



**Arab States Regional Breakout Session
16 April 2025, 10:00-11:30 am (NY time)**

IDENTIFICATION	
Session/plenary title	Arab States Regional Breakout Session
Session/plenary focus	Arab Region
Session/plenary UN co-lead UN 1	UNESCWA
Session/plenary UN co-lead UN 2	UNDP, RBAS
Session/plenary youth co-lead 1	MGCY
Session/plenary youth co-lead 2	ICMYO
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	
<p>The Missing Link: Youth Civic and Political Engagement as a Catalyst for Safe, Sustainable and Inclusive Societies</p> <p>Young people in the Arab region constitute the largest demographic group with over 60 percent being under the age of 30, representing a valuable resource with untapped potential for driving progress across the SDGs. They remain, however, systematically excluded from civic and political life, limiting their ability to contribute to the wellbeing of their societies. The World Bank estimates that youth exclusion costs economies billions of dollars annually in lost productivity, underemployment, and disengagement, concluding that “inclusion is about more than just jobs or education; it’s about ensuring young people have a voice and agency in shaping their communities.”¹ Across the region, youth face legal, structural, and societal barriers that restrict their participation in decision-making, policy formulation and governance. These barriers manifest in restrictive legal frameworks, outdated electoral systems, and policies that fail to institutionalize youth engagement, as evidenced by the fact that less than 2 percent of parliamentarians in the region are under 30.² This governance gap weakens intergenerational policy dialogues, leaving youth disenfranchised.</p> <p>Young women and girls in particular encounter compounded layers of exclusion due to gender-based discrimination and social norms. The Arab region has the lowest female labor force participation rate in</p>	

¹ World Bank Report. 2025. [Change-Makers : Empowering Youth for Inclusive Societies](#)

² https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/20231016_ipu_youthreport_en_lr.pdf

the world, with only one out of five women engaged in the workforce.³ This exclusion not only denies young people their rights but also undermines progress toward the SDGs, as societies cannot meaningfully advance development goals when a significant portion of their population remains marginalized.

The lack of youth civic and political participation has far-reaching economic and governance consequences. Limited meaningful participation in policy processes can exacerbate unemployment, with young people left out of strategies that could improve labor market opportunities. Youth unemployment in the Arab region is almost double the global average with 27.6 percent of all young people unemployed in 2023⁴. Young women are particularly marginalized, with 46 percent in the region not in employment, education, or training (NEET)⁵.

Many young people feel unheard, fueling frustration that can lead to migration, social unrest, or vulnerability to radicalization. More than half of all young people in the Arab States region (54 percent) strongly believe that their voices do not matter to their country's leadership, and almost as many (51 percent) do not think their government has the right policies to address issues most important to young people⁶. Where youth are sidelined from peacebuilding and governance, conflicts are more likely to persist, weakening social cohesion and obstructing sustainable peace efforts and development prospects. Political disengagement can lead to broader social instability which can discourage investment and economic growth. Conversely, when young people have institutionalized channels for civic and political participation, they become partners in conflict prevention, security reform, and resilience-building - leading to more peaceful societies and more sustainable growth.

Environmental governance is another area where youth participation is essential. Young activists and community leaders are at the forefront of climate action, yet their role is often informal and unrecognized in national strategies. The cost of ignoring youth voices in climate action is significant, as younger generations will inherit the consequences of today's environmental decisions. Without mechanisms to include youth perspectives in climate policies, environmental solutions risk being disconnected from the realities of future generations. Studies show that countries with structured youth engagement in climate governance report higher levels of policy innovation and local ownership over environmental solutions ([UNEP, 2023](#)).

Ultimately, societies that invest in meaningful youth civic engagement see higher levels of innovation, social cohesion, and economic resilience. Enabling young people to participate as equal partners in governance and development processes is not just a rights-based imperative - it is a necessity for achieving sustainable and inclusive progress. Without their engagement, the path to achieving the SDGs will remain incomplete.

