Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism for Syrian Refugees Using the Arts

Post Assessment Report

Contents

1. Chapter 1: Background

1.1. Introduction

This assessment is part of a larger project entitled "Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism for Syrian Refugees Using the Arts" implemented by the National Center for Culture and Arts of the King Hussein Foundation. The Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) is conducting this evaluation to assess to what extend project's activities participated in raised awareness of Jordan youth and Syrian refugees and host communities, with a focus on youth, to social causes and impact of violent extremism using interactive theatre arts (IT) to stimulate discussion and promote cohesion in P/CVE.

1.2. Purpose of the project

To strengthen the resilience and raise awareness of Syrian youth to the negative impact of radicalism using interactive theatre and provide capacity building workshops in Theatre Based Techniques and Psychosocial Awareness Training and Maslow's hierarchy of needs for Syrian and Jordanian mentors to enable them to deliver workshops in Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps aimed at increasing the resilience of youth against violent extremism and recruitment.

1.3. Overall Impact

Increased peace, stability and resilience to violent extremism of Syrian refugee communities in Jordan.

1.4. Specific Objectives

- Raised awareness of Syrian refugees and host communities, with a focus on youth, to social causes and impact of violent extremism using interactive theatre arts (IT) to stimulate discussion and promote cohesion in P/CVE.

- Improved competences of volunteers/mentors in conducting creative, non-didactic value-based workshops using Theatre Based Techniques and Psychosocial Awareness skills to counter violent extremism and foster civic responsibility and tolerance.

- Building resilience of vulnerable youth to violent extremism and providing a sense of belonging to their communities/ society.

1.5. Main activities – First year

- The NCCA signed an MOU with the Community Peace Centre to support it during its PVE campaigns nationwide which aim to raise awareness about recruitment to VE groups, cybercrime and extremist ideology. The MOU pertains to the exchange of expertise and collaboration between both parties.

- The National Interactive Theatre Troupe has performed the "The Weakest Link" play in different locations. Flyers are being disseminated to audience members and roll up are being placed at the performance venues for visibility.
- NCCA successfully conducted the performances of the interactive play "The Weakest Link" online to complete the number of performances required for the project, in addition to a few physical performances for limited audience members. The performances were held via the platform ZOOM and in coordination with MOE school teachers nationwide. The performances were live and allowed for direct interaction with the students.
- An additional 50 performances through digital platforms have been approved to be conducted during 2021, allowing for audience interaction and expanding the project's outreach while ensuring audience safety.
- NCCA signed a contract with Ro'ya TV channel to professionally film "The Weakest Link" and ensure the quality and format of the play is compatible with broadcast standards so that it is coherent and visually appealing to the beneficiaries. The broadcast of the play and serves as a tool to gauge audience reaction to the performance and provide an insight into attitudes and perceptions. Ro'ya TV channel broadcast the play and increased the outreach nationwide, with a minimum reach of 120K viewership. Donors' visibility appeared in the credits.
- NCCA shared the play on its social media platforms to its followers exceeding 21,000 to raise awareness of the causes and impact of violent extremism on the society and inform on means to C/PVE.

1.6. Post-assessment Design

1.6.1. Methodology

The IRCKHF adopted mixed methods to assess to what extend project's activities participated in raised awareness of Jordan youth and Syrian refugees and host communities, with a focus on youth, to social causes and impact of violent extremism using interactive theatre arts (IT) to stimulate discussion and promote cohesion in P/CVE. This included the following:

- 72 phone surveys with Jordanian and Syrian youth aged (18-30, 40% male and 60% female)
- 1 Zoom meeting with male or female Jordanian youth.
- 1 Zoom with male or female Syrian youth.

1.6.2. Ethical considerations

As with all IRCKHF assessments, the team assessed the risks and took the necessary precautions to ensure that no harm came to any of the participants. Informed consent was provided by all participants: in addition to understanding the objectives of the assessment, participants were given the option to remain anonymous; be selective about the personal

information they provided; and to opt-out at any time. Written, informed consent was documented from every respondent.

1.6.3. Limitations

COVID-19 was one of the most notable limitations. In order to protect the participants in the assessment process on one side, and to protect the assessment team on the other side, the project management decided to replace face-to-face surveys with phone surveys. However, due to the extensive experience of the data-collection team, they were able to maintain the level of quality, in data collection, that the Center ensures in all its projects.

