. They also recommend increasing transportation and food allowances, hiring qualified facilitators to support students with disabilities, and assigning dedicated staff for dropout outreach to reduce the burden on teachers.

Reality and Figures

Despite the relatively low annual dropout rates from basic education in Jordan—ranging between 0.25% and 0.38% during the period from 2011 to 2019—these figures do not reflect the true magnitude of the problem. While the percentage may appear small when viewed in isolation from the broader context, its cumulative effect over the years reveals an alarming scale. During this period alone, the total number of dropouts reached 44,120 boys and girls—a significant figure when compared to the size of the target population in basic education.

In a more recent and shorter period (2022–2024), 22,092 students dropped out within just three years, averaging over 7,300 students annually. This means that nearly half the total number of dropouts recorded over nine years occurred in only one-third of that time. Such a pattern indicates a worsening, rather than a decline, of the phenomenon—particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which weakened the education system, reduced the effectiveness of remote learning, and deepened inequalities in access to education, especially in poor and marginalized communities lacking adequate digital infrastructure amid a rapid shift to digital learning.

“ Despite the decline in annual dropout rates from basic education in Jordan, these figures do not reflect the true scale of the problem. ”

The severity of this phenomenon goes beyond the educational dimension to encompass economic and social aspects. Students who drop out of basic education often lose the opportunity to acquire essential skills, which in turn weakens their future prospects in the labor market. Basic education is not merely a stage of schooling; it forms the foundation for cognitive and life skills. Failing to complete it results in lower individual productivity and increases the likelihood of unemployment or participation in the informal labor market, ultimately having a negative long-term impact on economic and social growth.

From an economic perspective, the dropout of such a large number of students represents a double loss for the state: on one hand, it wastes the resources invested in educating these students without them completing the basic stages, and on the other hand, it places an additional burden on the social welfare system in the future. Each student who leaves school early is likely to require further support later on, whether in vocational training, social assistance, or even healthcare, turning the phenomenon from an educational issue into a comprehensive national challenge.

Given these realities, addressing school dropout should move from merely tracking numbers to implementing preventive measures and early interventions. This requires building an integrated system to monitor students at risk of dropping out, activating intervention tools such as conditional cash transfers, providing counseling and psychological services within schools, and improving the learning environment, especially in rural and poorer areas. Additionally, linking education to the labor market by introducing vocational and life skills components into the curriculum can increase students’ motivation to remain in school.

In short, despite its relatively modest annual rates, school dropout is a silent threat that is gradually growing to undermine the quality of education and the sustainability of development in Jordan. If the root causes of this phenomenon are not addressed through comprehensive strategies, its negative repercussions will become more evident in the coming years—whether in terms of human capital or the economic and social performance of the state.

“ Every child who leaves school early is likely to require additional support in the future.”

Recent data from the Jordanian Department of Statistics for the 2023/2024 school year reveals a concerning rise in student dropout rates from grades one to ten, with a total of 11,720 cases recorded. This upward trajectory is particularly evident as students advance to higher grades, underscoring deep-rooted structural challenges in the education system—chief among them the lack of educational sustainability and the limited effectiveness of early-stage preventive measures.

The statistics also highlight a marked gender disparity: 6,826 boys dropped out compared to 4,894 girls. This gap reflects socio-economic pressures that disproportionately affect male students, including societal expectations to join the workforce early and contribute to household income. Coupled with limited educational incentives, these pressures reduce boys' motivation to remain in school—especially in economically disadvantaged and marginalized communities.

The data further points to a troubling concentration of dropouts in the upper grades of basic education—particularly grades nine, ten, and eight—which saw 2,382, 2,192, and 1,920 cases, respectively. This pattern is far from coincidental; it reflects a web of interconnected social, psychological, and economic factors that warrant in-depth analysis to fully grasp their causes and consequences.

First from a psychosocial standpoint, adolescence is a pivotal period marked by profound changes in identity, belonging, and motivation. Without effective psychological support and counseling services in schools, students are more likely to disengage, especially if they feel unsafe or disconnected from their peers and educators. Issues such as bullying, discrimination, and the absence of positive role models can significantly increase the risk of dropping out.

