

# From Classroom to Community: Leveraging Social Studies Education for Long-Term and Inclusive Economic Growth



This policy paper is part of the project entitled “Addressing Socio-Economic Challenges in Jordan: Reflections on the Economic Modernisation Vision 2033” implemented jointly by the West Asia-North Africa Institute and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Jordan Office. The aim of the project is to examine Jordan’s Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV) implementation from fresh angles, highlighting the opportunities and necessary reforms to ensure the vision delivers on its promise for Jordan’s future.

**West Asia-North Africa Institute**  
70 Ahmad Al-Tarawneh St.  
P.O. Box: 1438  
Amman 11941 - Jordan  
[info@wana.jo](mailto:info@wana.jo)  
[www.wanainstitute.org](http://www.wanainstitute.org)

**Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Jordan Office**  
23 Isma’eel Haqqi Abdoh St.  
P.O. Box: 831025  
Amman 11183 - Jordan  
[Info.Jordan@kas.de](mailto:Info.Jordan@kas.de)  
[www.kas.de/jordan](http://www.kas.de/jordan)

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Published in 2026 by the WANA Institute and KAS Jordan  
Author: Salma Nasser  
Edited by: Dr Yara Shaban  
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# Abstract

Jordan ranks in the bottom 20th percentile of countries globally on social capital indices, indicating low levels of interpersonal trust, civic engagement, and tolerance, which undermine Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision's goal of inclusive economic growth and improved quality of life. Civic and social studies education plays an instrumental role in strengthening social capital by cultivating shared values of social tolerance and civic and social engagement (CSE) among young people. This paper examines the extent to which social tolerance and CSE are promoted in Jordan's education ecosystem at the policy, institutional and interpersonal levels by analysing the General and Specific Framework for Social Studies, the national social studies curriculum, and data from focus group discussions conducted with social studies teachers across the Kingdom. The paper finds that although the new national social studies curriculum incorporates concepts of tolerance and CSE, insufficient teacher training, limited learning tools, and weak school infrastructure constrain its effective implementation. Addressing these gaps will strengthen Jordan's social capital and help realise the broader ambitions of the EMV. Recommendations call for addressing gaps in the curriculum, establishing partnerships among stakeholders to promote tolerance and CSE among adolescents, and investing in teacher training and school infrastructure.

## الملخص

يقع الأردن في شريحة أدنى ٢٠٪ من دول العالم في مؤشرات رأس المال الاجتماعي، مما يشير إلى تدنياً في مستويات الثقة بين الأشخاص والمشاركة المدنية والتسامح، مما يُفرض أهداف رؤية التحديث الاقتصادي المتعلقة بتحقيق نمو اقتصادي شامل وتحسين نوعية الحياة للمواطنين. وفي هذا السياق، تلعب التربية المدنية والدراسات الاجتماعية دوراً محورياً في تعزيز رأس المال الاجتماعي من خلال غرس القيم المشتركة للتسامح الاجتماعي والمشاركة المدنية والاجتماعية بين اليافعين والشباب. تبحث هذه الورقة المدى الذي يتم فيه تعزيز التسامح الاجتماعي والمشاركة المدنية والاجتماعية في النظام التعليمي الأردني على المستويات السياسية والمؤسسية والشخصية، وذلك من خلال تحليل الإطار العام للدراسات الاجتماعية، والمنهاج الوطني للدراسات الاجتماعية، والبيانات المستمدة من مجموعات النقاش المركزية التي أجريت مع معلمي الدراسات الاجتماعية في مختلف أنحاء المملكة. تُظهر الورقة أنه على الرغم من تضمين مفاهيم التسامح والمشاركة المدنية والاجتماعية في منهاج الوطني الجديد للدراسات الاجتماعية، إلا أن نقص تدريب المعلمين، وضالة الأدوات التعليمية، وضعف البنية التحتية المدرسية تُقيد التنفيذ الفعال له. وستساهم معالجة هذه الفجوات في تعزيز رأس المال الاجتماعي في الأردن وتحقيق الطموحات الأوسع لرؤية التحديث الاقتصادي. تدعو الورقة لمعالجة التغارات في منهاج، وإقامة شراكات بين أصحاب المصلحة لتعزيز التسامح والمشاركة المدنية والاجتماعية بين اليافعين، والاستثمار في تدريب المعلمين والبنية التحتية المدرسية.