1.6.4. Demographic characteristics

72 male and female youth participated in the quantitative survey, distributed according to the below demographic characteristics. 56% of the sample were Syrians and 44% were Jordanians, while 60% were females and 40% were males. 74% of the sample live outside the camps and 26% live inside the Syrian camps. 40% of the sample were in the 25-30 age group, 39% in the 18-21 age group, and 21% were in the 22-24 age group.
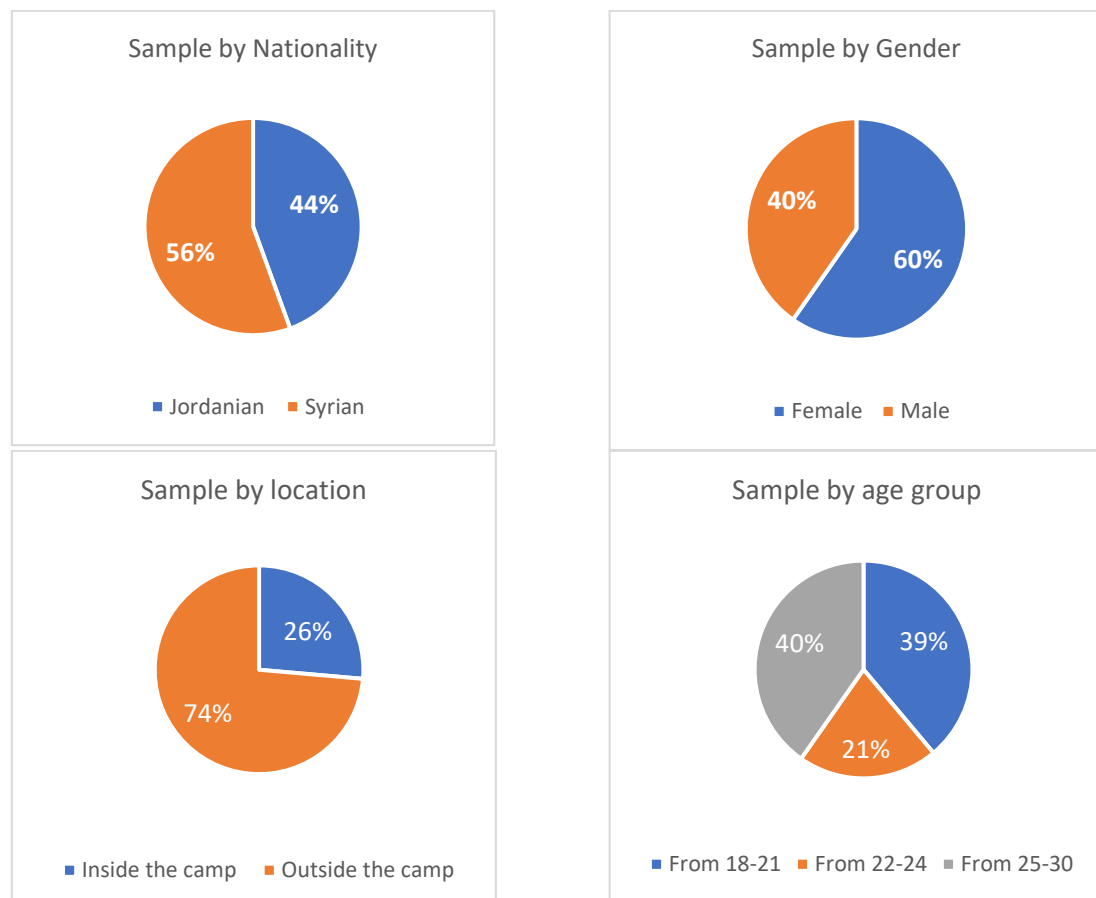
The sample included 7 governorates; Zarqa, Irbid, and Karak represented 74% of the total sample of male and female youth who participated in the post-assessment survey to evaluate the impact of the project activities after the first year.
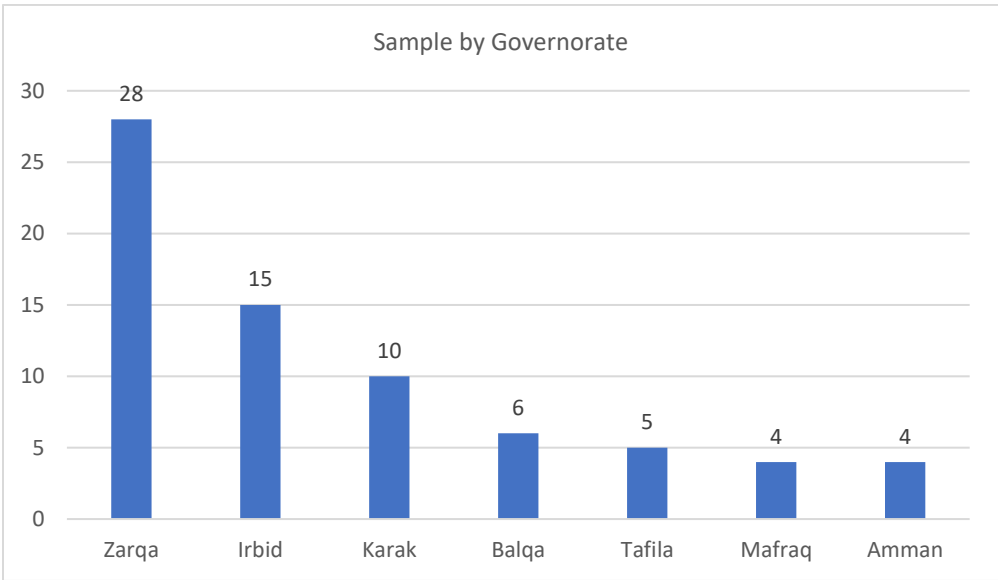
In terms of the marital status, we find that 61% of the male and female youth were single, 38% were married, and 1% were divorced.
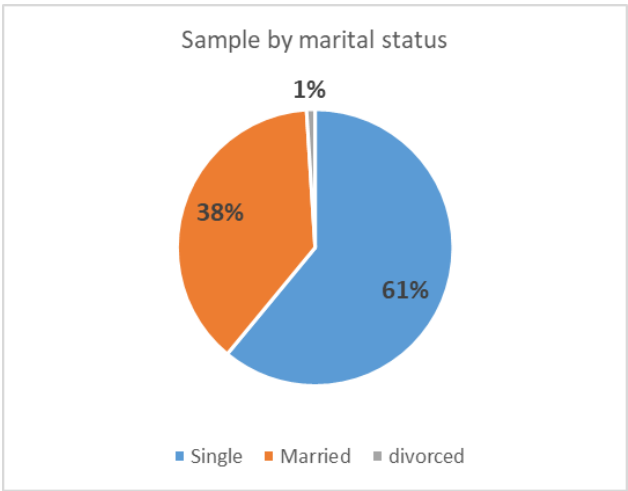
Regarding the academic achievement, we find that 51% of the youth has the general secondary education certificate and less, 41% of them were Jordanians and 59% were Syrians.

