

# Public-Private Dialogue

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## Tunisia | Youth Leadership & Employability

### Title of PPD initiative – Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program (TJSP)

by

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## 1- Background and Context

IREX has worked extensively in Tunisia to engage and empower youth to access knowledge, skills, and opportunities to serve as effective leaders in their communities, as well as strengthen civil society at the local and national levels.

Launched in 2013, the **Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program (TJSP)**, funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), of the U.S. Department of State, includes two programs that identify talented youth from across Tunisia for transformational capacity-building experiences to enable them to contribute meaningfully to Tunisia's economic growth and civic life. **The Tunisia Community College Scholarship Program** builds partnerships with technical institutes (vocational schools) across Tunisia to recruit underserved youth who then earn professional certificates at U.S. community colleges in ICT, applied engineering technology, and business management fields. **The Tunisia Undergraduate Scholarship Program (Tunisia UGRAD)** prepares future professionals and leaders to immediately and effectively enter the job market post graduation, through partnerships with approximately 40 Tunisian universities and an immersive learning experience at a U.S. university. For all participants, IREX provides direct training in soft skills and employability skills that predict success in the job market. In Tunisia, IREX partners with private sector employers to provide on-going support and capacity-building to participants and alumni, supporting development of entrepreneurship and employability skills, encouraging civic engagement, and building a network of engaged professionals.

With 60% of the population under the age of 30, young people are vital to economic growth and political stability in Tunisia. Yet Tunisia's youth don't possess the skills needed for gainful employment and remain largely unemployed with 62.3% of tertiary graduates unemployed. TJSP alumni are impressing employers with their key soft skills for professional leadership, with 89% of alumni who are not in higher education reporting employment.

Currently, there are nearly 350 Tunisian alumni that have completed the program, and more than 100 Tunisian students will leave for the United States this summer for the 2017-2018 program year.

IREX works closely with professionals and companies in Tunisia, to support TJSP alumni in bringing their skills home to Tunisia. IREX matches alumni with professional mentors, to guide

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them in implementing their innovations. We offer alumni the opportunity to meet and hear from professionals about various industries and career trajectories. These opportunities for interactions have strengthened the skills of the TJSP alumni, but have also led to more and more companies reaching out to IREX to share opportunities for alumni employment and engagement, further fostering private sector engagement with our programs.

## 2- Youth and Inclusion dimension

TJSP was designed by the US and Tunisian governments in support of Tunisia's economic development. More than a quarter of Tunisia's 10 million people are between the ages of 15-29, with 40% of Tunisian youth neither employed nor seeking higher education. And when you look at different groups of youth, the numbers are even higher. In some of the most disadvantaged regions of Tunisia, in the interior and along the borders, up to 80% of youth are unemployed; more than 70% of young women are unemployed. And while enrollment in higher education has continued to grow in Tunisia, youth with tertiary degrees experience unemployment rates at nearly double the national average.

In addition, higher education graduates in Tunisia are getting a quality technical education, but lack the opportunity to develop the soft skills that employers seek: communication, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, time and task management.

Through the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program, promising Tunisian undergraduate students get the opportunity to develop these key soft skills through holistic, experiential learning. During their one-year program in the United States, they study at US undergraduate institutions, but do so much more. Leaving their friends, family, and community, they develop independence and reliance on themselves to manage their time, tasks, and budgets and build their self-confidence. Through presentations on their home country and community service work, they build their public speaking, collaboration, and cross-cultural communication skills and build a stronger commitment to the success of their community and colleagues. Through seeking and participating in professional internships in the United States, they develop the skills to market themselves and their abilities, build their perseverance and self-confidence, and practice using all of these soft skills in a professional setting.

While in the United States, scholars build their skills through academic and experiential learning:

- Academic Coursework
  - Complete coursework related to their field of study to further build their technical skills for professional success.
  - Group projects and assignments, building peer to peer relationships, building relationships with professors and university staff, and exploring student organizations give scholars opportunities to build interpersonal skills.
- Internships
  - Scholars find internships in their field of study, which allows direct job shadowing and hands-on learning that strengthens technical expertise. Scholars set goals for their internship and are responsible for maintaining a work schedule, completing tasks per deadlines, and communicating needs.