Second, from an economic perspective, students in these grades are at a transitional stage between childhood and entry into the labor market, particularly in low-income settings. Families often perceive adolescents as capable of contributing financially, leading some to prioritize work over continued education—especially when schooling appears to offer limited future prospects.

Third, the perceived irrelevance of education is another critical factor. Many students struggle to see the connection between theoretical curricula and their practical or career aspirations. This disconnect is exacerbated in under-resourced schools that lack interactive teaching, extracurricular programs, and motivational activities, or when academic difficulties are met without effective learning support.

Fourth in terms of educational policy, declining quality in higher grades, overcrowded classrooms, shortages of qualified teachers, and weak pedagogical supervision all contribute to student disengagement. These systemic shortcomings can gradually erode students' commitment to education.

Finally, the lack of continuity between basic and secondary education—along with the absence of flexible alternative pathways such as vocational programs or non-formal education—leaves students with few options when they struggle in the traditional academic track. In such cases, leaving school becomes one of the only available choices.

Based on the above, addressing this upward pattern of dropout in the upper grades requires a comprehensive intervention that simultaneously tackles psychological, social, economic, and educational dimensions, through preventive and inclusive policies characterized by flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of those most at risk of leaving school.

The number of dropouts in grades four and five ranged between 687 and 746 students, indicating a clear increase in dropout rates as students progress through the grades, with a noticeable gender gap.

School Dropout Indicators (2023/2024)

Observation	Number	Indicator
Concentration in upper grades (ninth and tenth)	11,720 students	Total dropouts
58% of total	6,826	Males
42% of total	4,894	Females
Highest dropout in grade nine (2,382 cases) followed by grade ten (2,192 cases)	—	Highest dropout grade

While the figures indicate a relative decline in dropout cases in the lower grades—such as only 488 cases recorded in grade one—this decrease should not automatically be interpreted as a positive sign of the educational process’s health. On the contrary, it conceals concerning indicators related to the limited sustainability of learning and the weak ability to retain students within the educational system over the medium and long term.

“ The decline in dropout rates in the early grades should not be interpreted as a success of the educational system, but rather viewed within a broader context.”

The decline in dropout rates in the lower grades can be explained by several interrelated factors, beginning with what is known as “initial family commitment,” where parents demonstrate strong determination to enroll their children in school during the early stages in response to legal or social pressures encouraging the start of education at a certain age. However, this commitment is often temporary, waning over time in the face of mounting economic challenges and shifting family priorities, making early attendance more of a formality than a guarantee of educational continuity.

This lower dropout rate in early grades is also attributed to the absence of precise longitudinal tracking systems that monitor school performance and identify gradual underachievement that may eventually lead to dropout. A child may be physically present in school without making real academic progress, which increases the likelihood of withdrawal in later stages.

Added to this is the fragility of the educational environment in the early years, where many classrooms suffer from poor teaching quality and a lack of interactive learning methods, fostering a negative learning experience that weakens motivation. At the same time, educational policies lack an effective focus on early prevention, as most interventions are limited to later stages after dropout has occurred, with insufficient investment in early engagement support, such as psychological counseling, school meals, and attractive activities.

Finally, delayed economic pressures play an important role: families may keep their children in lower grades because they are too young to work, but as they grow older and physically more capable, the pressure to send them to work increases, leading to higher dropout rates in middle and upper grades. Thus, the low dropout rates in early stages are less an indication of a stable learning environment and more a reflection of the absence of immediate economic alternatives.

Based on the above, the decline in dropout rates in the early grades should not be viewed as an indicator of the success of the educational system, but rather placed in the broader context of the absence of educational sustainability and early prevention. A child's enrollment in school during the first years does not necessarily guarantee their continued attendance unless there is a supportive system that ensures their psychological, academic, and social continuity.

This leads to the importance of analyzing the structural causes behind the dropout phenomenon, which cannot be understood without addressing a set of interlinked dimensions, the first of which is the gender dimension.