Sample by academic achievement

- 25% General secondary education certificate
- 26% Less than general secondary education certificate
- 38% Bachelor's degree
- 11% Diploma
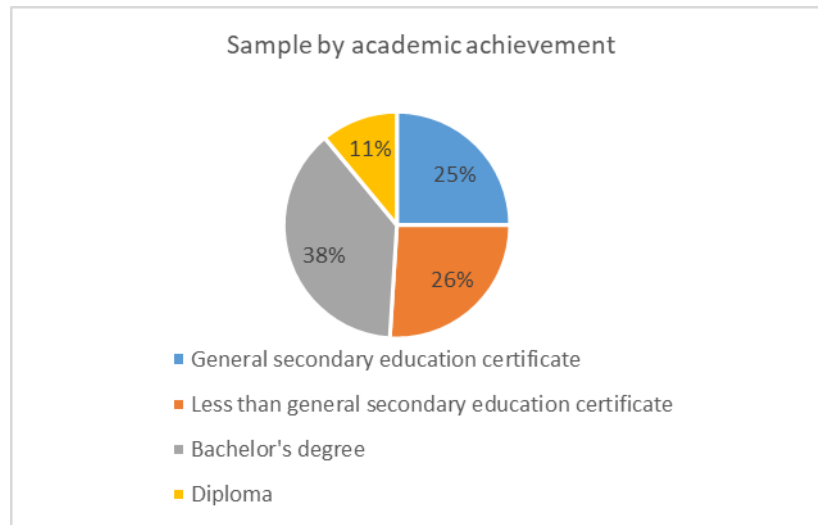
In terms of the economic situation, 20% of the youth are employed, 43% of which are Jordanians and 57% are Syrians. In the below chart, we find that 31% of the sample were unemployed and seek employment, 64% of them were Syrians and 35% were Jordanians.

Sample by economic status

- 20% Employed
- 31% Unemployed and seek employment
- 25% Student
- 24% A housewife
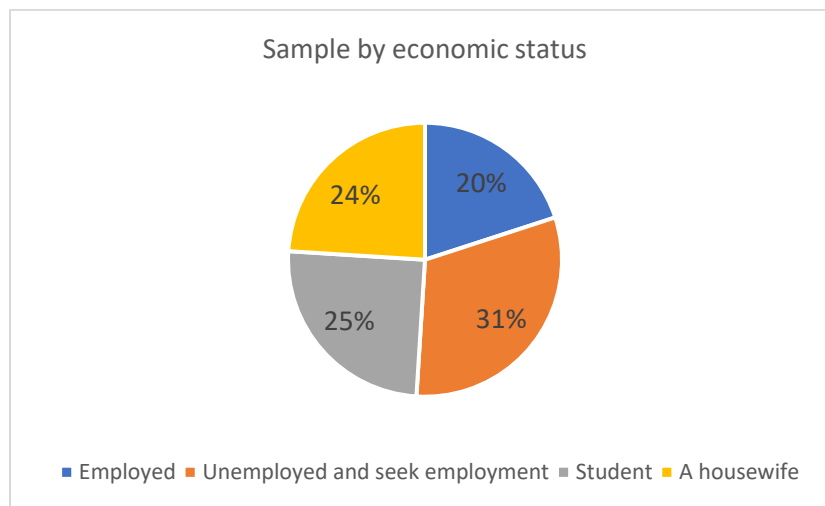
In terms of the household monthly income, we find the monthly income of 80% of the sample was less thatn350 JOD, 76% of which were Syrians 24% were Jordanians.

Sample by household monthly income

- Below 350 JOD
- From 351- 500
- From 501-800
- From 801-1500
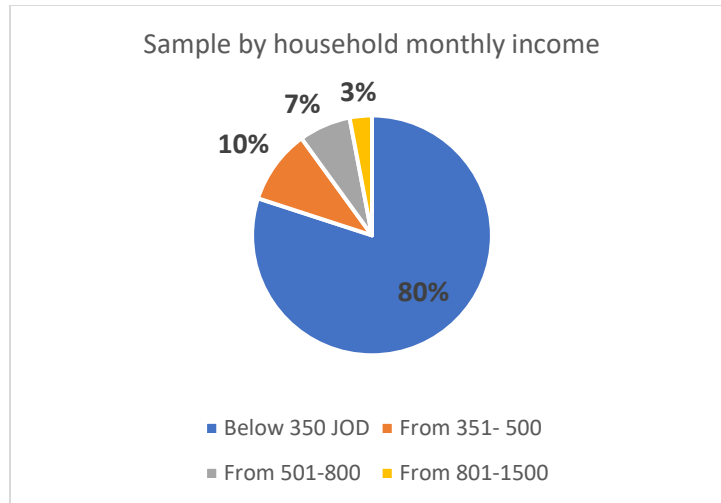
2. Chapter 2: Findings

2.1. The impact of the participation in the project on the youth

81% of the youth find that attending the play had a positive impact on them. It raised their awareness of the ideological radicalization phenomenon, its definition, consequences, and risks. The play's impact on the participants' personalities included the following aspects:

2.1.1. Correcting the misconceptions

The plays focused on the importance of correcting the misconceptions, clarifying the negative impact of the misconception of these concepts on societies and individuals. They also focused on the importance of enabling the youth to differentiate between the positive and negative ideas, as negative ideas make them easy prey to misconceptions that contradict the true religious concepts and constructive societal values. Such negative ideas might be translated into wrong behaviors among the youth.

"**the play discussed the reality we live in inside and outside the camp in the cities. Honestly, I had my own thoughts, but I acquired new and better ones**" Syrian female youth, Azraq Camp

Some of the youth indicated that the play bridged the knowledge gap schools and universities were supposed to fill.
"**the play was really good because it made us aware of things we did not learn about in schools or universities. They did not tell us how to deal with radicals**" Syrian male youth, Zarqa governorate

2.1.2. Selection of friends

In light of the decline in the role of the family and its influence on the youth, youth became more affected by the negative influences from outside the family. With the lack of family monitoring of the youth and the preoccupation with providing the necessary financial resources for them, teenagers and youth tend to seek information from outside the family, regardless of their validity, among which are their friends. These friendships could be a cause of most behavioral and ethical problems, hence the importance of family monitoring of their children's behavior in indirect ways that do not cause a loss of trust between the two parties, nor do bring accusations against the children that are not based on rationales.