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- Through the internship and internship search experience participants build their confidence, communication, collaboration, and teamwork skills through practical experiences in the workplace setting.
- Cross-Cultural:
  - Through community service/service learning, Scholars interact with established community service groups to understand the needs of the local community, volunteer their time, and build empathy and teamwork skills.
  - Scholars collaborate with organizations and professors both on and off campus to coordinate a country presentation where they practice their public speaking skills and interact with fellow community members.
  - Scholars engage with community members while exploring local communities by taking part in activities that contribute to understanding the culture, arts, sports, youth concerns, local celebrations, and civil society that exist in their community.
  - Virtual exchange connects a Tunisian community with a US community to exchange ideas, culture, and knowledge while building scholars ability to plan, communicate, and collaborate with different audiences.

The goal of the program is for scholars to return home equipped with the skills and knowledge to contribute to Tunisia’s economic growth. After their return, “alumni” of the program leverage their new skills on their own and with support from the program, including:

- Seed funding in the form of small grants to alumni to collaboratively develop, test, or launch innovative projects, and serves the dual purpose of supporting alumni in using their skills at home while developing further skills for innovation.
- The TJSP Alumni Network and Job Board through the TJSP Online Portal is a place for alumni to maintain and build their connections and to share and access professional opportunities available to alumni through partnerships.
- Mentor Matching is provided for alumni with innovative projects to receive six months of tailored feedback and guidance on their project from a professional mentor from a partner company, using IREX’s mentorship toolkits.
- Professional Leadership Plan (PLP) is a tool provided to alumni at re-entry to guide them in setting long-term goals and action steps for their professional development and reflecting on their progress.
- Professional Training and Engagement: IREX offers opportunities for alumni to develop skills via online training opportunities and online or in-person chats with professionals from a broad network of partners.

### 3- Partnership, Structure and Processes

IREX works closely with funding partner at the US Department of State throughout the program. In Tunisia, IREX works closely with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and the many universities and technical institutes where the program beneficiaries study. In the US, IREX works closely with the hosting undergraduate institutions, as well as the organizations where scholars intern and volunteer.

In Tunisia, IREX Tunisia has built diverse and sustainable public-private partnerships with companies and associations in Tunisia in support of the alumni of TJSP. For example, in response to the high numbers of TJSP Alumni anticipated to have benefited from the program by year 2021 (estimated at

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over 700 Tunisian Youth), the IREX team in Tunisia has already gained support from a variety of public sector partners.

Current employers of TJSP alumni are impressed by the skills-gained, and have committed to employing more alumni in the future, in addition to in-kind and financial contributions. Mentors matched by IREX with alumni working on developing their innovative enterprise ideas, are looking forward to continuing to mentor alumni, as well.

Past partners who have joined alumni activities as guest speakers have committed their business and their own time to continuing to support alumni through workshops, job training, apprenticeships and financial commitments.

IREX continually seeks new partners to foster the employability of TJSP Alumni. For example, at a recent luncheon hosted by IREX's Vice President for Global Programs Taleb Salhab, TJSP alumni and their direct supervisors spoke to a group of influential leaders from top Tunisian businesses about the experience of TJSP Alumni who are successfully integrated in the work force immediately following the completion of their degree. The featured employer panelists indicated the level of soft-skills (communication, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, time and task management) in their employees who were TJSP alums were incomparable to other employees and candidates pursuing the same positions in the Tunisian job market. This luncheon created new partners for IREX beneficiaries of the TJSP program.

## 4- Results so far

Based on an annual survey of TJSP Alumni, the 2016 results showed that of the TJSP Alumni that have completed their tertiary degree in Tunisia, 89% reported that they are employed. This is in stark contrast to the national average, wherein "62.3% of young tertiary graduates are unemployed."

### *Program Statistics*

- More than **350 Thomas Jefferson Scholars have completed the program** and returned to Tunisia with the skills to become leaders in their professional fields and communities.
- The alumni of the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program are comprised of nearly **45% women** and are returning to institutions and communities in all **24 governorates** of Tunisia.
- More than **35% of the Thomas Jefferson** scholars come from the most disadvantaged regions of Tunisia along the border of Algeria and Libya and the interior, and **70% come from outside the greater-Tunis region.**
- More than **45% of the scholars have studied** in technical fields including information technology, computer science and engineering, and **nearly 30% study** in business fields (management, finance, marketing, accounting).

These young people are poised to become leaders in their professional fields and in your companies.