Data clearly indicate that dropout rates among boys exceed those recorded among girls at all grade levels. This disparity reflects not only student performance or family commitment but, at its core, the gendered structure of social roles in Jordan. In some economically disadvantaged contexts, boys are expected to become economic contributors at an early age, prompting families to prioritize integrating them into the labor market over completing their education. Conversely, although girls show lower apparent dropout rates, they face different challenges, such as early marriage or domestic confinement, which can lead to indirect or "hidden" forms of dropout, such as chronic absenteeism or non-engaged attendance. Therefore, any effective response must consider the differing social and economic contexts for each gender.

This intersects with the marked variation in dropout rates across different grade levels, as data show that the likelihood of dropout increases with age. This upward trend suggests that the education system struggles to retain students in the advanced stages, a situation linked to multiple factors, including: escalating academic pressure without parallel educational support, a lack of student motivation to view education as a viable path to self-fulfillment or economic improvement, and the gradual decline of family and community support over time—particularly in poor and fragile environments. This underscores the need to redesign content and curricula to reflect student interests, strengthen their connection to school, and provide them with practical visions for their future.

Given this complexity, dropout cannot be treated as merely an educational issue but must be recognized as the outcome of deeper structural factors, including poverty, the absence of social safety nets, weak linkages between education and the labor market, and geographic disparities in access to basic services, particularly in rural areas and refugee camps.

Therefore, addressing dropout requires the adoption of a comprehensive national, multi-sectoral approach that goes beyond the Ministry of Education to include the Ministries of Labor, Social Development, and Planning, alongside civil society organizations and the private sector. This approach should integrate educational policy reforms with strengthened social protection, through in-school psychosocial and social support programs, the provision of flexible alternative pathways for vocational or part-time education, and linking education to conditional cash transfers to ensure students remain in school.

In this context, it is vital to address dropout as a national priority requiring a collective response, as the persistence of the phenomenon without addressing its root causes threatens to exacerbate a number of future structural problems, including: increased child labor, particularly in informal sectors with no protection or rights; the deepening of intergenerational poverty due to limited education; and widening social disparities that reinforce marginalization and entrench class and educational inequality.

Accordingly, tackling this phenomenon requires more than just technical or pedagogical measures—it calls for a comprehensive national strategy that redefines the role of the school and connects education to an integrated societal and developmental project.

In light of the above, school dropout in Jordan is a complex, structural national challenge that cannot be addressed in isolation from the surrounding economic, social, and political contexts. This reality demands the formulation of a multi-sectoral national strategy that integrates educational interventions with social and economic policies, designed with a fair vision that takes into account gender, geographic, and social disparities. Key features of this strategy would include developing a national early warning system for absenteeism and academic underachievement, enhancing psychological and social counseling within schools, expanding social protection programs linked to education, and creating flexible alternative pathways tailored to students most at risk of vulnerability and dropout.

The Relationship Between School Dropout and Child Labor

School dropout and child labor are among the most pressing social and economic challenges facing many countries, particularly in low- and middle-income communities. The relationship between these two phenomena is characterized by reciprocity and mutual reinforcement, with each contributing to the worsening of the other—creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break without effective interventions.

When a child leaves school, it not only deprives them of their fundamental right to education but also opens the door to early entry into the labor market, especially in the absence of effective alternatives and the necessary community and institutional support.

Numerous reports issued by both international and local organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, have shown that school dropout is one of the main drivers of child labor, particularly in informal sectors that require no advanced vocational skills, such as construction, agriculture, and services.¹¹

In communities affected by poverty and lacking social protection, children's education is often perceived as an additional economic burden, while child labor is seen as an immediate source of income. Under this perception, many families resort to withdrawing their children from school at an early age to meet daily needs, especially when government support programs are absent or fail to reach the most vulnerable groups. According to UNICEF, more than 80% of working children in the Middle East and North Africa are school dropouts, reflecting the deep interconnection between the two phenomena.¹²

11 International Labour Organization, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020*, Geneva, 2021.

12 UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2021*, New York, 2021.

On the other hand, child labor itself contributes to higher dropout rates. A child who works long hours in demanding conditions often suffers from physical and mental fatigue, which directly affects their ability to concentrate or attend school regularly. As a result, continuing education becomes unfeasible. Moreover, engaging in work reinforces the belief—both for the child and their family—that education yields no immediate return, unlike work, which provides instant income, even if it is minimal.