In addition, parents must get to know their children's friends, even by creating a fabricated coincidence that leads the father, for example, to get to know his son's friend and the same thing for the girl and her mother, because friends enjoy high credibility with their friends. During adolescence, the father must warn his children from making friends with bad people and to clarify their impact on the individual by bringing real examples of others who were affected by bad friends.

Through play attendance, youth are now aware that friends have a major and clear impact on the person, whether in the university, neighborhood, mosque, or even the gym. Therefore, it is important to choose good friends.

"**we became aware of radicalization discrimination. We discussed how one should deal with the community and choose his/her friends**" Syrian female youth, Irbid governorate

2.1.3. Impact on participants' personalities

Syrian and Jordanian male and female youth stated that attending the play was a driver for positive change in their personalities in terms of avoiding introversion and isolation, making friendships that would reflect positively on their personalities, and paying attention to their academic achievement as it supports the youth in having a better future.

"**I had a small circle of acquaintances; I did not communicate with many people and did not pay much attention to my study. The play encouraged me to interact with more people, it has really changed me**" Jordanian male youth, Karak governorate.

2.1.4. Role of the family

Youth participants realized the important role of the family in shaping their personalities, as the family is the most important link in the process of socialization. Family relations are based on continuous interaction, with a high degree of connection between its members, and their dependence on each other. In addition, these relationships are based on the process of persuasion and being persuaded. Therefore, the family remains the most important institution in the upbringing of generations, with the importance of school and the media, and emphasizing the importance of dialogue within the family.

"**raising awareness about radicalization. I am now aware that I need to be more social, not isolated or extremist. I also must not generate fatawas, think before I talk, and develop myself. Regrading family breakdown, I now sit and share my ideas with my family and ask for their opinion without insisting that mine is right**" Syrian male youth, Azraq camp.
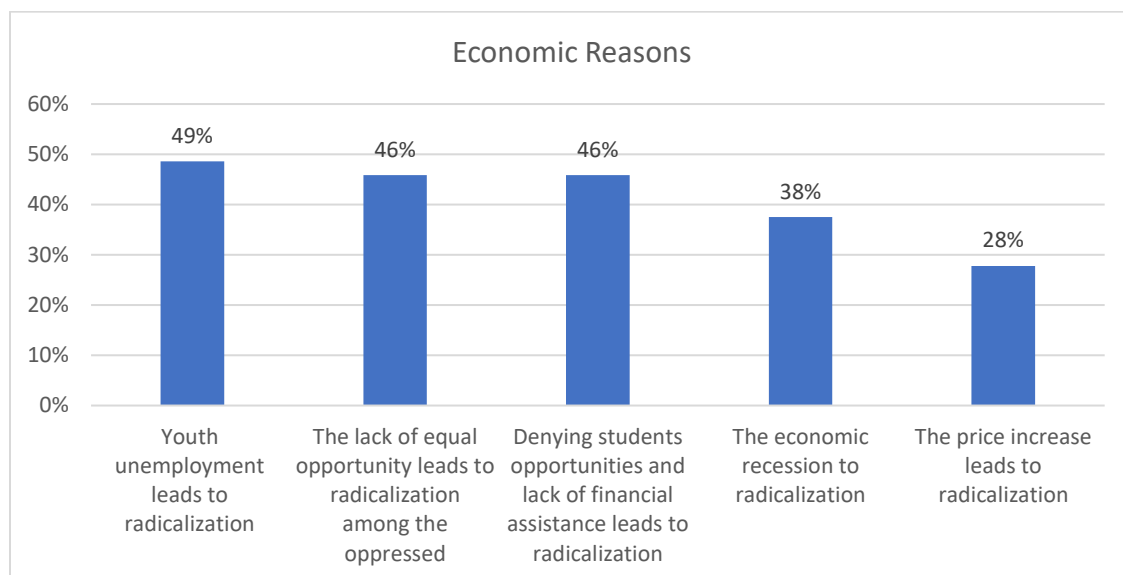
The youth indicated that various bodies raise awareness about the risks of radicalizations, such as the media. However, the style by which this information was represented, the interactive play, was a new approach that could to convince the youth and make it an exceptional experience.

"**we already knew this information, but seeing it represented in a play was different. It has been a very long time since I watched the play, but I still remember it and the participants. Honestly, it left t mark because I am against learning by instructions, I prefer more practical learning**" Syrian female youth, Zarqa.

2.1.5. The youth's acquired awareness of the causes of racialization

The interactive play contributed to raising Syrian and Jordanian youth's awareness of the causes of radicalization among the youth. 30% of the youth participants expressed that the project activities contributed to highlighting the existence of economic factors contributing to creating a generation of ideological radicals. The reasons behind this, by importance from the youth's point of view, include the high level of unemployment, which is considered a social and economic scourge that has negative effects on the individuals and society alike in the absence of the system of values and family control. Among the other economic reasons, the youth indicated that have a serious impact on the youth's orientation towards ideological radicalization, is the absence of equal opportunities among individuals, which results in ideological radicalization among the marginalized group that did not have access to the supporting opportunities. The youth

also expressed that the scarcity of opportunities and financial assistance to the youth, including students, results in ideological radicalization.

