



# Youth Shadow Councils in Local Administration



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## Introduction

### About YWCA

The Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) of Jordan was established in 1950 as a non-profit, non-governmental, national association affiliated with the World YWCA in Geneva. The Association aims at serving women and the community without social, religious or racial discrimination, promoting the standard of women in the cultural, economic and social spheres, as well as contributing towards meeting community needs. The YWCA has four branches in Amman (1950), Madaba (1956), Husun/Salt (1956) and Fuhais/Salt (1998) with a total membership of 950 women and men. The World YWCA develops women's leadership to find local solutions to the global inequalities women face. Each year, it reaches more than 25 million women and girls through work in 22,000 communities. This grassroots development experience shapes the organization's global advocacy agenda. YWCA work is inspired by human rights principles and a commitment to women's full and equal participation in society. It is a volunteer membership movement, inclusive of women from many faiths, backgrounds, and cultures.

### About IRCKHF

The Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation (IRCKHF) serves as a catalyst for socio-economic transformation through research, information and dissemination of knowledge. IRCKHF was initially launched in 1996 as part of the National Task Force for Children, today IRCKHF promotes the welfare of children, youth, women, families, communities, and vulnerable groups by providing objective, multidisciplinary research and analysis to practitioners and policymakers in Jordan and the region, enabling effective socio-economic planning and decision-making. Through cooperation with national and international partners and the creation of an online platform for knowledge sharing, IRCKHF advocates for positive change by disseminating research findings on critical issues falling under the pillars of gender and social justice, human rights, and civil society empowerment. IRCKHF mobilizes knowledge for positive social change using quality research, awareness, and advocacy.

## About Hivos

Hivos was founded in 1968, inspired by humanist values. The founders held the conviction that development work should be secular, as true cooperation presumes respect for differing beliefs. Hivos believes that human life in its many forms is valuable, and that people are filled with potential. Living a life in freedom and dignity, with respect for each other and the planet, leads to greater individual well-being and fair, vibrant societies.

## About WE4L

Women Empowered for Leadership (WE4L) program uses a combination of advocacy, skills training, knowledge tools, and coalition-building. The program works directly with potential women leaders, as well as with political parties, trade unions, civil society organizations, the media, and the creative sector. In WE4L, Hivos and the local partners provide strategic, media, and communication expertise. The focus is at the sub-national level where most practical issues that concern women are usually prioritized. The expectation is that a woman who starts her leadership journey at the sub-national level is likely to gather experience to enable her to lead at the national level.



## About the Project

The Shadow Council for Youth gathered more than 50 youth (female and male) from three areas in Jordan Na'our, Madaba and Husband to enforce Article 4, Paragraph A-6 of the Municipalities Law 2015, which gives citizens the right to attend and engage in the local council meetings. The role of the youth is to identify the needs in accordance with the annual Local Assessment Guide, and then inform the local administration and network with their local councils. The outcome of the project is to increase the general public's recognition and support of women in leadership positions.



50  
youth



The initiative contributed to the development of an enabling environment for women's leadership through enhancing local councils' procedures to provide equal participation of men and women in organizational leadership structures. The targeted local councils became aware of the importance of engaging youth to help support their procedures as well as elected women.



More than 50 youth were educated on the legal and operational framework of municipalities 38 of them attended 8 regular sessions inside the local councils to monitor and observe the decision-making process.

The deep engagement of representatives of local councils was an unexpected outcome, in particular their encouragement of youth engagement and their recognition of the importance and added-value of their inclusion. For instance, the staff of the Madaba and Na'our Councils recognized the need to keep dynamic communications and dialogue between them and the community. Therefore, they created a platform for both sides to connect and explore participatory solutions related to local development priorities. Also, the Municipal Council's management expressed its willingness to collaborate with youth councils to achieve mutual goals.





