



#YOUTH2030

6th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Session on the Arab States

31 January 2017
CONFERENCE ROOM B

9:30 – 11:00 am

United Nations Headquarters, New York

Background and context

Arab Region

More than 60 percent of the region's population is under the age of 30, and the current youth generation is the largest this region has witnessed over the past 50 years; making up 30% of its population of 370 million. Youth are often exposed to the detrimental impacts of poverty and labour markets eschewed by the impact of globalisation (dramatically reflected in 10 million unemployed Arab youth, between the ages of 18 and 25), and unmet expectations, due in part to the evolving dynamics of family structures and fanned by technology and the global media.¹

The region as a whole needs to create 5 to 6 million new jobs a year for new job seekers in order to stabilize unemployment rate, and the public sector cannot easily absorb new entrants. The region has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world approaching 30 percent. In poor and conflict-affected countries, nearly 45 percent of young people are affected by unemployment. Young females are particularly affected, facing the double burden of age and gender. Female unemployment in 2013 reached 17.8 per cent compared to a male unemployment rate of 8.4 per cent.² Female youth unemployment (15-24) amounted to 33.1 per cent in 2012 compared to 21 per cent for male of the same age group.³

In addition to unemployment, youth exclusion is strongly evident, often crossing with other forms of marginalization linked to gender, location, culture and/or community. This undercuts both development and social cohesion, yet it remains poorly recognized. Social norms continue to side-line youth in many places, treating political and economic

¹ Arab Youth Strategizing for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 2006

² World Development Indicators, World Bank.

³ World Development Indicators, World Bank.



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participation as the prerogative of older people. More than 30% of Arab people are increasingly dissatisfied with their living standards. Populations in an expanding number of Arab countries are suffering from lack of socio-economic progress and limited participation in society, compounded by a deteriorating state of security.

For UNDP, the full involvement of young men and women in participatory decision-making and monitoring processes is vital to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Young men and women are powerful agents of change if given the right incentives; harnessing their energy, knowledge, reach, critical thinking and innovative ideas and solutions is indispensable for the achievement of the SDGs. Young people's challenges ought to be addressed, but also their meaningful inclusion in SDG decision-making processes is equally critical. The youth, from all backgrounds, including the most marginalized, need to have recognition and a proper space to participate in the shaping, implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at local, national and regional levels. Governments that recognize the importance of engaging and cooperating with young people as partners and establish explicit pathways for their significant participation will be much better positioned to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Further, youth engagement is crucial if the demand for participation, inclusion, accountability and revitalized global engagement embedded in Goal 16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies) and Goal 17 (partnerships and implementation) is to be attained.⁴

With momentum building as the Arab region discusses SDG implementation, the time is now to involve youth as stakeholders and partners in addressing the sustainable development challenges.

In 2015, UNDP Regional Bureau of Arab States (RBAS) successfully launched the first annual Youth Leadership Programme (YLP1) that brought together around 40 inspiring young men and women from 18 Arab countries to nurture their creativity, strengthen their leadership skills, and help them realize their ideas to improve their communities, whether local, national or global.

Building on the success and lessons learned from YLP 1 and in the context of the 2030 Agenda, RBAS launched YLP 2 in April 2016. Under the theme of "Innovation for Sustainable Development," YLP 2 supports young men and women from across the region in exploring innovative approaches to addressing sustainable development challenges in four prioritized pillars: Gender Equality, Good Governance, Social Cohesion, and Economic Empowerment. Over the course of the year, the participating youth received ongoing support,

⁴http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-as-partners-for-the-implementation-of-the-sdgs/



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attended a series of interactive hands-on learning workshops, as well as targeted mentoring to unpack the SDGs, identify entry points for change, and develop skills in various social innovation approaches and methodologies, especially human-centered design. The expected outcome of YLP 2 is to mobilize young participants to become engaged citizens, innovative problem-solvers, effective leaders and successful agents of change.

YLP 2 was launched in 11 countries namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Somalia Tunisia and UAE and who adopted the programme to benefit the local context and priorities. The program ran for approximately 6 months with several stages: Inception (call for applications and selection), Design (national hands-on workshops and mentoring) and Development (the regional leadership workshop). Each Country Office offered customized national activities that introduced youth to the SDGs and supported youth as they developed their ideas and initiatives around SDGs and the four thematic pillars. At the national level in each of the 11 countries, the participants were mentored and their ideas nurtured. As an outcome of the national processes, five participants from each country were selected to join the regional workshop to further their skills and learning. The participants then had the opportunity to network with youth from other countries, debate their ideas in creative and innovative ways, and capture knowledge of successes and challenges in youth leading the SDGs. Lastly, 12 young women and men from this regional cohort were chosen at the end of the programme to receive the “Change Maker” honor at a final awards ceremony in Kuwait.

The ECOSOC Forum provides an opportunity for YLP participants to engage at the global level representing their initiatives and recommendations.

2. Objectives

The Regional Breakout Session for Arab States will provide a platform for the YLP 2 Change Makers to talk about how they understand their role in achieving SDGs and to showcase the solutions that they developed through the YLP programme and through their own means.

Over the course of the session, participants will have the opportunity to discuss challenges facing the region, youth empowerment, SDG achievements, and social change initiatives.

3. Issues at stake

- Promoting Arab youth empowerment and supporting youth to become engaged citizens and change-agents;
- The role of youth in addressing sustainable development challenges, in relation to:
 - Gender Equality
 - Good Governance
 - Social Cohesion
 - Economic Empowerment



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- Encouraging Arab youth to tap into their creativity and use innovative approaches to addressing development challenges

4. Questions for the participants

- What are the most significant struggles being faced by Arab youth today? How might youth empowerment and SDGs provide solutions for these problems?
- What are the primary challenges encountered by Arab youth who hope to become successful change agents? What kinds of initiatives, policies, and/or programmes might best support youth who want to become active citizens, innovators, and solution-finders?
- What role can Arab youth play in promoting SDG achievements? How can individuals and organizations best support these youth in pursuing their aims?
- How can organizations empower Arab youth with diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of gender, race, education, disability, and class? Why is this kind of diversity important for solving challenges in the Arab region and promoting SDGs?
- The recent Arab Human Development Report identified three crises in the Arab region: of the state, economic models, and politics. What role can youth play in addressing these crises?

5. Suggested reading materials

[2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

[UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017](#)

[Arab Human Development Report 2016](#)

[Security Council Resolution 2250](#)

[Youth, Peace and Security Consultation and Dialogue, Arab States Report](#)

<http://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/presscenter/events/2016/december/14-19December-YLP2.html>