



**ECOSOC
YOUTH
FORUM**

#YOUTH2030

8th Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

ARAB STATES

**8 April 2019
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United Nations Headquarters, New York**

IDENTIFICATION	
Session focus	Arab States
Session title	Youth Champions of Change to expand sustainable impact
Session lead	Kawtar Zerouali, UNDP
Session co-organizers	Samir Anouti, UNFPA
Session moderator	Taher Sellami, Tunisia, UNDP Arab States, Youth Leadership Programme
Session note-taker 1	TBD
Session note-taker 2	TBD
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	
The Arab region is home to the youngest population in the world, with over 100 million youth between the ages of 15 and 29. ¹ These young men and women have the potential to drive	

¹ "Expanding Youth Opportunities in the Arab Region." United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
<http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/poverty/ExpandingYouth%20Opportunities%20AHDR%20research%20paper.pdf>

significant change and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite widespread stereotypes about unmotivated and unskilled youth in the region, it has been demonstrated that they tend to be “better educated and more connected to global knowledge relative to older ages.”² 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.

Young people in the region face unique challenges, including legal discrimination, gender-based violence, inadequate livelihoods, as well as broader social, political, and economic marginalization and exclusion. Unemployment among youth in Arab States, for example, is the highest in the world, 30 percent in 2016, compared to 13 percent worldwide³. 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.

If the region is to achieve the 2030 Agenda, youth cannot be sidelined or siloed. They must be given every opportunity to contribute and must be supported in their efforts to mobilize, to act, to make change, and to concretely advance sustainable development in their own communities.

Agenda 2030 prioritizes “leaving no one behind” by reaching those most marginalized, including women, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities, those living with disabilities, and those in rural environments, elevating their voices and their solutions. It also calls for putting in place the systems that allow for innovation and action to achieve the SDGs.

While positive steps have already been taken to foster youth inclusion in a number of Arab States, more work remains to be done. The recently released UN Youth Strategy (2018-2021) has prioritized promoting the civic and political engagement of youth, noting that the UN must leverage its capacity in order to promote youth participation in public affairs at all levels.⁴ Young change-makers must be identified and supported, and closer collaboration must be fostered among the government, civil society, and private sector.

In view of achieving a transformative leap and qualitative improvement and growth for youth in Arab countries, there is need to develop and/or update the approach as well as youth policies and strategies within a framework that upholds their rights, fulfils their potential, as well as, optimize their contribution to sustainable development of their countries. As emphasized during the 2018 Youth Forum in the Arab Region, such an approach would equally necessitate a new paradigm and positive narrative on Young People in the region that promote

² “Expanding Youth Opportunities.” UNDP.

³ https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_514537/lang--en/index.htm

⁴ UN Youth Strategy. 2018.

youth as positive change makers and problem solvers and show how their insights and innovations can help speed up attainment of SDGs' and the 2030 agenda in the Arab Region.⁵

Key issues:

- Promoting social, economic and civic inclusion of youth in the Arab region and supporting them to become engaged citizens and agents of change.
- Harnessing technology for inclusion of youth to catalyze meaningful change.
- Supporting youth as drivers of innovative solutions for sustainable development challenges, especially in relation to:
 - Ensuring access to quality education (Goal 4)
 - Ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment (Goal 5)
 - Increasing access to decent work and economic growth (Goal 8)
 - Reducing inequalities in the society (Goal 10)
 - Active engagement in climate action (Goal 13)
 - Working towards peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16)
 - Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (Goal 17)

SESSION OBJECTIVES

It is important to explore the potential and assess the bottlenecks facing Arab countries in their attempt to empower youth and address youth related development issues from the policy-making and planning levels to systematic and structural barriers, implementation via national and local mechanisms, financing and monitoring, evaluation and results measurement, statistical tools and capacities. In this regard, the Regional Breakout Session for Arab States ECOSOC Youth Forum will serve as a significant space for young people to share emerging approaches that demonstrate and amplify young people's contribution to achieving the SDGs both region and national specific with a focus on lessons learned and ideas for scaling these solutions that can be shared with other regions."

The Session will provide a platform for the youth from the Arab region and partners to:

- Unpack emerging approaches and opportunities that demonstrate and amplify young people's contribution to achieving the SDGs
- Identify youth's role in achieving SDGs and to showcase the solutions or products that they have developed including through UNDP's Youth Leadership Programme (YLP), Youth Forum in the Arab Region, and through other means.
- Examine policies and strategies enabling/or preventing, youth's equal participation and inclusion in achieving SDGs.

⁵ 2018 Youth Forum in the Arab Region, UNFPA-Mediterranean Forum for Youth and the World Organization of the Scout Movement, December 2018

- formulate recommendations to advance the youth development agenda which reinforce their inclusion and participation at all levels.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Youth living in the Arab Region to share their experiences and initiatives in creating innovative solutions to sustainable development challenges. In addition, the session will provide an interactive platform to identify and address gaps and challenges young people are concerned with for inclusive and meaningful participation of young men and women.

The session will end with agreed on concrete recommendations on successful approaches and needed enablers to scale up youth inclusive participation in the Arab region and supporting them to become engaged citizens and change-agents in the implementation of the SDGs at the national and regional level.

These recommendations are to be shared with decision-makers and representatives of governments attending high-level events, included in Presidential Statement at ECOSOC High Level Segment and the High-level Political Forum in July and September 2019.