In the Jordanian context, official data reveal a similar pattern that reinforces this reciprocal relationship. The 2024 Employment and Unemployment Survey issued by the Jordanian Department of Statistics indicated that 47.3% of employed Jordanians do not hold an educational qualification higher than the basic level¹³, this is a high percentage, indicating the cumulative impact of the dropout phenomenon, particularly in the upper grades. Moreover, the entry of these individuals into the labor market without skills or proper training confines them to low-productivity jobs or the informal economy, where opportunities for advancement are limited and job security is lacking.

There is also a notable disparity between males and females in terms of educational attainment and economic participation rates. According to the same source, 56.1% of employed males have an educational level below the General Secondary Certificate, compared to only 9.1% of females¹⁴, this indicates clear differences in social roles and societal expectations. In many cases, males are pushed into the labor market at an early age to contribute to supporting the family, while females are given greater opportunity to continue their education—despite the specific challenges they face, such as child marriage or family-imposed restrictions.

Low educational attainment is one of the direct factors contributing to high unemployment rates. The 2024 Labor Force and Unemployment Survey indicated that 40% of unemployed individuals in Jordan hold a qualification below the General Secondary Education Certificate,¹⁵ this reflects the limited employment opportunities available to individuals who have dropped out of education. The data show that dropping out not only affects the child at the time but also extends into adulthood, limiting individuals' ability to compete in the labor market, prolonging periods of unemployment, and contributing to the reproduction of poverty and inequality.

13 Jordanian Department of Statistics, Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2024.

14 Jordanian Department of Statistics, Employment and Unemployment Survey, 2024.

15 Jordanian Department of Statistics, Labor Force and Unemployment Survey, 2024.

In light of these indicators, addressing unemployment and improving the quality of the labor market cannot be separated from early intervention to prevent school dropout. Policy approaches must be proactive, starting from the school itself by improving the learning environment, providing psychological and social support, and linking education to the labor market through flexible vocational pathways that accommodate the circumstances of students who do not find traditional academic education a suitable option. Conditional social protection programs tied to school attendance should also be activated to ensure children remain in school and to economically incentivize families to invest in their children's education.

The relationship between school dropout and child labor is a clear manifestation of a broader imbalance in the economic and educational structure. Addressing it requires not only reforming the school system but also adopting fair economic policies, fostering genuine community empowerment, and ensuring social safeguards that protect both the child and the family.

The Economic Impact of School Dropout and the Value of Preventive Intervention

In light of the growing school dropout phenomenon in Jordan, there is an urgent need to assess the economic cost of inaction compared to the expected return on the state's investment in reintegration programs and preventive support. This annex provides a financial analysis based on local data and international approaches:

First: Cost per Student in the Education System

Data from the Jordanian Ministry of Education indicate that the annual cost per student in public schools ranges between 450 and 1,300 Jordanian dinars.¹⁶ This variation depends on several factors, such as building ownership (government-owned or rented), the number of students per classroom, operational salaries, and administrative expenses. Based on these parameters, the average cost per student is estimated at 900 Jordanian dinars per year.

Second: Cost of incentives and cash support linked to school retention

Under the “Hajati” program implemented by UNICEF in partnership with the Ministry of Education, conditional cash incentives are provided to marginalized families to ensure their children remain in school. These incentives include transportation allowances, school meals, and stationery. The cash allocations are estimated at around 25 Jordanian dinars per child per month, over 9 school months, amounting to 225 dinars annually.