## Context analysis

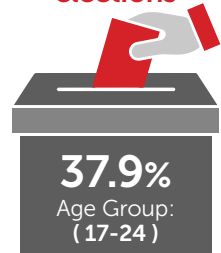
The latest amendments to the Elections Law in 2016 provided an opportunity for youth engagement in politics by decreasing the voting age. The decision to change the voting age to include more youth in the election process was announced by the Independent Election Commission, and was applied to the Parliamentary Elections in 2016 and Municipalities and Decentralization Elections in 2017. The law interpretation clarifies that citizens whose age is 17 years 90 days before the Election Day or earlier would be added to the voter list. Unfortunately, there was insufficient preparation of the youth and no training to raise their awareness on the country political reform issues. However, an article published by an expert on youth issues indicated that "37.9 per cent of youth in the age group of 17-24 voted in the Parliamentary elections compared to 33.3 per cent of those in the age group of 18-24 who participated in the 2017 municipal elections. The difference may be partially explained by the age as 17 years olds were allowed to vote in the parliamentary elections, and the minimum age for voting in the municipal elections was 18." <sup>1</sup>

Generally, the public in Jordan is still not fully engaged in practicing their rights of holding the government and its authorities accountable for achieving the public interest. However, the 2015 Municipalities Law, Article 4, Paragraph A6 states that : 'The council's sessions shall be in public and every citizen with a direct interest in any topic listed on the agenda may participate in the discussions on that topic, provided that the decisions are made in a confidential meeting. Confidential sessions may also be held as deemed necessary by the Council.' Additionally, the same law states that the strategic and planning responsibilities should be undertaken using a participatory approach with the community according to Article 6, Paragraph B, which states that local councils should 'contribute to the preparation of strategic and development plans and develop the needs assessment document within their boundaries in cooperation with civil society organizations, and submit them to the Municipal Council.'

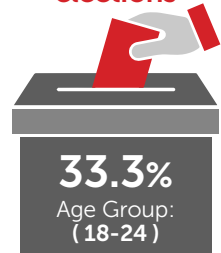
Jordanian citizens do not practice their right to criticize the local authorities' performance. In addition, Jordanian citizens are not familiar with municipal functions as they only refer to the municipality for waste management and cleanliness, road paving, and electricity. In other words, Jordanian citizens narrow the municipalities' functions to infrastructure services. However, according to the amended law, they now have new responsibilities related to development, and increasing resources and economic opportunities.

The current Municipalities Law (Municipalities Law issued in 2015) is being revised by the Parliament and an updated version of the law is expected to be issued in 2021, to be titled 'Local Administration Law.' The process of updating the law is necessary to engage community members as much as possible by applying new tools to measure its effectiveness internationally, such as shadow counseling and consultation. <sup>2</sup>

### Parliamentary elections



### Municipal elections



The new National Youth Strategy (2019-2025) indicated a number of weaknesses in youth programs in Jordan. It states that there were various programs implemented by different agencies; however, there was a poor coordination and they were unable to build networks and partnerships with government and local authorities. Furthermore, a Mapping of Youth Activities in Jordan published by UNFPA <sup>3</sup> reported that youth participation should not only refer to their participation in the manual phase of projects; Jordan needs to make more efforts to involve youth and maintain their participation in the decision-making process. This major challenge is difficult to overcome because of the traditional hierarchy that links age with decision-making. The irony in this report is that most of Jordan's activities for the youth fell in level 4 of the ladder, which gives limited spaces for youth to contribute to the development as identified in Hart's Ladder of participation.



1 - <http://jordantimes.com/opinion/fares-braizat/not-too-young-run>

2 - <https://www.ca-ilg.org/GEYouthDevelopment>

3 - <https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Youth20%Mapping20%Report2015-202014%.pdf>



## Rationale of YWCA Initiative

YWCA believed that there was an opportunity to work on an initiative to engage youth in the local administrations' sector and build partnership with CSOs and local authorities to ensure sustainability. YWCA, in its mandate, calls for innovation to engage youth. The past decades' investment on youth through international and national projects should be upgraded to open new horizons for youth to express their needs and priorities, as well as promote women's political participation.



## Methodology and Tools

The YWCA initiative was designed to make a change in youth perception of their level of active engagement; they are now aware that they have the duty of searching for information through communicating with decision-makers to monitor the decision-making process in the district and learn about the process by which council members make decisions.