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# 1 Introduction

His Royal Highness King Abdullah II emphasises the importance of education in shaping Jordan's future and its capacity to spread tolerance, mutual understanding, and raise global citizens rooted in their heritage.<sup>1</sup> Similar values are emphasised in Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV), which seeks to maintain Jordan as a “symbol of tolerance and altruism”,<sup>2</sup> celebrate diversity, and promote sustainable, inclusive growth through its pillars of economic growth and quality of life.

Despite these ambitions, Jordan ranks low on global social capital indicators, which measure perceived tolerance towards minorities and immigrants, donations made to charity, voter turnout, volunteering, and the extent of voicing opinions to public officials.<sup>3,4</sup> Jordan's ranking on these indicators suggests that social capital, central to the EMV's goals, requires greater attention, especially given its significance for building strong societies and economies.<sup>5</sup> Social capital refers to the resources available to individuals, including social networks, affiliations, and community organisations, that bridge between individuals and foster a sense of belonging.<sup>6,7</sup>

Strengthening Jordan's social capital is therefore crucial for promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development and enhancing the quality of life. Economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development are interdependent: people and societies shape the economies that sustain their livelihoods, and economic conditions, in turn, influence wellbeing. Strong social capital is associated with higher economic growth rates and improved health outcomes,<sup>8</sup> and socially cohesive societies are better positioned to ensure equitable labour market participation and facilitate an attractive environment for investment and job creation.<sup>9</sup> Jordan's efforts to improve its investment climate<sup>10</sup> and to address the low female economic participation of 14.5

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<sup>1</sup> Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein, “Seventh Discussion Paper: Developing Human Resources and Education Imperative for Jordan's Progress”, April 15, 2017, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/discussion-papers/developing-human-resources-and-education-imperative-for-jordans-progress>.

<sup>2</sup> Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Economic Modernisation Vision: Unleashing Potential to Build the Future, <https://www.jordanvision.jo/img/vision-en.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Legatum Institute, Jordan (Ranked 86th): Legatum Prosperity Index 2023, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://index.prosperity.com/globe/jordan>.

<sup>4</sup> Social Progress Imperative, Jordan Social Progress Index, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.social-progress.org/social-progress-index>.

<sup>5</sup> Asep Suryahadi et al., “Social Capital and Economic Development in a Large and Multi-Ethnic Developing Country: Evidence from Indonesia”, Asian Development Review, 41, no. 2 (2024).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>7</sup> Isabel V. Sawhill, Social Capital: Why We Need It and How We Can Create More of It, (Brookings Institution, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> German Development Institute, Social Cohesion and Economic Development: Unpacking the Relationship, (2019).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Integrating the Three Dimensions of Sustainable Development: A Framework and Tools, Greening of Economic Growth Series (Bangkok: UN ESCAP, 2016), <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Integrating%20the%20three%20dimensions%20of%20sustainable%20development%20A%20framework.pdf>.

percent,<sup>11</sup> and the high unemployment rate of 21.3 percent<sup>12</sup> require concerted effort to strengthen Jordan's social capital to address these structural challenges.

Civic and social studies education plays a central role in cultivating social capital. It shapes shared values, nurtures social identity, and can bridge socioeconomic divides among children,<sup>13</sup> which influences the ideological, cultural, and intellectual development of young citizens.<sup>14</sup> Schools serve as primary agents of socialisation, often stepping in to fill the gaps left by families, religious institutions, and traditional media.<sup>15</sup> The EMV prioritises improving education through the "Smart Jordan" growth driver, which seeks to raise a generation of capable citizens equipped with the required future skills to accelerate economic growth and enhance quality of life.<sup>16</sup>

This study examines Jordan's social studies education ecosystem as a pathway for strengthening social capital among young citizens, thereby contributing to long-term economic growth and enhancing quality of life. This focus is timely as the new national social studies curriculum will complete its first full cycle at the end of the 2025/2026 academic year.<sup>17</sup>

The paper seeks to answer the following question:

- To what extent does Jordan's social studies education ecosystem nurture tolerance and civic and social engagement?

In this study, social capital is examined through two dimensions: social tolerance and civic and social engagement (CSE). Social tolerance refers to an individual's ability and willingness to coexist and establish relationships with individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds.<sup>18</sup> CSE "refers to citizens' participation in community life to improve conditions or shape the future."<sup>19</sup>

The paper begins by outlining the methodology, followed by an exploration of Jordan's social studies educational ecosystem at the policy, institutional and interpersonal levels. It then offers policy recommendations for stakeholders working to cultivate a generation that embodies social tolerance and CSE to support inclusive, sustainable growth, and concludes with a summary of the findings.

