

# PILOTING YOUTH PLATFORMS IN LEBANON & JORDAN

## 4-day Training: The Common Ground Approach and a Collaborative Design Workshop

Jordan and Lebanon have large youth populations, and despite the significant size of these demographics, youth in both countries face challenges as they seek to engage meaningfully in society. Concerns regarding education, employment, and active citizenship are common. Young people have limited opportunities to make their voices heard and lack representation in both local and national political processes. This disenfranchisement further marginalizes youth, and political and civic barriers prevent them from becoming leaders within their communities. Additionally, youth suffer from a lack of infrastructure and support in both Jordan and Lebanon, which prevents active engagement with their peers, communities, and local authorities. There are no youth-related communication or dialogue platforms young people can access to connect with their peers.



In September 2021, Search for Common Ground (Search) launched its Piloting Youth Platforms project, which aims to tackle issues impacting youth, and increase their participation in Lebanese and Jordanian society. *A group of 21 youth from different backgrounds were selected from a wide number of online applicants, and the project's cohort of dynamic and diverse youth are now learning how to become active and effective change-makers.*



**Thanks to the CGA, my outlook on conflict has changed drastically, especially with the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict. I now understand the various factors that are core components of conflict and violence better, and take them into consideration. I really think it is essential for youth to receive such training, since it provides an effective change in outlook regarding the ways we perceive and understand conflict. This moves away from stereotypical notions.**

- 22-year-old Syrian Female, Beirut Resident



In February 2022, Search hosted the project's first in-person activity—a four-day training that took place over two weekends. The first three days of the training were dedicated to Search's signature Common Ground Approach (CGA). Participant youth worked their way through practical and theoretical sessions focused on conflict transformation that: brings people together across dividing lines, enables the understanding of differences, facilitates the discovery of shared interests, and builds collaborative solutions. When conflicting parties understand their underlying needs and identify areas of common interest, they are better positioned to build trust and catalyze or renew relationships based on dignity and respect. These relationships enable collaborative problem solving, and the creation of durable, win-win outcomes. Across all of the sessions held, youth were able to dive into understanding their own complex identities, and the identities of others.

Participants stated they gained new perspectives and were able to mindfully reflect on familiar concepts such as active listening and empathy across a host of sessions. In total, 88 percent of the participants said they learned new information during the training they would be able to utilize in their personal and professional lives.



**The training allowed us to have fruitful dialogue regarding a vast array of topics that helped us listen to each other and understand different viewpoints.**

**- 21-year-old Lebanese Male, Baalbek**



The last day of the second weekend was reserved for a Collaborative Design Workshop, where youth shaped the future of the Piloting Youth Platforms itself. By considering youths' personal needs and interests, as they articulated them, Search was able to practically reinforce the project's goals within the framework of the project itself. Conversations held during the workshop fed into larger discussions on training needs and topical priorities Search continues to build upon.

Participants collaborated in groups and proposed ideas and vision for what effective, youth-supporting platforms should look like and how they should operate. Diverse, yet overlapping, ideas were creatively presented and considered. Youths' core recommendations for supportive platforms included:

- ▶ The development of safe spaces for mutual empowerment;
- ▶ A focus on mental health;
- ▶ Opportunities for networking, discussion, and knowledge sharing;
- ▶ Opportunities for self-expression through art and hobbies;
- ▶ Opportunities to highlight positive stories and moments of success;
- ▶ Opportunities for sharing cultural perspectives and practices to break past common stereotypes and stigmas (e.g. regional, gender, and political stereotypes);
- ▶ Collaborative dialogue and round-table discussions for youth from different regions; and
- ▶ Crafted experiences that bring youth together across dividing lines.



Workshop participants generated plans for an online platform designed for youth they tentatively named **Aaber (Express)**. Conceptually, the platform would help youth communicate with one another and express themselves safely and freely. In the participants' first iteration, the platform would be developed and run by youth between the ages of 18 and 35, and would be designed to foster discussion about "mainstream topics in a non-mainstream way." Each week, platform members could discuss new topics, and podcasts featuring special guests would discuss these concerns as well. Weekly discussions would then be followed by monthly visits to specific geographic locations, where live, in-person sessions would reflect on past podcast discussions. All regional features would be hosted in public spaces and help build community solidarity and trust. While workshop participants were excited about these plans, they recognized the current concept may need revision and were prepared to see the full process of iterative development through. In both the CGA training and the Collaborative Design Workshop, youth appreciated the freedom they had to express themselves and their needs. Their voices and opinions now form the cornerstone of the Piloting Youth Platforms project.

These young individuals, drawn from diverse backgrounds across Lebanon and Jordan, are motivated by a personal fervor, and are committed to engaging youth across their communities to build a more inclusive and respectful society.



**Search** is the world's largest dedicated peacebuilding organization and supports programming in 32 countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, The Middle East, and the United States. Search's mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict from adversarial means to shared solutions.

**In Jordan**, Search has worked since 2015 on leading programs to mitigate tensions between refugees and host communities, advance responsive and inclusive governance, and transform violent extremism.

**In Lebanon**, Search has worked since 1996 through a diverse array of programming, including social cohesion, peace education, and media production.