Third: Annual cost of reintegrating a dropout student

Based on the average cost of education (900 dinars) and the annual cash support (225 dinars), the estimated cost of reintegrating one dropout student is 1,125 dinars per year. Assuming 1,000 dropouts are targeted, the total annual intervention cost would amount to 1.125 million Jordanian dinars.

Fourth: Cost of failure – the economic loss resulting from non-intervention

According to estimates by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, each student who drops out of basic education costs the state an accumulated loss of approximately 10,000 Jordanian dinars over their working lifetime. This loss includes reduced productivity, a higher likelihood of reliance on government assistance, and lower participation in the formal economy. Accordingly, failing to reintegrate 1,000 dropout students could cost the state nearly 10 million Jordanian dinars.

Fifth: The Economic Return to the State from Preventive Intervention

If reintegration programs succeed in bringing back 60% of school dropouts (600 out of 1,000), the state will avoid future losses estimated at 6 million Jordanian dinars, reflecting these students’ future contributions to the formal labor market and the reduced burden on social support funds.

Sixth: Return on Investment (ROI)

Assuming a total intervention cost of 1.2 million dinars and a realized return of 6 million dinars from avoided future losses:

$$\text{ROI} = (6,000,000 - 1,200,000) \div 1,200,000 = 4.0$$

This means that every dinar invested in reintegrating school dropouts generates an economic return equivalent to 4 Jordanian dinars, making preventive intervention a highly cost-effective investment in the medium and long term.

Social, Economic, and Psychological Impacts

This complex relationship between school dropout and child labor produces a wide range of negative effects.

First, children are deprived of their fundamental right to education, which reduces their chances of improving their economic situation in the future, thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty from one generation to the next.

Second, child labor endangers their health and safety, as they are often forced to perform strenuous physical tasks, frequently under inhumane conditions. These children are also vulnerable to exploitation, whether in wages or in the work environment itself, without any effective legal means to protect them.

From a psychological perspective, working children often feel excluded and frustrated compared to their peers who remain in school, which can lead to long-term psychological effects such as low self-esteem, social withdrawal, or aggressive behaviors.

From a societal standpoint, this phenomenon increases illiteracy rates, reduces the productivity of the labor force over time, and undermines the state's capacity to build an educated, productive, and prosperous society.

Recommendations

At the Legislative and Executive Level:

1. Review national laws to ensure alignment with international conventions.
2. Impose stricter penalties on child employers and activate monitoring and inspection mechanisms.
3. Mandate reporting of school dropout cases within an integrated national system.

At the Educational Level:

1. Strengthen psychological and social counseling in schools, especially in higher grades.
2. Establish flexible vocational pathways parallel to the academic track.
3. Improve the learning environment, reduce classroom overcrowding, and provide engaging interactive activities.

At the Social and Economic Level:

1. Link education with social protection programs and conditional cash support.
2. Provide financial incentives to poor families to ensure their children remain in school.
3. Implement national awareness campaigns on the risks of dropout and the value of education.

At the Institutional Level:

1. Establish a permanent coordination unit among relevant ministries to reduce dropout.
2. Support civil society organizations as partners in prevention and intervention.
3. Engage the private sector in designing vocational training programs targeting dropouts.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of school dropout is not merely an educational challenge—it is a structural crisis with deep human and developmental dimensions, affecting the present of children and the future of Jordanian society as a whole. When a child is forced to leave school, they are not only deprived of their right to education but also stripped of the opportunity to build a dignified life, instead being pushed into a cycle of poverty, violence, and exploitation that may last for decades.

Global experiences have shown that addressing dropout cannot be fragmented or temporary—it requires a comprehensive national vision that considers the specific circumstances of marginalized groups and integrates the social, educational, and economic dimensions. Combating child labor is not achieved solely through penalties but by providing real alternatives, starting with family support, continuing through an engaging school environment, and leading to a labor market that respects rights.

Given the economic challenges and social pressures Jordan faces, protecting children from dropout and labor must become a national priority that embodies a commitment to the fundamental principles of social justice and reflects the urgent need for integrated measures to safeguard the most vulnerable and guarantee their right to education and protection.

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