



**ECOSOC**  
**YOUTH FORUM**

**YOUTH2030**

## Economic and Social Council Youth Forum

**"COVID-19 recovery: Youth taking action for a sustainable future"**

### CONCEPT NOTE

#### REGIONAL SESSION ON "ARAB STATES"

**20 April 2022, 8:00 AM – 9:30 AM**

IDENTIFICATION	
<b>SDG/theme or Region</b>	Arab States
<b>Session co-lead UN</b>	UNDP regional hub and ESCWA
<b>Session co-lead Youth</b>	Western Asia Youth Caucus, UN Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY)
<b>Session co-organizers (both UN and Youth)</b>	UNAIDS, UNESCO
BACKGROUND & KEY ISSUES	
<p>Prior to the onset of COVID-19 more than two years ago, over 110 million youth (aged 15-29) in the Arab region were already experiencing multiple, intersecting and longstanding human development, health and socio-economic challenges to the true fulfilment of their potential. In the Arab States region there are staggered paths of transition from education to work and the fastest growing youth unemployment rate in the world (25.6 per cent in 2020 in the Middle East and 29 per cent in North</p>	

Africa)<sup>1</sup>. The rate of young people in informal employment is as high as 85 per cent in Arab States (87.5 per cent in North Africa)<sup>2</sup>, and there is low female labour force participation as well as prevailing gender inequality and continued violence of all forms against girls and young women.

Furthermore, the region has a large refugee and migrant population, low political participation, and many countries experiencing humanitarian crises and conflict. These are all seemingly bleak challenges upon which the present and future of young people hang with deep concern. COVID 19 is arguably also standing in the way of many young people aspiring to become agents of positive change through taking action.

Nevertheless, within the framework of building back better, Arab countries and young people still stand a good chance to unite and transform these challenges and barriers into a prosperous demographic dividend that can shift the course of development trajectories in the region. This transformative vision and hope for empowering young women and young men has been a cornerstone in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

Arab countries have been profoundly impacted by the pandemic as government policies to contain and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and flatten the contagion curve have triggered economic crises that threaten hard-won development gains<sup>3</sup>, layered on top of pre-existing patterns of economic growth that largely relied on the excessive extraction of scarce, non-renewable natural resources and substandard waste management. A key finding from a 2020 World Bank report found that the pandemic has had an unequal impact on people, often affecting the poor and vulnerable disproportionately, including exacerbating already high levels of gender-based and domestic violence and interruptions to education<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, faced with a shortage of health care workers, many countries are pushing health care students who are approaching graduation to the front lines to join the fight against the virus, placing them in stressful situations and increasing their risk of infection<sup>5</sup>. The UNDP Human Development Report 2020 makes clear that we are at an unprecedented moment in the history of our planet. In the Arab States, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production over the past decades, combined with the consequences of climate change, have contributed to growing water scarcity, increased energy consumption, and associated greenhouse gas emissions, thus exacerbating land degradation and desertification and escalating food and energy import bills<sup>6</sup>.

Working with Youth as partners in reaching the SDGs in a post-COVID context and recovery, as recently emphasised by the Secretary-General's Report on "Our Common Agenda" that dedicates an area of

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<sup>1</sup> Youth unemployment in Northern Africa is among the highest in the world. It was 30.9 per cent in 2012 and has only fallen slightly to 29.3 per cent in 2020. a0.ILO modelled estimates, Nov.2021, ILOSTAT.

<sup>2</sup> ILO (2020b). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Arab States. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_737672.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_737672.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> UNDP (2021). Compounding Crises. Will COVID-19 and Lower Oil Prices Lead to a New Development Paradigm in the Arab Region?

<sup>4</sup> World Bank (2020). MENA Development Report. Distributional Impacts of COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa Region.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/engaging-young-people-in-the-response-to-covid-19-in-whos-eastern-mediterranean-region.html>

<sup>6</sup> UN Secretary General Policy Brief (2020): [The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region: An Opportunity to Build Back Better](#)

action to *listen and work with youth*, requires support on multiple levels with a range of stakeholders that work in synergies and not in siloes. This session will explore young people's contribution in the Arab States through four pathways to achieve the SDGs. Furthermore, the session will provide a unique opportunity to connect and unify youth initiatives, leaders and advocates from across the region and amplify the call for collective transformative action. The pathways are youth as impact entrepreneurs, job seekers, community builders and policy shapers. Through each of these pathways, youth exemplify the ability to support and lead transformation.

### SESSION OBJECTIVES

The Arab States Regional Breakout Session will showcase how youth contribute to the SDGs in the fields of entrepreneurship, community building, job-seeking and policy shaping and highlight how an enabling environment is crucial to this through a dialogue and a call to action.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Defined recommendations and suggestions for supporting an enabling environment for young women and men in the Arab region.

### APPROACH USED TO GENERATE CONCRETE CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A youth focused social media campaign organized across organizational channels and cross-cutting human development, socio-economic, environmental, gender and health issues, to map youth. Short survey link and possibility for youth to submit short videos (30-second statements).

These contributions will inform discussion guidelines for the session itself and will be made into a short video format along with social media infographics.