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Statistics, Unemployment Rate Reached 21,3% in Q1 2025, [https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/News/Unemployment/2025/unemp\\_Q1\\_en\\_2025.pdf](https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/News/Unemployment/2025/unemp_Q1_en_2025.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Department of Statistics, Unemployment Rate Reached 21,3% in Q1 2025, [https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/News/Unemployment/2025/unemp\\_Q1\\_en\\_2025.pdf](https://dosweb.dos.gov.jo/DataBank/News/Unemployment/2025/unemp_Q1_en_2025.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> German Development Institute, Social Cohesion and Economic Development: Unpacking the Relationship, (2019).

<sup>14</sup> Qaisar Saleh Al-Ghraibeh, [ الواقع وتحديات مادة التربية الاجتماعية (الاجتماعيات) في الأردن ] The Reality and Challenges of Social Studies Subject in Jordan, Nissan, April 18, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Michael McDevitt, "Political Socialization and Child Development", in The Sage Handbook of Political Sociology: Two Volume Set, ed. William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner (Sage Publications, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Economic Modernisation Vision: Unleashing Potential to Build the Future, <https://www.jordanvision.jo/img/vision-en.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with an expert in the social studies curricula at the Ministry of Education, and a coordinator for the National Center for Curriculum Development.

<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Alzyoud et al., "The Impact of Teaching Tolerance on Students in Jordanian Schools", British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences 15, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>19</sup> Hannah Borhan, Civic education as a pathway to inclusive societies: Exploring the role of education in fostering civic and social engagement, (Paris: OECD, 2025), [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/civic-education-as-a-pathway-to-inclusive-societies\\_3f128be8-en.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/civic-education-as-a-pathway-to-inclusive-societies_3f128be8-en.html).

## 2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, social ecological approach to examine the social and structural factors shaping Jordan's social studies education ecosystem. This approach guides the analysis across three interconnected levels: policy, institutional, and interpersonal (Figure 1), and informs the selection and interpretation of both primary and secondary data.<sup>20</sup>

At the policy level, the study investigates how national frameworks seek to promote social capital through the education ecosystem. At the institutional level, it explores how schools and curricula are implemented within different education settings. At the interpersonal level, it examines classroom dynamics and teachers' perceptions of students' attitudes and behaviours.

To operationalise this approach, the study combines both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through three online focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with social studies teachers from both boys' and girls' schools, working in the North, Centre, and South of the Kingdom, yielding a total of 16 participants from 11 governorates. The FGDs provided insights into institutional practices and interpersonal interactions within the classroom. An interview was also conducted with the social studies curriculum coordinator at the Ministry of Education (MoE) to understand the philosophy behind the newly developed social studies curriculum and its policy framework. To gain a deeper understanding, consultations were conducted with an education expert and the head of the social studies department at a private school in Amman, as well as a field visit. The study also relied on secondary data from the national social studies books from first to eighth grade, and the civic education book of the ninth grade and relevant MoE and National Center for Curriculum Development (NCCD) policy documents, including the General and Specific Framework for Social Studies, its standards, learning outcomes, and performance indicators.<sup>21</sup>

A thematic content analysis was applied to the data to identify emerging and recurring themes to systematically uncover key patterns and generate deeper insights into Jordan's social studies education ecosystem at the policy, institutional, and interpersonal levels.

As for the study's limitations, it relied on teachers' observations of students' interests and behaviour, rather than direct data from students, which limited the individual-level analysis. Secondly, schools are one of several influential sites of value formation and socialisation, and rapid digitalisation makes schools' role in this regard more challenging.<sup>22</sup>

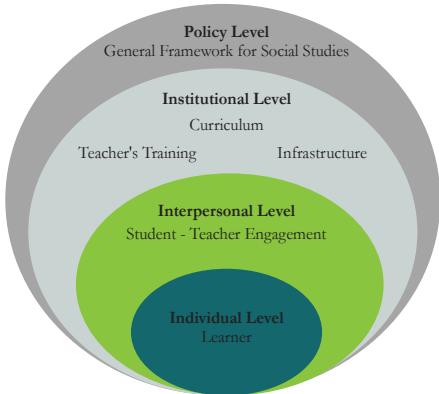


Figure 1. Social ecological model

<sup>20</sup> Josephine Campbell, Social ecological model, (EBSCO), <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/environmental-sciences/social-ecological-model>.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for Curriculum Development, الإطار العام والخاص لمبحث الدراسات الاجتماعية ومعاييرها ومتطلبات تعليمها ومؤشرات أدائها [The General and Specific Framework for Social Studies: Standards, Learning Outcomes, and Performance Indicators], (Amman: July 5, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Chehrazed Ben Hamida, "Civic Education and Religion: Building a Culture of Citizenship and Social Peace". Intercontinental, Amman, Jordan. September 22, 2025.