OBJECTIVES OF SESSION/PLENARY

³ (<https://www.undp.org/arab-states/gender-justice-law-arab-region>)

⁴ ILO. (2024). Arab States Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2024

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ ASDA'A BCW Youth Survey (2023). <https://arabyouthsurvey.com/en/findings/>

This session aims to highlight the critical role of youth civic engagement in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensuring inclusive and resilient societies. It will explore the economic, social, and political consequences of youth exclusion, emphasizing the need for institutionalized participation mechanisms based on clear operational standards. The discussion will showcase young people's perspectives on how meaningful youth engagement can foster economic growth, social cohesion, good governance, and environmental sustainability, citing evidence that links youth participation to greater trust in institutions, conflict prevention, and resilience-building. Participants will exchange strategies and best practices to strengthen youth inclusion in decision-making, ensuring that young people contribute as active partners in shaping policies and solutions for a more sustainable and equitable future.

OVERALL FORMAT/STRUCTURE

A regional interactive and evidence-based debate between young people and decision-makers on the role of youth civic and political participation in advancing the SDGs. The session will include member States keynotes, a panel of youth speakers representing different sectors in the Arab region and engagement with the audience. An open floor discussion will follow for all attendees to contribute by reflecting on presentations, sharing perspectives, but also best practices and lessons learnt.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does youth civic and political participation contribute to achieving the SDGs, particularly in areas of economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental sustainability?
2. What are the underlying structural, legal, and societal barriers preventing young people from meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and how do these barriers vary across different governance models?
3. What is the economic cost of youth exclusion? How does youth exclusion impact economic development, labor markets, and innovation?
4. What strategies can help break down societal norms and structural barriers that prevent young women and girls from taking leadership roles? What are some of the common narratives found across the region that discourage young women's participation?
5. In what ways can youth engagement in governance enhance trust in institutions and promote stability?
6. What strategies have proven effective in fostering youth leadership in policy development in the Global South?
7. How can governments, international organizations and civil society create institutionalized mechanisms for sustained youth inclusion?
8. How can youth perspectives be systematically integrated into climate policies and sustainability strategies?
9. What indicators or benchmarks can track whether youth voices truly influence policy development?

NAMES AND TITLES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)

Moderator: Ms. Noora Al-Adba, 27 years old, Qatar

Noora AlHedfa is a youth leader and sustainable development advocate, specialising in strategic international engagement. She holds a Master's in Diplomatic Studies from the University of Oxford. Her work supports the effective implementation of the SDGs through public diplomacy, multilateral engagement, and youth-led initiatives, with a focus on cross-cultural collaboration and the role of youth in policy innovation.

Speaker 1: Ms. Rahaf Abu Mayyaleh, 22 years old, Jordan

Rahaf Abu Mayyaleh is a Young Leader in the Generation17 program, and a committed youth and climate activist. She has dedicated her efforts to climate advocacy and the advancement of green technology, contributing to the training of over 4,000 young people. In recognition of her leadership and positive impact on the community, she was featured as a success story by the "Crown Prince Foundation".

Speaker 2: Ms. Fay Khales, 22 years old, Iraq

A law graduate focused on financial regulations and AI policy, Fay has contributed to international policy discussion on governance, sustainability, and digital policy, advocating for stronger youth engagement and legal frameworks in these areas. Fay is also a SOTF Youth Delegate, UNODC Youth Delegate, COP29 Youth Delegate, and White and Case Intern (UAE).

Speaker 3: Mr. Mohammed Alsalman, 22 years, Saudi Arabia

Mohammed Alsalman is a senior Interior Design student at Pratt Institute specializing in neuroaesthetics and architecture's impact on well-being. A Ministry of Culture Scholar and board member of the *Mawhiba* Student Council, in addition he represents Saudi Youth in multiple international high-level forums, advocating for sustainable development, youth empowerment, and the role of design in advancing well-being.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS, SUGGESTED READINGS, IF ANY

1. ESCWA (Left Behind Youth, February 2025) [Social Development Report 5: Unpacking the promise to leave no one behind in the Arab region - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia](#)
2. ESCWA (SDGs Report 2024) [Arab Sustainable Development Report 2024](#)
3. [UNDP Youth Civic and Political Participation Curriculum https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/youth-civic-and-political-participation-](https://www.undp.org/arab-states/publications/youth-civic-and-political-participation-)

[curriculum#:~:text=The%20UNDP%20%E2%80%9CCurriculum%20on%20Youth,youth%20civic%20engagement%20and%20political](#)