Unemployment rate amongst the youth was high as it reached 67.6 % Meanwhile, 84.7 % of the youth had finished their bachelor's degree or higher.<sup>4</sup> They stated that this initiative enabled them to connect with their communities because it was the first time they practiced their right to obtain information from decision-makers. For instance, they requested to learn the content of development plans; this exercise made them fully aware of how to differentiate between central and local authority tasks: if the issue is outside the official border of Madaba Municipality, the decision shall be issued by the central authority. Their visits to the council made them aware of the complications in procedures between the local council and the center. For example, since 2017, Madaba Municipality has been following up with central ministries to obtain the approval to build a public park on a land outside Madaba borders. Three years later, in 2020, the council received the

approval. During the implementation of the project, the youth became more appreciative of local council officials because they became aware that the council officials were working with limited resources and within a weak decentralized legal framework.

The project changed the perception of the local municipality staff; they have offered partnership with YWCA to keep referring them with trained and qualified youth for Madaba, Husband and Na'our councils. Through this partnership, the YWCA can refer directly to the mayor, elected members and official staff, such as the executive director.

**In terms of tools for actively engaging youth, YWCA applied the following during the implementation :**



**Activating a partnership with three targeted councils, YWCA staff visited mayors to present the objectives of the initiative.**



**Development of youth selection criteria, which were as follows:**

- Experience in other CSOs or CBOs inside Madaba or Amman.
- Previous voluntary work experience over the past three years.
- Ready to commit their time to the project
- Willingness to promote program objectives.
- Have received prior training on the topics of human rights and citizenship.



**YWCA received around 70 applications. After filtering the participants, 59 participants (37 % male and 63% female) were chosen (34 from Madaba, 9 from Na'our, 16 from Husban).**



**Activating social media platforms** by creating a Facebook page and training youth to monitor the targeted councils' website and Facebook pages. They posted their observations on regular basis, and a media committee was formed to publish informational summaries about target areas.



**Designing capacity-building training ( online )** aimed to provide knowledge about major local administration functions and legal framework in Jordan, definition of youth active participation, inclusive development with gender background, core values of active participation, monitoring and evaluation basics, and core values of active participation.



**Pre-assessment :** Prior to the capacity building training, IRCKHF conducted a pre-assessment to set a baseline to help measure the project's impact on: the promotion of the concept of active citizenship; raising awareness of youths' right to participate in local government; monitoring performance of Municipal Councils in Madaba, Husban, and Na'our; and promoting of volunteerism and strengthening the sense of accountability among Municipal Council Members to local communities.



IRCKHF adopted mixed methods to set a baseline to help in a subsequent phase in assessing the impact of project activities on promoting citizenship and volunteerism, enhancing participatory action in the Local Administration among municipalities, and developing mechanisms to improve Local Administration's work while meeting the aspirations of different groups of the community. Pre-assessment activities were conducted in Madaba, Na'our and Husban and included the following:

- **59 phone surveys with Jordanian youth.**
- **9 key informant interviews with members of municipal councils.**

The pre-assessment report addressed the following topics: youth political participation, role of municipal councils, formation of municipal councils, services provided for women, services provided for the youth, development roles, mechanisms for identifying developmental needs, the role and importance of Youth Shadow Councils, Article 4 item A6 of the Municipalities Law of 2015.



### **Attending the regular sessions of the local and municipal councils:**

After the training, participants were divided into groups according to their areas of residence. In Madaba, there were three groups distributed to three local councils (Dhiban, Faisalya and Madaba Center) in addition to Na'our and Husban councils located in Amman Governorate. Each group attended two sessions (face-to-face), conducted bi-weekly. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic and the guidelines set by the Defense Law in Jordan prevented the youth from physically attending the sessions.



**Outreach and field actions** taken by participants were as follows:

- **Data collection :** Each participant was asked to be creative in gathering information before they attended the regular sessions. Participants got back to their communities to identify their urgent needs as categorized in the Local Assessment Guide in four pillars : ( **Infrastructure - Local economic development - Social development - Good governance** ).
- Some of the participants used social media, visited project sites, or met with municipalities' beneficiaries.
- Documentation of their observations on a form provided by YWCA, and published on a Facebook page post.



**Hosting a 'bridge for dialogue' meeting with local administration representatives and youth :** YWCA facilitated holding a bridge for dialogue meeting, which was the first meeting in Madaba and Amman districts gathering both youth and municipalities' management. The municipalities admitted that there was a lack of communication over the past years, but have promised to engage youth and update them about their plans and procedures. They agreed on the importance to consolidate good governance practices, especially the participatory approach.