### 3 Findings and Discussion

The findings identify the extent to which tolerance and CSE are nurtured through Jordan's social studies education ecosystem at the policy, institutional, and interpersonal levels. The section begins with the policy level focusing on the General and Specific Framework for Social Studies, followed by the institutional level delving into the social studies curriculum, school infrastructure and teachers' training. Lastly, it explores the interpersonal level through teachers' perceptions of students' engagement.

#### 3.1 Policy level: The General & Specific Framework for Social Studies

At the policy level, the General and Specific Framework for Social Studies, developed by the NCCD, sets out the vision, defines the necessary learning environment for social studies education, and outlines the requirements for effective implementation. For grades one through eight, the curriculum combines three subjects – history, civic education, and geography – into a single subject, in line with international practices in teaching social studies.<sup>23</sup> From grades nine to twelve, these three subjects are taught separately.

The NCCD's framework and associated curriculum aim to cultivate students' awareness of national, regional, and global issues, thereby developing and enhancing their critical thinking skills. To achieve these aims, the framework identifies five components required to deliver the subject's outcomes: a coherent social studies curriculum, a qualified social studies teacher, effective social studies teaching strategies, a supportive learning environment, and the use and development of authentic assessment strategies.

The values underpinning the framework are closely aligned with the social capital dimensions highlighted in this study. They include social cohesion, respect for diversity in its various shapes and forms, distancing from all forms of extremism and prejudice, enhancing critical thinking skills, and emphasising values of justice and equality.<sup>24</sup> These values position social studies education as a key policy lever for fostering social tolerance and CSE and thus contribute to the broader EMV goals of improving quality of life and advancing Jordan's rankings in global indices measuring social capital.

#### 3.2 Institutional Level: Curriculum, Infrastructure, and Training

##### 3.2.1 National Social Studies Curriculum

At the institutional level, the national social studies curriculum operationalises the policy commitments outlined in the NCCD's Framework and translates them into classroom content.

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<sup>23</sup> Online focus group discussions with teachers from the north of Jordan, Centre and South of Jordan conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13-15, 2025.

<sup>24</sup> National Center for Curriculum Development, طيّب الدّراسات الاجتماعيّة ومعاييرها ونّتاجات تعلّمها [The General and Specific Framework for Social Studies: Standards, Learning Outcomes, and Performance Indicators], (Amman: July 5, 2022).

The social studies curriculum promotes values of social tolerance and CSE across multiple units and lessons, adapting explanations and exercises to the developmental needs of each academic stage. During the primary years, these values are introduced mainly through visuals and simple narratives,<sup>25</sup> becoming more complex over the academic years.

Social tolerance and CSE are taught through applied learning exercises, including research-based tasks, critical thinking activities, group work, and exercises that draw on everyday scenarios and life skills to bring the concepts closer to students' lived realities. The curriculum also incorporates digital tools in its exercises, namely through QR codes embedded in textbooks to access additional learning materials and activities.

This focus on active engagement of the learner is further reinforced by the curriculum's use of inclusive language, evident in how questions are framed, giving agency to the learner, such as "I will demonstrate" rather than using the feminine or masculine forms of "demonstrate" in Arabic.

One drawback is that some visuals used in the curriculum do not show Jordanian children. This lack of immediate self-identification may reduce students' ownership of these values, undermining the curriculum as a site for building lasting tolerance and CSE in students. For students to internalise these values, they must first see themselves as legitimate participants through the curriculum.

The subsequent sections illustrate how tolerance and CSE are promoted through the social studies curriculum and particularly in the seventh and eighth-grade books. These pivotal school years are especially important as adolescents begin forming their worldview and social identities, making the curriculum's discussion of tolerance and CSE consequential for the development of social capital.<sup>26</sup>

### **3.2.1.1 Promoting social tolerance**

In the social studies curriculum, social tolerance is positioned as a fundamental characteristic of Jordanians, alongside mutual support and respect.<sup>27</sup> Tolerance is introduced early on through family and religious values. This approach is grounded in Article 6 (4) of the Jordanian constitution, stipulating that "The family is the basis of society, the core of which shall be religion, morals and patriotism."<sup>28</sup>

Building on this foundation, students in the seventh and eighth grades develop a more in-depth understanding of tolerance beyond the family unit, weaving it throughout units on human rights, ethics, freedom of speech, and culture, which encourage collaboration, critical thinking, and mutual respect.

