



**ECOSOC
YOUTH
FORUM**

#YOUTH2030

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

ONLINE REPORTING

ARAB STATES

8 April 2019
CR 6, 1.45-3.45 p.m.
United Nations Headquarters, New York

IDENTIFICATION	
Session focus	Arab States
Session lead	Kawtar Zerouali and Samir Anouti
Session rapporteur	Martine Zaarour
Session moderator	Noor Al Mahrooqui and Taher Sellami
Session note-taker 1	Masooma Kadhem
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<u>CURRENT LANDSCAPE</u>	
What is the current landscape for this region or SDG, including issues, opportunities, recent trends, gaps, challenges?	
The Arab region is home to the youngest population in the world, with over 100 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29 and it has been demonstrated that they tend to be “better educated and more connected to global knowledge relative to older ages.” This indicates that it is not the lack of motivation or lack of skills, but rather lack of available opportunities, that prevents them from becoming change-makers in their communities. In fact, the youth in Arab region are facing enormous challenges including the lack of decent employment	

opportunities; weak participation; inadequate quality of health services and access to education; in addition to the significant impact of conflicts, terrorism, instability and migration. Additional challenges include legal discrimination, gender-based violence, inadequate livelihoods, as well as broader social, political, and economic marginalization and exclusion. The youth unemployment in the region is the highest in the world, with 30% in 2016, compared to 13% worldwide, while it is also a gendered issue - young women are twice as likely to be out of work compared to men. Young women are often excluded from education, and subsequently from the workforce, further constraining youth's ability to contribute to achievement of the SDGs. This discrimination of women is exaggerated even more in countries facing conflict or post-conflict transition.

The fact is that Youth in the Arab region represent a fundamental pillar in rebuilding and pushing societies on a sustainable development, peace and tolerance path. They have proved that, when given the opportunity and the necessary means, they take the responsibilities seriously and promote social change in their communities.

Hence, a new paradigm for working on youth priorities has never been as urgent to promote. The young people need to be **included** in policy and decision making as **equal** partners by being informed, consulted and **empowered** to contribute to the sustainable development of their societies through their innovative approach and proposed solutions to the region's most pressing challenges.

YOUTH SOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS

(What are youth doing to address the current situation and leverage opportunities? And what are some of the most transformative solutions?)

The youth in the Arab region want to have more control over their lives and self-expression to expand their opportunities as resilient and active society members and solution-finders. To achieve that they challenge the status quo in the region by claiming their position as positive agents of change and ensure their active participation in the implementation of the 2030 agenda in their countries. They actively seek for and seize the available opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes of youth-related issues. Get involved at grass-root level, joining youth organizations in their communities and come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems. The young men and women of the region place great importance on formal and continuing education; taking advantage of existing and emerging capacity-building and education tools, for example, by using internet access as a vehicle for online learning.

During the Arab States breakout session we heard from young social entrepreneurs and change-makers working on transformative solutions and initiatives designed to tackle some of the important challenges faced by the youth in the region:

- **Taher Sellami, Tunisia** shared with us his INO project, an online platform for job seekers, aims at eliminating discrimination in the recruitments process and provide all with equal opportunities
- **Martine Zaarour, Lebanon** shared her Jay Thuraya project that helps women to generate income from the comfort of their homes using the latest online technology by selling home made products and preserve their culinary heritage and traditions.
- **The Peace of Art project** is a Lebanese youth-led academy that uses art as a peacebuilding tactic. Through teaching young girls' art, Peace of Art managed to support the integration of young Syrian refugees in North Bekaa and address complex issues such as sectarian tension and animosity.
- Lastly, Assilah's local Meditation **Forum for Youth** that has managed to both motivate its local youth to be active policy and change makers as well as partner with Regional, International and UN partners to share the perspective of the region's youth, foster inter-rational dialogue and advance the thinking on youth policies in the region.

The organizers then divided the room to four groups to give chance to small group discussions designed to encourage participants to share their experiences, ideas and views regarding the role of the Arab youth in policy dialogue and civic engagement and their contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

LOOKING TO THE HORIZON

What can the UN and youth do together to make sure young people's contributions have a deeper and wider impact, and that they are be better served and engaged by member states?

The United Nations system and other international institutions, Governments, civil society organizations at the local and regional level, as well as the private sector has to take action to : a) promote a youth-positive narrative reflecting their strengths and diversity and **empower** them as social change agents; b) engage youth as **equal** partners on principles of equal partnership, accountability and ownership in the development, peace and security of their communities and; c) Promote a more **inclusive** and enabling humanitarian and development system with new ways of working that commit to investing in young people capacity and skills.

The UN, policy makers and the youth in the Arab region should work together to:

- Push for elimination of discriminatory laws in the region to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Make more effort to integrate youth from the region with the 2030 SDGs agenda, by making it more accessible and readable, in order for youth to become agents and ambassadors of SDGs in their countries and on international stage.

- Create entrepreneurial ecosystems as a mechanism of successful engagement with the governments