Economic Reasons

Category	Percentage
Youth unemployment leads to radicalization	49%
The lack of equal opportunity leads to radicalization among the oppressed	46%
Denying students opportunities and lack of financial assistance leads to radicalization	46%
The economic recession to radicalization	38%
The price increase leads to radicalization	28%

51% of Syrian and Jordanian youth find that ideological radicalization has social causes are, in order of importance to the target group: dealing with bad friends, especially extremists, widespread ignorance and lack of awareness among some families, family breakdown, domestic violence with the wife and children, lack of social integration of some individuals which leads them to extremism, and lack of social integration of some individuals which leads them to extremism and weakens their values of loyalty and citizenship.

Social Reasons

Category	Percentage
Having a bad company, especially of extremists	58%
The widespread of ignorance and lack of awareness among some families	57%
Family disintegration	54%
Family violence with the wife and children	50%
Lack of social integration	50%
lack of ethics in society	47%
Weak values of loyalty and citizenship	40%
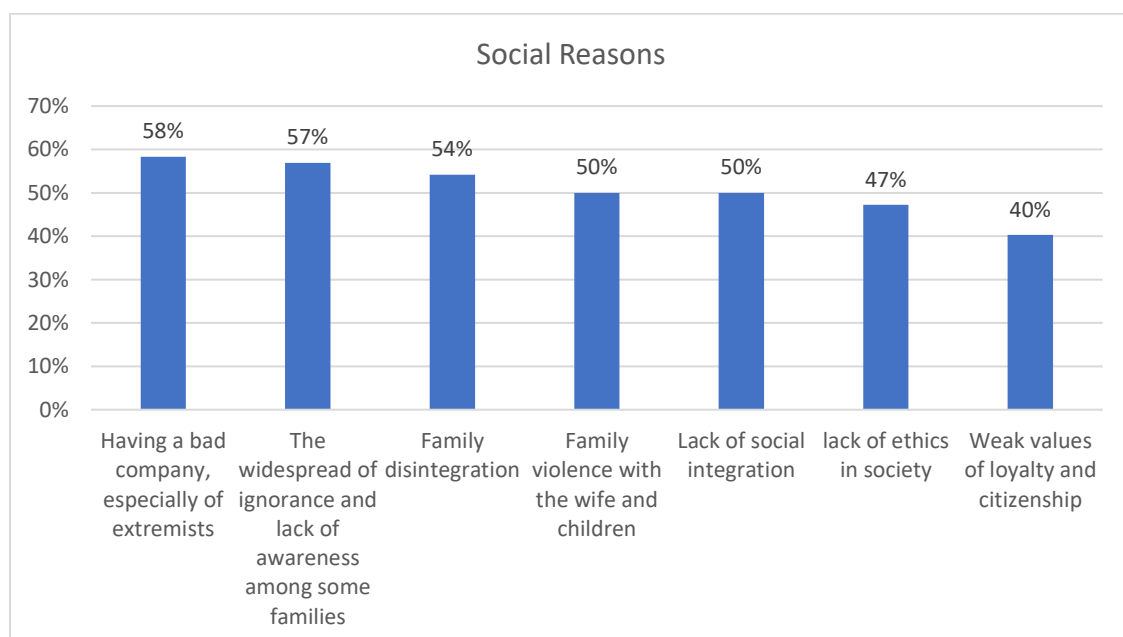
%46 of the Syrian and Jordanian youth find that ideological radicalization has religious causes are, in order of importance to the target group: the absence of a proper understanding of the texts of (Sharia) Islamic Law, receiving fatwas without ascertaining their source and viability, the insufficient role of preaching and guidance in society, and the presence of radical religious groups.