In human rights units, tolerance is grounded in international human rights conventions, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Amman Message of 2004, which draws upon Islamic values to promote tolerance and respect between faiths and cultures.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with an expert in the social studies curricula at the Ministry of Education, and a coordinator for the National Center for Curriculum Development.

<sup>26</sup> Michael McDevitt, "Political Socialization and Child Development", in *The Sage Handbook of Political Sociology: Two Volume Set*, ed. William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner (Sage Publications, 2018), 800.

<sup>27</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف الثاني الفصل الدراسي الأول] [Social Studies Second Grade First Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, p. 82.

<sup>28</sup> The Jordanian Constitution, Article 6 / paragraph 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف السادس الفصل الدراسي الأول] [Social Studies Seventh Grade First Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, p. 16.

Through such frameworks, Jordanians are simultaneously taught to be global citizens, Arab citizens, and proud patriots.

The curriculum also teaches tolerance through cultural diversity, which is described as a tool for achieving peace, development and stability.<sup>30</sup> The curriculum introduces students to ancient civilisations and to global cultural practices through traditional clothing, sports, cuisines, and dances. By mandating lessons focused on diversity, the curriculum nurtures students' knowledge and tolerance of different cultures.

As for diversity within the Jordanian context, students learn about cultural, historical and natural sites in different governorates in Jordan from a geographical perspective.<sup>31</sup> Units on Jordanian cultural practices take a homogeneous approach, evident in the limited references to ethnic and religious diversity in Jordan.<sup>32</sup> Cultural practices discussed are limited to marriage practices and national dishes, without providing historical or geographical context.<sup>33</sup> Homogenising Jordanian identity in national education narrows students' understanding of 'Jordanian-ness' to their own lived reality, which undermines social tolerance and therefore inclusive social capital.

The curriculum also emphasises students' responsibility in fostering social cohesion and tolerance to combat extremism and hate speech. It also outlines the stakeholders involved in this effort and the various manifestations and drivers of extremism to help students better comprehend the issue.<sup>34</sup> This fosters more resilient and tolerant young Jordanians, strengthening societal bonds and thus contributing towards a stronger social capital and an enhanced quality of life.

Therefore, social tolerance is discussed within different dimensions, including human rights, cultural diversity, and combating extremism. While tolerance is promoted in the curriculum, the main limitation is the topical depth of units and the framing of Jordanian identity, both of which require development to nurture tolerant young citizens actively engaged with society.

### **3.2.1.2 Promoting civic and social engagement (CSE)**

The social studies curriculum also promotes CSE in its chapters and units, in line with the NCCD's Framework. CSE is introduced from the premise that all Jordanian citizens hold rights and responsibilities as stipulated in the constitution. Over the years, students learn about social engagement through spreading awareness, social responsibility, community service and solidarity,<sup>35</sup> but civic engagement is not given the same attention in the curriculum.

In seventh and eighth-grade books, CSE is demonstrated on the family, school and national levels.<sup>36</sup> This multi-level approach encourages students' active participation within their immediate and wider social environments. The family level focuses on democratic principles within the household, while the school level brings democratic principles closer to students' reality by explaining and encouraging participation in student elections. On the national level, students learn about the various political institutions in Jordan, including the Parliament and the Independent

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>31</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف السابع الفصل الدراسي الثاني] [Social Studies Seventh Grade Second Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development.

<sup>32</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف السابع الفصل الدراسي الأول] [Social Studies Seventh Grade First Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف السابع الفصل الدراسي الثاني] [Social Studies Seventh Grade Second Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, pp. 48-58.

<sup>35</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف الخامس الفصل الدراسي الأول] [Social Studies Fifth Grade First Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, p. 23.

<sup>36</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف السابع الفصل الدراسي الأول] [Social Studies Seventh Grade First Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, p. 10.

Election Commission. However, the voting process in national elections is not covered in detail until the ninth grade, and local elections are not discussed. Additionally, the curriculum does not explicitly mention voting as a characteristic of an active citizen and only refers to it briefly through an exercise.