APPROACH USED TO GENERATE REGIONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS & CONTRIBUTION

UNDP and UNFPA along with their partners in the UN system, governments, civil society and youth organizations have been providing support to national policy development and implementation, by promoting active participation of youth, including the most marginalized and vulnerable in all spheres of society.

In response to the growing need to create alternative paths to action and social change, UNDP supports a variety of initiatives across the region to engage and empower youth as they contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Some regional flagship initiatives are the Youth Leadership Programme (YLP) and Visualize 2030 SDGs Data Camp (Viz 2030), Launched in 2015, YLP's mission is to invest in young women and men across the region to unleash their potential to become social innovators, leaders and a powerful force for change in their communities, countries and the region at large. This year's objectives are to identify youth who are committed to contributing to the national and regional development agendas and to support them as they develop, implement and scale their own innovative solutions to sustainable development, be they social enterprises, non-profits, NGOs, advocacy campaigns or other initiatives.

Additionally, UNDP RBAS' "Visualize 2030: SDGs Youth Data Camp" (launched in 2017) aims to encourage and train youth in the Arab region to produce data-driven audio-visual content on

issues related to SDGs in their countries or the region. By having access to and effectively using knowledge resources, youth can become more actively and meaningfully engaged in rethinking development policies, taking fact-based positions, or leading on entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of their countries and regions.

UNFPA leads an evidence-based strategic response to support that every adolescent and youth, in particular adolescent girls, are empowered to realize their rights and full potential, and participate in sustainable development, humanitarian action and peace building. This includes country-level interventions based on priority needs of adolescents and youth as well as key regional interventions such as those dedicated to Youth, Peace and Security; Life Skills and Citizenship Education; Adolescent Health and Well-being; as well as, Adolescent Girls.

Very recently, UNFPA partnered with UNWOMEN, OCHA, ILO, UNICEF, and IOM as well as the Mediterranean Forum for Youth and the World Organization of the Scout Movement to convene the first-ever Youth Forum in the Arab Region, which was held in Assilah, Kingdom of Morocco from 19-21 December 2018. The Forum was attended by some 250 participants from 20 Arab countries. More than half of the attendees being adolescents and youth (aged 10-29), participants also included high-level representatives of Arab Governments including Ministers, Secretary Generals and Director Generals as well as members of parliament, youth networks and association and other civil society organizations, representatives from the private sector and academia, UN agencies and other international and regional development partners, plus experts and influencers among them actors, musicians and social media bloggers. The Forum's main objective is to set and advance the youth agenda while and promoting youth, peace and development in the Arab States. The aim is a dynamic, rights-based and representative regional platform that consults, engages and proposes actionable and innovative solutions on youth issues and challenges by bringing together representatives of all relevant stakeholders. The sessions focused on defining elements of a new paradigm and narrative on adolescents and youth in the region. Themes were Innovation, Youth, Peace and Security with the objective of ensuring a strong foundation for subsequent editions of the Forum. It included the launch of a Regional Strategic Framework on youth, Peace and Security in Arab States. Participants agreed on several key messages, grouped by issue according to session discussions and highlighted in the Forum outcome summary statement -- The Assilah Call for Action.

OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW

- 5 min: Welcoming remarks and presentation of the session Objectives and Approach
- 20 min: Selected youth will be giving 3 min each to talk on selected topics to be agreed on prior to the session
- 60 min: Small groups discussion led by youth on the selected questions from the CN
- 20 min: Each group reports back to the larger group

- 15 min: Agreement on the overall recommendations to be reported to the plenary.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What role can youth play in promoting the SDGs?? How can individuals and organizations best support these youth in pursuing their aims?
- Youth policies have been recognized globally as important, however, which mechanisms or paths are better for ensuring youth inclusion as partners in achieving the SDGs and for ensuring an enabling environment that ensures sustainability
- What are the most significant struggles being faced by youth in the region today? How might young women and men be empowered, and SDGs provide solutions for these problems?
- What are the primary challenges encountered by youth who hope to become successful change agents? What kinds of initiatives, policies, and/or programmes might best support youth who want to become resilient and active society members, innovators, and solution-finders?
- What role can youth in the region play in proactively expanding their opportunities, both economically and socially?
- How can organizations empower youth with diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of gender, ethnicity, education, employment status, disability, and class? How can they contribute to enhancing pluralism in the Arab region such that it becomes a friendly environment for youth from diverse backgrounds?

PREPARATORY EVENTS

- YLP5 Launch in Beirut, 28 - 31 March – annual forum for representatives from youth-serving organizations working with YLP innovators and change makers.
- UNDP Country Offices collaborate with national partners in hosting social innovation camps, challenges and competitions for young people at the national level all year round

- UNDP Inter-Agency Technical Team on Young People meeting – February 27/28
- UNFPA convened youth consultations including: (a) Y-PEER and other Youth Associations\Networks; (b) Group of the 2018 Youth Forum’s Youth Representatives; and, (c) Group of Youth Representatives selected to participate at the 2019 ECOSOC Global Youth forum and the extended Country Offices’ Youth Points.

SUGGESTED READING

[2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)

[Youth2030: UNDP Youth Strategy](#)

[Arab Human Development Report 2016](#)

[Security Council Resolution 2250](#)

[Launch of the UNDP Youth Leadership Programme 4](#)

[Regional Framework on Youth, Peace and Security in Arab States](#)

[Report of the 2018 Youth Forum in Arab States](#)

[The Global UN Youth Strategy](#)