Religious Reasons

Category	Value
The absence of a proper understanding of the texts of (Sharia) Islamic Law	51%
Receiving fatwas without ascertaining their source and viability	51%
The insufficient role of preaching and guidance in society	42%
The presence of radical religious groups	40%
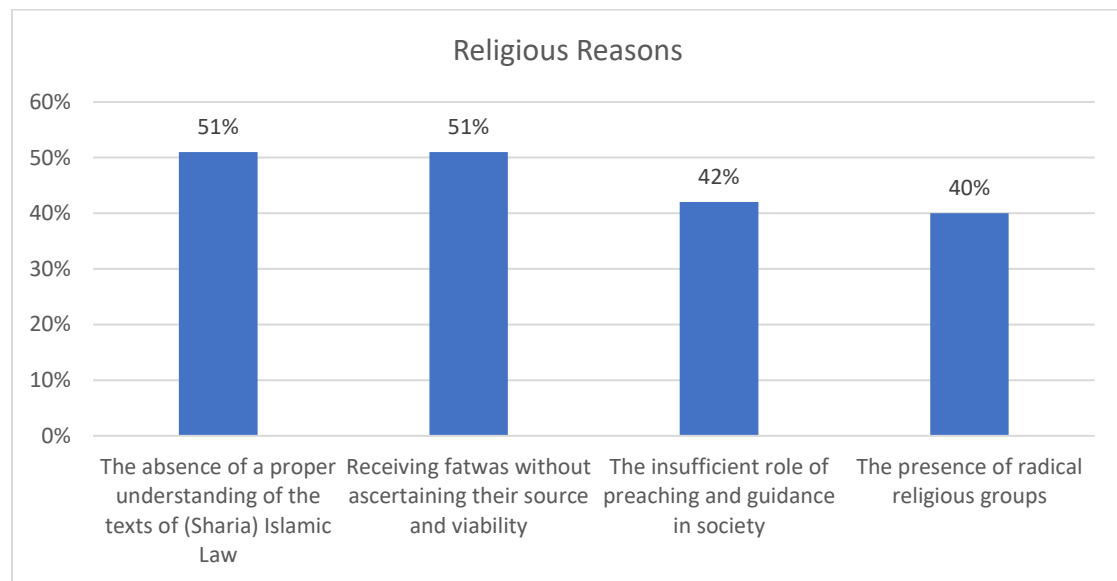
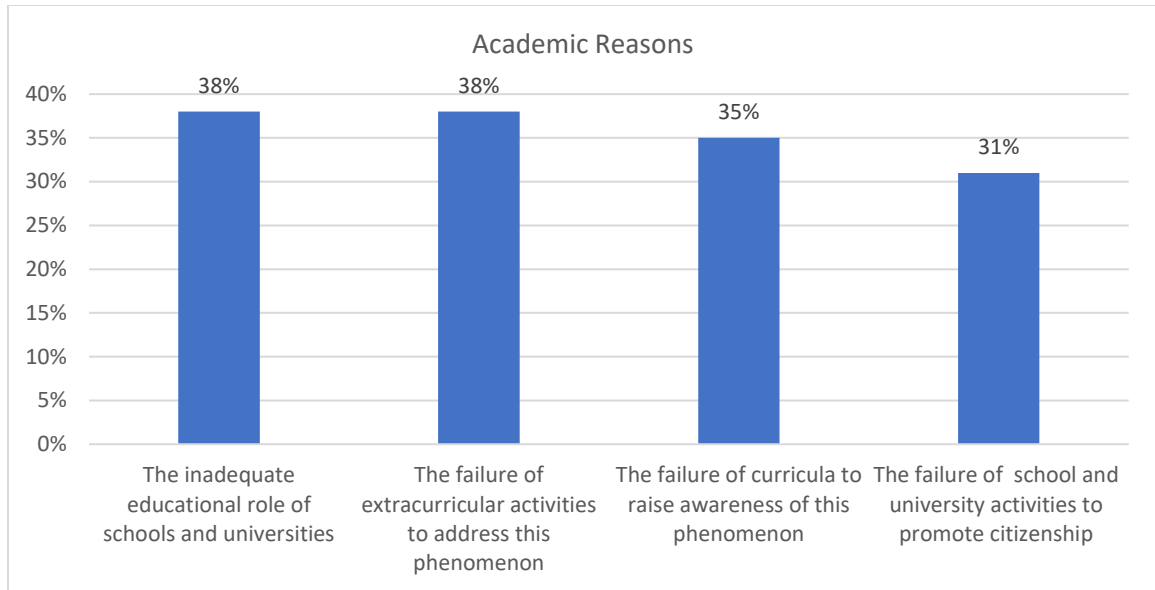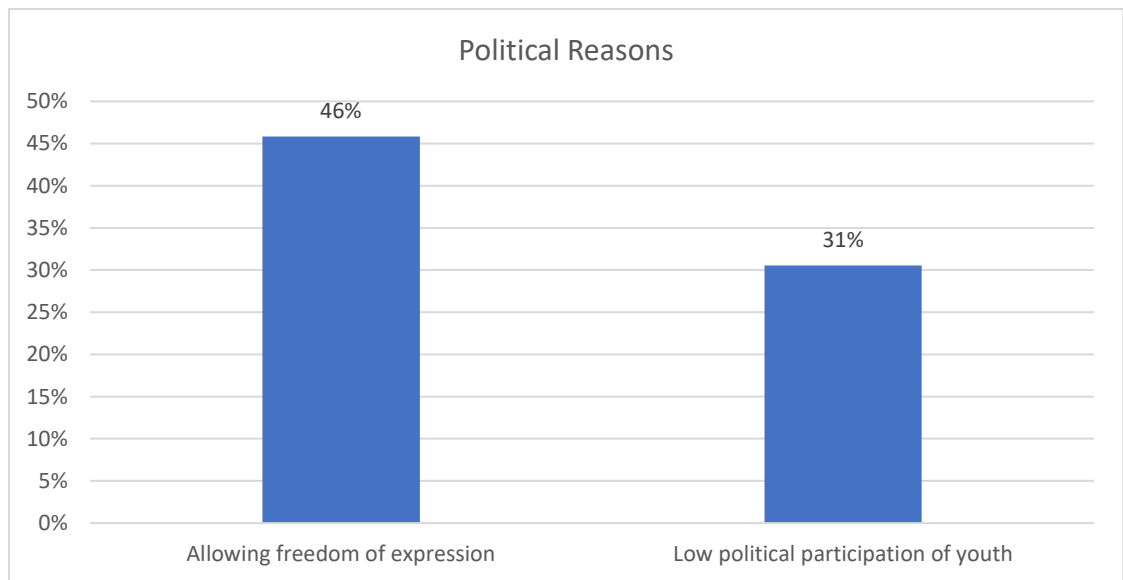%35 of the Syrian and Jordanian youth find that ideological radicalization has religious causes are, in order of importance to the target group: the weakness of extracurricular activities in dealing with these phenomena, the insufficient educational and cultural role of schools and universities, the curriculum shortcomings in dealing and raising awareness of this phenomenon, and the weakness of school and university activities in promoting citizenship.

Academic Reasons

Chart showing academic reasons (percentages):
- The inadequate educational role of schools and universities: 38%
- The failure of extracurricular activities to address this phenomenon: 38%
- The failure of curricula to raise awareness of this phenomenon: 35%
- The failure of school and university activities to promote citizenship: 31%

38% of the Syrian and Jordanian youth find that the political causes of ideological radicalization are, in order of importance to the target group: lack of freedom of expression and the youth's weak political participation.

Political Reasons

Chart showing political reasons (percentages):
- Allowing freedom of expression: 46%
- Low political participation of youth: 31%

By reviewing the previous data, we find that the youth have agreed that social causes, primarily dealing with bad friends, especially radicals, widespread ignorance and lack of awareness among some families, family breakdown, and domestic violence with the wife and children are of the key factors leading the youth towards ideological radicalization.