**Sustainability Plans :** The targeted councils management proposed to upgrade this initiative by:

- **A) Providing internship opportunities for youth to activate the councils' websites and social media platforms :** this is essential to promote and disseminate decision making process to the public in order to remind them that their concerns and priorities are being addressed.
- **B) Forming a youth committee through an annual election within the Development unit in each council.** This unit should develop an annual plan with youth and ensure their engagement in implementing it. More importantly, the youth can provide mentoring session to female elected members about technical topics, such as finance issues, laws, instructions, etc.



## Implementation :

- YWCA conducted three online training sessions over two days, all in June 2020, for 59 youth ( 37% male and 63% female ).<sup>6</sup> The trainings covered four pillars:
  - **Local administration structure in Jordan.**
  - **National planning framework and plans.**
  - **Participation approaches (introducing shadowing councils' idea).**
  - **Gender mainstreaming.**
- YWCA divided the youth into five groups (defined as shadow council groups) by their areas of residence. The areas are Husban and Moshagre/Na'our, and three districts in Madaba (Jeraneh, Fasaliya and Leab/Moleh. YWCA got official approvals from each council prior to the youth's attendance to regular council sessions or visits.
- Each youth group participated in two regular sessions at their local councils or municipalities. In total, the youth participants could attend 10 sessions and three face-to-face meetings with elected members in each district. In these sessions and meetings, the youth recognized the preparations, discussions, and elected members involvement and participation.

- The youth formed a media committee and worked together to produce animations, monitor the Facebook page, and post project activities and photos. During the implementation, they issued three articles briefing out their districts' circumstances and the election history of local administrations.



- YWCA held a dialogue meeting for 10 active youth and 10 representatives of three councils in early August. They spoke openly about how to improve the intervention approaches and agreed on future actions for sustainability (mentioned in the sustainability bullet above).
- YWCA held an introductory training (online) for the youth in mid-August 2020, covering gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation concepts and reflecting the importance of local administration planning. Youth participants submitted an assignment developing M&E plans, which helped them differentiate between definitions of impact, outcome, output, activities and learn to rephrase their development concerns to a strategic level.
- YWCA held a graduation ceremony in each council to distribute certificates of appreciation for active youth in September 2020. The mayors of each target council distributed the certificates to the youth and showed their commitment to build a continuous partnership with YWCA to invite more youth to be engaged in shadowing councils.





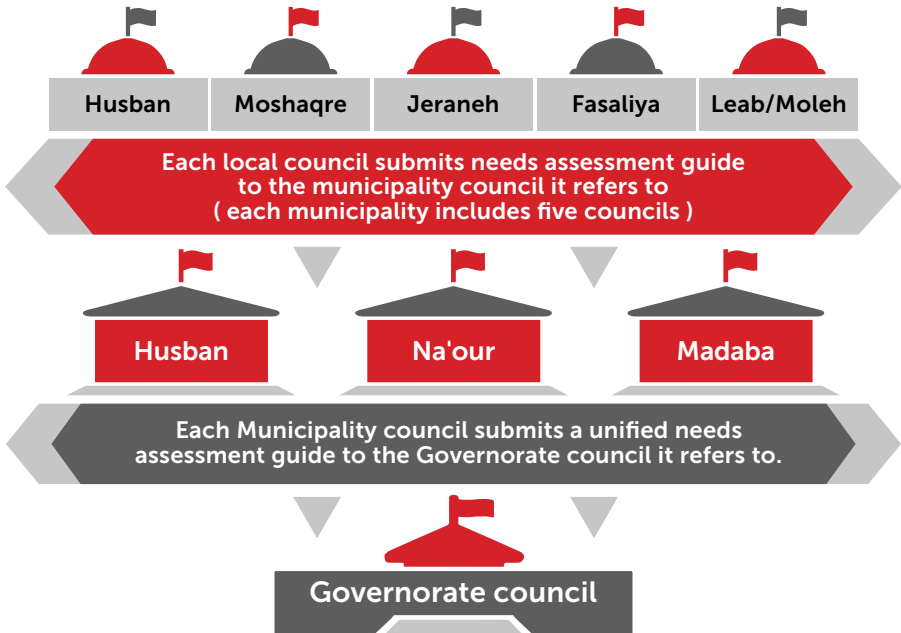
## Best Practices and Lessons Learned



### First : Enhancing knowledge

The municipalities used to issue an annual development plan. According to the Jordanian Law, the development plans for each municipality should be developed in consultation with communities and civil societies; however, these plans are kept on shelves and are not shared with the community.