The curriculum also focuses on youth engagement in public life through volunteer work, entrepreneurship, and political parties.<sup>37</sup> Students are also familiarised with key social challenges in Jordanian society to direct them towards the issues that require their engagement, including poverty, unemployment, and cyberbullying.<sup>38</sup> While students are introduced to youth-focused civil society organisations, including the Crown Prince Foundation and All Jordan Youth, as possible avenues for engagement,<sup>39</sup> it does not equip students with the know-how to engage with grassroots, local civil society.

Aligning with digital transformations, the curriculum introduces students to digital citizenship, explaining how to utilise the government's e-services platform, Sanad. However, students are not introduced to digital participation tools, such as Bekhedmetkom or the Legislation and Opinion Bureau's online participation platform, which would position students as active participants rather than service recipients.

Overall, CSE in the social studies curriculum, and particularly in the seventh and eighth grades, places greater emphasis on social engagement than on civic engagement, keeping young citizens unaware of the available pathways for civic and political participation. This risks perpetuating weak social capital, as a service-oriented perception of government, coupled with limited political participation, undermines citizens' sense of responsibility and ownership towards their country.

### 3.2.2 Physical and Digital Infrastructure in Schools

At the institutional level, teachers in focus group discussions (FGDs) identify weak school infrastructure as the greatest challenge undermining the public education system. For one, teachers point to the large class size, often ranging from 40 to 50 students. This poses a challenge in classroom management, consuming a significant portion of the class's time, and hindering the learning process with limited ability to utilise modern teaching strategies, such as group exercises.<sup>40</sup>

Most of the teachers participating in the FGDs expressed frustration with the lack of digital tools and subject-specific resources in their schools. They emphasised that digital tools could meaningfully enhance learning by helping students visualise the complex social concepts discussed. Even in schools that have a computer lab, there is a high demand from teachers across different subjects to use it, as expressed by one teacher:

We often have to book in advance just to give a lesson using the smart board, and each teacher might get only one session per week. Imagine if you have three or four classes, who gets priority? Who do you manage to accommodate?  
You feel that some students may get the chance, while others won't, so it's difficult to ensure digital teaching and interaction.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ali Mahafzah et al. [الدراسات الاجتماعية الصف الثامن الفصل الدراسي الثاني] [Social Studies Eighth Grade Second Semester], National Center for Curriculum Development, pp. 86-88.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-95.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>40</sup> Online focus group discussions with teachers from the north of Jordan, Centre and South of Jordan conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13-15, 2025.

<sup>41</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the centre of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 14, 2025, translated by the author.

In the absence of adequate digital infrastructure, many teachers rely on their own or students' smartphones to integrate digital tools in their lessons, but a recent general directive by the MoE has requested schools to regulate mobile phone usage.<sup>42</sup> While this provides a safer environment for students, teachers can no longer implement interactive learning activities previously used, such as Kahoot, or conduct examinations via Google Forms.<sup>43</sup>

These findings reveal a noticeable gap between the curriculum and public-school infrastructure. While the curriculum incorporates technology through its exercises, most public schools are not equipped to leverage digital tools in the classroom. This reaffirms the need to focus on the "Smart Jordan" driver in the EMV to rapidly scale plans of improving school infrastructure. This would enable more participatory approaches in the classroom that would improve social capital dimensions.

### 3.2.3 Teacher Training

Teacher training is also a barrier to implementing the new social studies curriculum at the institutional level. With a new curriculum in place, teachers expressed a sense of urgency to receive additional training to deliver the new curriculum to the best of their abilities. Most teachers hold expertise in only one of the three disciplines - history, geography, and civic education - that have been merged into a single integrated curriculum. While teachers recognise the paradigm shift of the curriculum and acknowledge that this development has saved time for lesson and examination preparation and grading, some feel that the new curriculum puts an extra strain on them, needing to convey concepts from the geographical, historical, anthropological, national, political, philosophical, and economic angles.

Across the FGDs, social studies teachers expressed feeling that they are sidelined and not given the same attention as teachers of other subjects in terms of training, as conveyed by one teacher:

The social studies teacher is one of the most neglected by the Ministry. When we look at our colleagues in Arabic, Science, Mathematics, or English, they have training courses—intensive courses, and so on. But for social studies teachers, from what I see in the field, there is no attention or recognition of any kind.

Teachers also pointed to the lack of systemic training structures to advance their skills. While a mandatory 155-hour program has been implemented for new teachers hired by the MoE since 2023, it does not extend the same resources to those already in service. Although the Queen Rania Teacher Academy has a designated network for social studies teachers, teachers reported that it is inactive. Several teachers also mentioned a training course taken in 2022, designed for a new democracy curriculum, which was not implemented. Despite this, it equipped teachers with new teaching strategies that they applied in social studies classes, suggesting that targeted training can have a tangible positive spillover effect.