Most of the analyzes related to countering radicalization focus on the role of school curricula, media, poverty, unemployment, political factors, and other causes. However, we rarely find analyzes focusing on the role of the family in this regard. The family is the most important link in the social and political upbringing process. Family relations are not utilitarian relationships, but rather intimate relationships based on continuous interaction with a high degree of connection between its members and their dependence on each other. The existing power relations between family members play an important role in the process of persuasion and being persuaded, hence the family remains the most important institution in bringing up generations, with the importance of schools and the media.

The family may not be the reason behind the radicalization of its children. However, by not paying attention to the children, not spending enough time with them, and not trying to meet their needs and deal with their problems, especially during adolescence and youth, the family creates the conditions for their slipping into radicalization and violence, whether its manifestations are political or social.

The family does not control all the intellectual and ideological inputs that children are exposed to at school, by friends, or through various media outlets. Nevertheless, it is a significant link because it continuously interacts with the children, and can notice any changes in their behavior and discover any manifestations of problems that children may suffer from.

2.2. General recommendations from the participants

The youth believe that plays were presented elaborately. They recommended holding live plays inside schools, universities, and camps after the end of government arrangements regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. They also recommended tackling other topics of interest to the youth, such as gender-based discrimination issues, and targeting all age groups, as they believe that theater has a great impact on individuals in general.

> "**it was a great play that was presented elaborately and discussed new ideas. I hope more refugees participate in such plays because theater do have a greater impact on people**" Syrian male youth, Azraq camp.

In case the plays are presented through the Internet, the youth recommended the provision of mechanisms guaranteeing the quality of the Internet and prevent its interruption, and provision of means that ensure greater interaction of participants with the interactive theatrical presentation, such as interaction by allowing the use of video cameras.

Based on the attendance and interaction of the participants with the play, they submitted the following recommendations to the relevant authorities, which is evidence that the play contributed to raising their awareness of the roles of relevant authorities in the issue of radicalization among the youth.

2.2.1. Role of religious institutions

- The need for preachers and clergy to be familiar with the main challenges the youth face and how to communicate with their world (their language, way of thinking, mood, and nature of understanding) with an emphasis on focusing on an effective mosque discourse that attracts the attention of the youth and solves their problems. They are also responsible for providing religious advice and accepting dialogue with females who have different needs and social conditions.

"**clergy must understand all society groups and accept dialogue with females. Sometimes when you ask them for advice, they refuse to talk to you and say that they want to talk to a male… I do not want my brother, father, or husband to ask them for me, but they insist I bring a male with me**" Syrian female youth, Azraq camp.

"**using other methods other than intimidations. Focusing on the positive side when raising people's awareness rather than the negative side and intimidation, and acquiring a method to deliver information properly**". Jordanian female youth, Zarqa governorate.

- Training preachers and clergy on how to deal with the youth they try to modify their radical behavior. Clergy must not be part of the community that isolates those youth, which contributes to increasing their extremism and orientation towards ideological radicalization.

"**improving their way of dealing with radicals. We must appoint clergy who talk to and treat the youth like their big brothers or friends**" Syrian female youth, Zarqa governorate.

- Clergies' and preachers' role must not be limited to delivering Friday sermons, but to establish communication channels with the youth, whether through social media or TV channels, to provide a proper understanding of religion based on Quran and Sunnah.

- Renewing the religious discourse based on today's variables and youth's needs.

"**they must raise the youth's awareness through Friday sermons and facilitate understanding of religion. Most importantly, they must focus on inter-religious tolerance, and love, and acceptance of other religions and people**." Jordanian male youth, Azraq camp.

- Raising the youth's awareness of the sources of proper religious information to avoid suspicious religious platforms.

"**collaborating with the government and not appointing muftis before confirming their eligibility. Not disseminating fatawas without ascertaining them and raise people's awareness of not receiving fatawas without ascertaining their sources. In addition to correcting misconceptions about Is lam and believing in coexistence**." Syrian female youth, Irbid governorate.

2.2.2. Role of educational institutions

The youth believe that schools and universities have a fundamental role, as the school represents the second social milieu following the family in which the young imbibe social and cultural values of society. The family has a key role in instilling moral values, patriotism, and belonging by instilling correct concepts in the children from a young age. In addition to promoting critical and scientific thinking and objectivity, and encouraging the rejection of radicalization and violence. Education must have a role in establishing moral standards, values of freedom, democracy, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance of others, and strengthening the spirit of citizenship. The youth suggested various mechanisms to achieve this goal, including: including topics on radicalization in the curriculum, awareness-raising and counseling through lectures, school counseling, and extracurricular activities.
"the curricula lack the concepts of patriotism and affiliation. We read and memorize the country's foundation history just to get good grades, then we forget it. We are not aware that this is my country which I love and do not know how to be active citizens."

"**I have a university student for 5 years now and no one has ever made us aware of these concepts. Despite that this play's attendance was not mandatory, we did attend it. The phenomenon of radicalization should be included in compulsory university subjects and attendance should be mandatory**" Jordanian male youth, Irbid governorate.

2.2.3. Role of the family

The youth agreed that the family is the first building block for the formation of a healthy personality. Whenever the family is cohesive, the children will be conscious and mentally sound. They emphasized that the family has the most prominent role in preventing radicalization and its spread among children, followed by the role of the school. Opening channels of communication and containing children are among the factors that protect them from radicalization in all its forms. Family problems are often the first seed of radicalization. The family has the primary role in the development of children and the formation of their mentalities from birth, and in shielding them from radicalization, so they ensure they properly up bring their children away from violence and try to contain them and protect their ideas. Marital strife has a great impact on the psyche of children. Often, when the family is loving and is in an atmosphere of love and dialogue, children will not be subject to any kind of radicalization. In addition to shielding children from radicalization and not protecting them from bad friends who carry radical and destructive ideas. The youth demand civil society organizations to provide programs educating parents about the importance of the proper upbringing of children.