The youth realized that some elected members were unfamiliar with the legal process, and admitted that they approved it without reading it. In addition, the youth mentioned that the municipality's management was not getting back to citizens to show the final approved plans and budget. Besides, they do not inform the public of actual implementation and progress.



Female youth brought attention to the daily obstacles that prevented them from moving freely at any time of the day. They also mentioned asking the municipal council to install street lights in the main Tourism Street in Madaba, to build recreational public park for mothers and children, in addition to other concerns. On the other hand, the female elected members asked to involve more youth in order to support them by offering special assistance; especially if they are graduate students, such as lawyers, who can support them interpret laws and instructions, or IT graduates to apply research and IT youth skills. In addition, youth are the council's messengers to assess community perspectives regarding council's decisions prior to their approval.



## Second : Promoting know-how through engagement and participation

The youth discussed with Madaba Mayor some concerns related to Madaba Governorate's master planning; they wanted to learn about the legal procedures and the level of authority the municipality has to improve the master planning and make it more modern and organized. This discussion clarified the efforts done by the municipality to solve urban and master planning in Madaba Governorate. Various efforts have been made by the current elected council, and the citizens will notice the improvements after five years. For example, the municipality is trying to solve public transportation issues, bus stations, etc. These concerns particularly address female youth concerns.

On the other hand, there are various complicated issues regarding municipal council's authority that need central government interventions, such as the expansion of housing to farms and agriculture areas located outside Madaba municipality borders.

Youth who attended the Na'our council regular meetings were informed by male elected members that the youngest elected woman has achieved notable efforts to correct the procurement procedures. Moreover, they did an assessment on good governance practices among employees. The result showed that the council's mayor and staff are responsible to collecting feedback from community members about their services and performance.



## Third : Media as a tool for transparency and outreach

During the regular meeting with Madaba municipality, the youth recognized that the municipality had received approval from the Government to start building a recreational park in July 2020. This piece of information was not shared with the public; however, it was mentioned in the consultation session with the public two years ago.

One of the youth participants is a reporter in a radio station (Madaba Hawana). He talked about the initiative (Youth Shadow Councils) during a radio show titled (Noqtet Wasel). He presented a frequent complaint about communication and internet accessibility in areas managed by Dhiban Municipality. This program helped link youth (Shadow council members) with the mayor of Dhiban Municipality. The latter thoroughly explained the municipality's attempts in solving this issue. On this particular incident, youth have contributed to identifying the legal gaps translated in the current Decentralization Law because the mayor indicated that the central government entity, which should follow the communication topic, is not officially presented at the local level.

The youngest participant called Yazeed Al-karoub, who lives in Dhiban around 40km away from Madaba Governorate, is talented in using social media and produced a simple animation video that he posted on the following Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/Y.C96205>).

Another youth group in Madaba produced an informational brief about the municipality. They also did research to collect historical and geographic information, and introduce touristic areas. Also, they mentioned the names of the women who were first elected in local councils in the area.



## Fourth : Enhancing capacities and skills

The Executive Director at Madaba Municipality approved the creation of a youth committee inside the municipality to engage the youth in promoting municipality work. In Na'our, the council and the head of development unit called for monthly meetings with graduate youth to exchange knowledge.



### Case Study :

YWCA initiated the implementation of a youth initiative 'Shadow Youth Councils for Local Administration Councils in three areas' from April to September 2020. The initiative targeted two districts in Amman (Husban and Moshagre/Na'our) and three districts in Madaba (Jeraneh, Fasaliya and Leab/Moleh located in Madaba).

Generally, the public rarely practice their right to monitor and follow up the work of the government and local authorities. On the other hand, local authorities themselves are not accepting the idea of opening municipal offices to citizens, whom they treat as mere beneficiaries without caring about the time and quality of services. The local authorities used to offer consultation sessions for the public once a year when they are obligated to develop the annual Assessment Needs Guide. However, they do not keep the public updated once the guide is approved. The initiative alerted both sides to be more accountable and transparent to municipal achievements or failures.