The lack of training limits the opportunities for promotion, as completing training courses provides potential pathways for advancement. Teachers noted that a teacher's guide for the subject would be beneficial for teaching the new curriculum. This would help teachers in choosing suitable teaching strategies for each unit and provide further information on how to unpack complex concepts.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Overall, the lack of training for social studies teachers leads to inconsistency among teachers' capabilities, as the delivery of classes becomes heavily dependent on personal effort. It also exacerbates inequalities between teachers in public and private schools, with the latter receiving separate training programs tailored to their schools. Limited training also hinders the learning process and, hence, the ability to meet the NCCD's Framework's outcomes, including the promotion of tolerance and CSE among students.

### 3.3 Interpersonal Level: Teachers' Perceptions Of Students' Engagement

At the interpersonal level, teachers observe that students are highly engaged with specific topics discussed in the curriculum -including human rights, culture and climate change- despite constraints on infrastructure and teachers' training.

Multiple teachers highlighted students' engagement with the newly incorporated human rights units. One teacher attributed this interest to students' awareness of current political issues, referring to the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza.<sup>44</sup> Through these units, students learn about global human rights principles and how they are reflected in the Jordanian context for the first time. Teachers convey complex human rights concepts by relating them to students' lived realities, making them easier for the students to grasp.<sup>45</sup>

Within the curriculum, there is a focus on the right to education and the right to work, specifically for women. One teacher noted that "students often express surprise upon learning such facts",<sup>46</sup> as was the case with one female student regarding the right to work, while in other cases, girls in class express their dream jobs without constraints that were previously only deemed suitable for men.<sup>47</sup> This particular example demonstrates the ramifications of social studies education for encouraging female participation in the workforce by ensuring that young girls are aware of their rights and potential, and it highlights the knowledge gap often filled by schools. Learning about rights can also ignite critical thinking among students. According to a teacher at a boys' school in Jerash, upon learning about the right to work, a student expressed frustration that his brother, a university graduate, is unemployed.<sup>48</sup>

Climate change is another unit that many teachers note high student engagement "because they feel that the topic affects them and they are living it."<sup>49</sup> By learning about climate change, students are empowered with the knowledge and tools to combat it, which can nurture more aware and engaged citizens with buy-in to build a green economy, in line with the EMV's focus on sustainable green growth.

Units on culture were likewise seen as engaging for students. Teachers often utilise interactive activities in these units, in which students may learn how to pour traditional coffee, wear traditional dress, and organise cultural bazaars with local community participation. According to a girls' schoolteacher, "by the end of the year, the school turned into a cultural exhibit."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the north of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13, 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the south of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 15, 2025.

<sup>46</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the north of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13, 2025.

<sup>47</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the centre of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 14, 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, translated by the author.

<sup>50</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the north of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13, 2025, translated by the author.

CSE is also promoted through student council elections, utilised as a practical learning tool for social studies units, and helps students comprehend elections, political campaigns and civic participation in practice.<sup>51</sup> Also, one teacher noted efforts to organise a school-wide debate, tied to the lesson taken on democracy and freedom of expression. Through this activity, students learn to express their opinions and defend their ideas.<sup>52</sup>

However, teachers' experiences also underscore the challenges of dealing with sensitive topics that arise in social studies education, as demonstrated by one teacher in a boys' school in Amman:

I experienced an embarrassing situation. A student said, 'I don't like dark-skinned people,' and there was a dark-skinned student in the class. I immediately tried to defend him in any way I could and make the student apologise. I felt the situation was a bit sensitive. The student openly said, 'I'm racist, I don't like dealing with these people,' and this happened in front of his classmate. These are the kinds of things we try to correct and change in students' values [...]. This came up when discussing the Jordanian constitution article stipulating that all Jordanians are equal in front of the law.<sup>53</sup>

Another teacher expressed frustration with communicating difficult topics: "It is very difficult for teachers to know what strategy to utilise to communicate the information easily without getting into too many other topics."<sup>54</sup>

These cases indicate a need to equip teachers with strategies to address sensitive subjects and to facilitate a safe space for dialogue, rather than shy away from them, thereby promoting greater social cohesion.