"**educating parents because they educate their children in return. Organizations can organize meetings and sessions with the families. They must not use intimidation.**" Jordanian female youth, Balqa governorate.

"**most radicals have an emotional void and family breakdown; their families do not support or educate them**" Jordanian female youth, Tafileh governorate.

"**not to discriminate between boys and girls. We should raise children's awareness of the forms of radicalization and direct them to right behaviors**" Syrian female youth, Azraq camp.

"**moderately monitoring the children without negligence or extremism. Monitoring any change in their behavior, knowing how they are friends with, and where they go**" Syrian male youth, Azraq camp.

"**establishing dialogue with the children, teaching them to respect others and other religion, and warning them from bad friends**" Syrian female youth, Irbid governorate.

2.2.4. Role of media institutions

Electronic media has gained popularity among the youth due to its privacy, low cost, wide participation, and ease of use. Hence highlights the role of traditional media, such as satellite channels, print media, and radio stations in allocating more coverage to educating the youth about radicalization, its concept and risks, and the importance of investigating news from credible websites and avoiding rumors. The media must be impartial when raising issues, such as radicalization, to gain the credibility of the youth. It must also have more interest in providing valuable content on social media which has become an important source of information for the youth.

"**accuracy in delivering news and avoiding rumors or wrong information. Information should be presented in a way suitable for the community**". Jordanian female youth, Balqa governorate.

"**various media outlets in our society spread fault news. They should deliver credible news and discuss radicalization more often**". Syrian female youth, Karak governorate.

3. Plays on the Internet.

The team of the National Center for Culture and Arts presented an interactive and face-to-face theatrical performances in different governorates. However, in light of the developments of the epidemiological situation and in line with the defense orders, the team completed provided the performances through the Internet. Most of the youth found that watching performances on Zoom were of the same level and quality of the live theater, where they were able to obtain the information, these plays were intended to deliver. Nevertheless, the youth had the following observations on the performances delivered online:

- Some of the youth said that the internet connection was poor, hence the play disconnects.

"**the nice thing about plays is that you get to see them live, but this play was great and clear. We did face some difficulties with the internet, but we were able to understand the message**" Syrian female youth, Azraq camp.

- The level of interaction was low. Among the reasons is that some of the youth watched the recorded version of the play and the management of dialogue for a large audience was much harder through the internet.

"**there is a huge difference. Live plays do have a bigger impact, we stay focused and address plenty of issues. One might lose the internet connection and not be able to hear anything**" Jordanian female youth, Zarqa governorate.

"**the concept of the play is great, but I do prefer live plays so I can ask questions and get answers right away. When we did ask questions, they put us in a waiting room in the app for 5-15 minutes. They often answer the questions and often do not**" Syrian female youth, Azraq camp.

On the other hand, some find that online plays did accomplish wider goals in terms of access to a broader base of youth and flexibility in attendance time based on the youth convenience. Another major factor was that in some cases, the entire family would watch the plays, which maximizes its impact.

"**it was perfect, my entire family watched it and we discussed it afterwards**" Jordanian female youth, Zarqa governorate.

The female youth expressed that online plays encourages them to interact because they feel shy to participate in front of a large audience.

"**I felt that watching it online encouraged me to participate, I think I would feel shy to participate in live theater**." Jordanian female youth, Balqa governorate.

The other advantages of online plays are the accessibility to the play due to the lack of need to move to other locations.

"**it would be different in terms of the difficulty to go to the location in which the play is performed, especially if it is held in another governorate. Online plays are good because one would watch it from home, the only issue is the internet disconnection**". Jordanian female youth, Balqa governorate.

4. **Results**

- Project activities, primarily interactive theater, contributed to raising the awareness of Jordanian youth and Syrian refugees in camps and host communities of ideological radicalization, its causes, and impact on the individual and society.
- Project activities corrected the misconceptions related to ideological radicalization and clarified the negative impact of this misconception on individuals and communities.

- The male and female Syrian and Jordanian youth mentioned that attending the play was a driver for positive change in their personalities in terms of avoiding introversion and isolation, and making friendships that would reflect positively on their personalities.
- Project activities highlighted the importance of the family role in socialization and that family relations should be based on continuous interaction between its members and persuasion.
- The youth realized that the interactive theater had an impact on the individuals and is capable of raising awareness, highlighting, and changing attitudes towards the social issues that affect the community and individuals' everyday life.
- Project activities contributed to raising the youth's awareness of the responsibilities and role of relevant bodies, including educational, religious, and media institutions and family, regarding ideological radicalization.
- Through social media platforms, ZOOM, and TV channels, the play succeeded in accessing a broader segment of youth which raised the level of awareness of this issue.
- Through the internet, the plays contributed to revealing the importance of targeting the family, not the individuals (youth) only, to achieve a greater impact. Whereas in some cases, the entire family did watch the play, which achieved a greater impact and promoted dialogue among the family on radicalization.

5. Recommendations

- Working on disseminating this theatrical work to target all age groups and families through TV channels, social media platforms, schools and universities, and civil society organizations operating inside and outside Syrian refugee camps.
- Designing part of project activities to target families, which play a key role in socialization, to achieve a greater impact through promoting dialogue within the family.
- Promoting communication and integrating the relations between the family and the educational institution to combat radicalization. In addition to the collaboration between them to design plans and purposeful programs to create a state of harmony and joint action to address social issues including radicalization.
- Despite the significant impact of the interactive face-to-face theater arts and due to COVID-19, the importance of using technology and the internet has emerged to facilitate target groups' broader access to these purposeful theater arts.
- Promoting partnerships with civil society organizations working with marginalized groups, such as refugees, poverty pockets, battered women, family breakdown cases, etc. so these organizations contribute to raising awareness about this issue through the tools used by the NCCA; theater arts.