- Nearly **80% of alumni** report that they have taken on a leadership role in their campus or community after they return home,

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- More than **70% of alumni** report continuing to be engaged in civic and community service activities.
- And **25% of alumni** report they have started or launched their own initiatives

## 5- Expected Results

IREX continues to monitor the success of each cohort of scholars and alumni, as well as the long-term changes and hope to see broader and deeper impact over time. Already we have seen:

- the total number of applicants to the program double in five years
- the percent of female participants increase from 42% to 54%
- the percent of participants from disadvantaged governorates increase from 20% to more than 50%

Competency gained through the program:

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & ATTITUDES	PERSONAL 		INTERPERSONAL 		COMMUNITY 		CROSS CULTURAL 		PROFESSIONAL 	
	Problem solving	Vision	Communication	Social Skills	Social Responsibility	Dedication	Empathy	Resilience/ Adaptability	Respect	Problem solving
Critical thinking	Reflection	Social Skills	Teamwork	Dedication	Understanding	Empathy	Resilience/ Adaptability	Respect	Critical thinking	Planning
Creativity	Academic preparation	Teamwork	Collaboration	Understanding		Empathy	Resilience/ Adaptability	Respect	Creativity	Career exploration & readiness
Positive self-concept	Personal financial management	Emotional Intelligence				Empathy	Resilience/ Adaptability	Respect	Networking	
Self-control		Digital Literacy				Empathy	Resilience/ Adaptability	Respect	Goal-setting	

## 6- Challenges

The Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program has seen very strong results in the professional leadership skills gained by the youth participants during their academic year program and in the results of how they have used those skills to contribute to Tunisia's development. While the program has very diverse representation within it, including gender balance and strong representation from across Tunisia, it is not representative of open to all Tunisian youth, as candidates must be undergraduate students with strong English skills to be eligible to apply.

Strong partnerships with Tunisian businesses help us ensure that these youth go on to become leaders in their professions, thereby benefitting more youth in Tunisia by practicing and modeling the key soft skills youth need to get and stay employed as Tunisia continues its economic and political transition.

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## Biographies of Authors:

### **Ms. Kaia Benson, MA**

*Project Director, TJSP, IREX DC*

Kaia Benson provides leadership, oversight, and technical support to an employability portfolio of undergraduate programs at IREX. Kaia has more than a decade of international youth engagement experience and has supported the career progression of more than 1000 youth from North Africa, Central & South Asia, and Eastern Europe.

As Project Director of the Tunisia Undergraduate Scholarship Program and the Tunisia Community College Scholarship Program, Kaia provides diverse Tunisian youth with professional and leadership development opportunities, preparing them to contribute to Tunisia's economic development.

Her previous roles with IREX include serving as Project Director for the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program in Pakistan and the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program in Eurasia and Central Asia; leading the educational programs team in the Caucasus as Regional Director; and supporting youth in Turkmenistan as Program Manager. As a US Peace Corps Volunteer, Kaia co-directed the first Girls Leading Our World summer camp in the Khorezm region of Uzbekistan, supporting girls in developing life and leadership skills.

Kaia earned her Masters in International Affairs from Columbia University in Middle East studies and international security policy.

### **Ms. Ashley Noia, MSPPM**

*Country Director, IREX Tunisia*

Ashley Noia is the IREX country director in Tunisia, where she leads on-the-ground implementation of the Thomas Jefferson Scholarship Program, supporting the professional leadership and employability of Tunisian youth.

Prior to joining IREX, Ashley worked at Chemonics for five years and in Tunisia since 2014, contributing to USAID programs' monitoring, evaluation, and communications and overall office operations. She oversaw a nationwide job fair in Tunisia that brought together job seekers and employers, and she supported the development of career centers across Tunisia.

Ashley has supported international development programs funded by the US government in Tunisia, Tajikistan, Morocco, Iraq, and Ukraine. Previously, she was a consultant to the Government Accountability Office where she advised the policy team on gaps in college and career readiness in the US. Through the Heinz College Alumni Mentor Program, she designed career panels and networking events bringing university students and local businesses together.

She is an alumna of the Coro Fellows Leadership in Public Affairs program, a program designed to build leaders through experiential learning and practicum consultancies within US communities. Ashley speaks French and earned her master of science in public policy and management from Carnegie Mellon University.

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