Many teachers from both boys' and girls' schools also mentioned that tensions and mistreatment between students are often linked to external problems such as family disputes or tribal tensions. At the same time, many students also possess a strong sense of community engagement, helping others by working together to collect the price for a sandwich at lunchtime or donating through clothing initiatives.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, the FGDs highlighted that students are engaged with the curriculum's topics that are tied to their lived experiences, but reported incidents and challenges highlight teachers' struggles with implementing strategies that address and thoroughly unpack complex concepts. This reflects the need to focus on social studies in schools to promote social well-being and to strengthen teachers' skills to meet the NCCD's Framework's aims and nurture students' social capital.

<sup>51</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the south of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 15, 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, translated by the author.

<sup>54</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the north of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 13, 2025, translated by the author.

<sup>55</sup> Online focus group discussion with teachers from the centre of Jordan, conducted by Salma Nasser, October 14, 2025.

# 4 Recommendations

Enhancing the role of social studies in promoting tolerance and civic and social engagement requires coordinated action across all stakeholders within Jordan's education ecosystem. The following recommendations are tailored to key stakeholders and aim to strengthen the ability of Jordan's education system to nurture informed, tolerant, and engaged citizens.

## For the National Center for Curriculum Development

- Further develop the social studies curriculum to include in-depth explanations on voting know-how and political participation in Jordan in the seventh and eighth grades. Include sections in the curriculum explaining civic technologies for participation, such as the Bekhedmetkom and Tawasal platforms, to inform young citizens of potential avenues for engagement.
- Adopt an institutional policy for all visuals added to Jordanian national curriculum books to be reflective of the faces of Jordanian children, adolescents, and families, reinforcing inclusion and representation in the curriculum and giving ownership of the values promoted in the curriculum.

## For the Ministry of Education

- Design and implement a policy that mandates the organisation of yearly debates and student council elections in all public schools in Jordan, with a monitoring and evaluation framework. This should be a cross-disciplinary collaboration among teachers to ensure civic values are reinforced across all subjects, not only within social studies.
- Facilitate partnerships between public schools and municipalities to organise dialogues and politics labs in public spaces such as parks for school students. Municipalities can utilise the Greater Amman Municipality's model of youth dialogues and politics labs organised in public parks.
- Design and provide a specialised mandatory training that equips teachers to lead difficult conversations on sensitive topics such as racism, tolerance, diversity, and human rights.

## For Queen Rania Teacher's Academy

- Activate the Academy's network for social studies teachers by establishing online channels and activating the standardised training track for social studies teachers, recognising the interdisciplinary nature of the subject, to ensure that the curriculum is executed meticulously.

## For Civil Society Organisations

- Actively include school students in youth-focused programming and activities to enable early participation in community engagement initiatives. This will give school students more avenues for engagement while strengthening advocacy for civic and social studies education and practical activities in schools.

## 5 Conclusion

Nurturing tolerant and active citizens is essential to ensure that young citizens are invested in taking ownership in the process of building a stronger Jordanian economy and enhancing quality of life over the long run.

Civic and social studies education is a primary avenue for nurturing the values of tolerance, diversity, and civic and social participation, thereby fostering a stronger society and economy. The National Center for Curriculum Development and the Ministry of Education have sought to innovate through the curriculum to cultivate more tolerant and engaged citizens. However, weak school infrastructure, limited availability of digital tools, and limited opportunities for teacher training hinder the curriculum from unlocking its full potential. Social studies teachers in particular receive fewer training opportunities compared to teachers of other subjects and have fewer opportunities to use digital tools in schools. As a result, the curriculum is not aligned with the reality of most public schools, exacerbating educational inequalities in Jordan.

The EMV has prioritised the development of Jordan's education sector through the "Smart Jordan" growth driver, both in terms of skills and infrastructure. Rigorous improvements are required in this regard, in addition to sustained investment in teachers' professional development to meet educational needs and the EMV's goals. Additionally, the curriculum must engage students more deeply in tolerance and CSE concepts to build greater resilience and social capital, and to meet the General and Specific Framework for Social Studies' ambitious aims.





**West Asia-North Africa Institute**  
70 Ahmad Al-Tarawneh St.  
P.O. Box: 1438  
Amman 11941 - Jordan  
[info@wana.jo](mailto:info@wana.jo)  
[www.wanainstitute.org](http://www.wanainstitute.org)



**Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Jordan Office**  
23 Isma'eel Haqqi Abdoh St.  
P.O. Box: 831025  
Amman 11183 - Jordan  
[Info.Jordan@kas.de](mailto:Info.Jordan@kas.de)  
[www.kas.de/jordan](http://www.kas.de/jordan)