The initiative was unique in sustaining partnerships with local authorities. In addition, there were various capacity-building trainings provided to local councils' authorities (staff-elected members) about decentralization and community participation concepts, but they were mere general information without including best practices and guidance to apply them.

YWCA initiative served to achieve two outcomes; ***first it invested in empowering 58 youth and provided them with skills and knowledge and opened new paths for them to be connected with local authorities; in addition, the youth themselves have*** become aware of municipality legal and operational frame work, ***second*** municipalities elected members and staff have recognized the need to keep dynamic communications and dialogue between them and the community. For example: Na'our mayor mentioned in the dialogue meeting that this was the first initiative to target Amman remote areas and provide an opportunity to network with other near municipalities located in other districts in Madaba. He also stressed the importance of the initiative at the present time; as it serves as mid-term evaluation especially that the election round 2017 is approaching to end in March 2021.

The youth participants were encouraged to fulfill their gained skills as empowered youth, they were eager to seek for answers and clarifications about their frequent daily challenges related to housing, transportation, or other development concerns. YWCA played a role in letting the youth talk about their concerns using gender perspectives; they recognized that gender mainstreaming is a major tool for planning and implementing development projects.

This initiative gave them the power to raise their concerns to local authorities during their attendance of regular sessions. It was the first time for them to meet elected members or talk in front of the mayor to request clear answers.



In addition, their attendance of regular sessions in local councils made them understand the legal and internal processes required by local authorities to address community needs.

Youth mentioned that these sessions did increase their understanding of legal barriers and bureaucracy within central ministries, complicated regulations, and limited resources, which usually face local councils. For example, in Husban council (located in Amman Governorate) an elected female member, who participated in youth training session, mentioned that the council management is fully aware of waste problems but the decision is too expensive because Husban is part of Amman governorate and it applies different rules according to the Municipalities Law. She also mentioned that citizens are not committed to paying waste fees because it is higher than other local councils located outside Amman Governorate, which affects the municipality's ability to purchase of new equipment.

During the training sessions, the youth participants were asked if they have practiced their right to vote in the past elections in 2017. Unfortunately, only 18 out of 54 have practiced this right. In addition, many of them have complaints and distrust in local authorities' representatives as the resources and benefits of municipal councils are distributed based on personal relations and interests. During the training, participants were asked to do a research on each targeted municipality website and Facebook page. Afterwards, the majority noticed that the news and posts are not up to date and promote personal achievements of elected members or the mayor. There are no published plans, progress reports, polls to assess public satisfaction about municipality services.



Local authorities elected members have become aware of the importance of providing feedback to the community on regular basis using social media for pragmatic purposes, as well as the importance of clarifying budget issues or progress of development plans and the assessment guide. Unfortunately, the youth found that there are three development plans approved by Madaba, Husban, and Na'our councils, but some of them did not know how to monitor the progress and approved the plans without reviewing them.

On the other side, official employees at the local councils (executive staff) mentioned that involving youth is a change in itself because everyone will become accountable to start healthy communication for improvement purposes, not criticism. They indicated that the involvement of youth should not stop in order to help exploring participatory solutions related to local development priorities. The municipal management accepted to collaborate with youth councils and achieve mutual goals through the development units in each target council.

In addition, the youth were educated on municipal work and how to differentiate between the roles of the three councils, official employees, and the elected members; and became aware of the organizational structure of municipal council. YWCA referred the trained youth to the development unit inside each council to continue their voluntary work and contribute to their community.

The initiative clarified the pros and cons of municipality council's work. In some cases, there were legal gaps outside the council's control, and in other cases there was a lack of transparency in reporting the progress to the public. Also, the citizens are still not familiar with how decentralization benefits their communities.

““

*“ The project enabled my peers and I to understand people’s real needs.”*

**Haneen**

””

““

*“ I became a stronger person, and acquired a number of skills related to dialogue and decision-making.”*

**Bashar**

””

““

*“ We learnt how decisions are made at the local level, and how to ensure that our needs are given the priority.”*

**Lima**

””

““

*“ Through the project, the youth became more involved in municipal work and the local decision-making process.”*

**Aya**

””