The key insights from the session itself will also be collected and turned into an article and accompanying social media infographics.

### OVERALL STRUCTURE AND FLOW

#### Opening (5 min)

- Moderator starts session with opening reflection question in Mentimeter based on the preparatory consultations with music playing ( [UNDP Lebanon YLP song](#) and [Ayami songs](#) ).
- Moderator explains the objective of the session and welcomes all speakers and participants.

- Keynote address (video) by H.E. Shamma Al Mazrui, Minister of Youth, United Arab Emirates

### **Youth introductions in TED talk style (20 min)**

- Moderator introduces four young speakers (policy shaper, entrepreneur, jobseeker and community builder) who showcase their experience on how their work on the different pathways contributed to the SDGs and Covid-19 recovery, including how they overcame challenges. They share their own story and perspective from a youth lens.
- They are spotlighted one by one when presenting themselves.

### **Dialogue on the enabling environment (30 min)**

- Moderator starts a dialogue by inviting each expert in turn with a tailored question to weigh in, from their perspective, on what the corresponding youth shared, and to provide recommendations that can be helpful given their experience.
- Next, a larger dialogue will be opened with questions posed to all speakers, spotlighting them as they respond. The moderator will continue to facilitate and guide to ensure all perspectives are included, and youth are given equal room to respond. Speakers can add to each other's points by raising their hands and being invited to speak.
- The following questions will be incorporated into the dialogue:
  - What are the challenges and solutions of successful young entrepreneurs, policy shapers, community-builders and jobseekers in post-COVID-19 recovery in Arab States?
  - How do youth contribute to a sustainable future in the Arab region?
  - What should be done to leverage and support the enabling environment?
  - How can entrepreneurship/community building/decent work/policy shaping contribute to COVID-19 recovery?
- Technically this will be done by spotlighting who is talking at any given time and leaving the moderator with spotlight on continually.
- Discussion ends with a summary of discussion by the moderator.

### **Q&A (10 min)**

- Taking the most upvoted questions from Mentimeter the moderator will ask all speakers to share answers by raising their hands. If there is enough time, participants in the audience who shared a question in the chat can also be asked to unmute and elaborate on their question.

### **Closing and action points (5 min)**

The moderator asks both the speakers in the event and all joining the meeting and viewing the livestream to share what action points they believe can be done to improve the enabling environment for youth to contribute to the 2030 Agenda by answering in Mentimeter. Youth will be invited to participate through the platform, and livestream will be also advertised across social media platforms. All replies will be collected and turned into an article and accompanying social media infographics.

## SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges and solutions of successful young entrepreneurs, policy shapers, community builders and jobseekers in post-COVID-19 recovery in Arab states?
- How do youth contribute to a sustainable future in the Arab region?
- What should be done to leverage and support the enabling environment?
- How can entrepreneurship/community building/decent work/policy shaping contribute to COVID-19 recovery?

## NAMES OF SESSION SPEAKERS AND MODERATOR(S)

### Keynote address:

- H.E. Shamma Al Mazrui, Minister of Youth, United Arab Emirates (video)

### Youth speakers:

- **Young Jobseeker** – Young person working towards supporting other youth to develop their skills and find opportunities.  
**Ms. Tala Qawasmi** (Palestine)
- **Young entrepreneur** – Young entrepreneur working on a social enterprise that tackles environmental issues.  
**Ms. Ethar Farea** (Yemen)
- **Young policy shaper** – Young person promoting youth engagement on policy issues related to environment and gender.  
**Mr. Ahmed El Halabi** (Lebanon)
- **Young community builder** – Young person working on community/educational projects related to environment.  
**Ms. Rasha Emad Eldin** (Egypt)

### Expert speakers:

- **Expert** on job seeking  
**Ms. Lama Zaher** (Lebanon)
- **Expert** on entrepreneurship  
**Mr. Omar Itani** (Lebanon)

- **Expert** on policy shaping  
**Mr. Abdelaziz Bouslah** (Tunisia)
- **Expert** on community building  
**Ms. Bara'ah Batainah** (Jordan)

**Moderator:**

- **Mr. Ahmed Buasallay** (Bahrain), Youth Development Delegate Alumni (UNDP/AYC Partnership)

### OVERVIEW OF PREPARATORY EVENT/CONSULTATION

As a first step, a survey has been developed to capture key issues and needs that youth in the four pathways experience. The survey is also widely disseminated across social media of UN regional entities, including IBCs for adolescents and youth.

In terms of consultation, preparatory meetings are organized to familiarize speakers and experts of the ECOSOC Youth Forum in general and Arab States in specific. A detailed presentation was also delivered on the modality of interaction, and expectations. Experts and speakers were provided with guidelines and were invited to comment and review, to ensure inclusiveness and teamwork.

### SUGGESTED READING

World Bank. MENA Development Report. Distributional Impacts of COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa Region. 2020

WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, International Association of Dental Students and International Pharmaceutical Students Federation. "Engaging young people in the response to COVID-19 in WHO's Eastern Mediterranean Region". <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/engaging-young-people-in-the-response-to-covid-19-in-whos-eastern-mediterranean-region.html>