



UNITED NATIONS

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# Technical Note

Let's Engage Arab Youth in Sustainable Development Goals!

*Arab youth as active actors for peace-building*

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Aim

The aim of this technical note is to highlight the global engagement of youth in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), starting with an overview of the United Nations (UN) outlook on youth and focus to engage youth with SDGs, and moving on to the status of youth in the Arab region, to provide recommendations for increasing youth participation in SDG implementation in Arab countries. The recommendations are directed to youth in the Arab region, civil society organizations as well as governments. The technical note has a special focus on the case of SDG 16 in the Arab region taking into account the UN's historic emphasis on the strong relationship between peace and development, especially among the young population.

### 1.2 Overview of United Nations Outlook on Youth

The UN defines youth or young people as “those persons between the ages of 15 and 24, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States”.<sup>1</sup> The current generation of youth is bigger than any other time in history - nearly 1.8 billion- and almost 90% of today's youth live in less developed countries.<sup>2</sup> The UN has long acknowledged that the energies, imaginations, and ideals of youth are crucial for sustainable peace and development of the communities where youth live (See Figure 1), finally adopting the “World Programme of Action for Youth” (WPAY) as an international Strategy guiding international communities in their response to youth challenges. The WPAY guides the UN Youth agenda and provides practical guidelines and policy framework for national measures and international support to enhance youth's situation, currently having fifteen youth priority areas (See Figure 2) and focusing particularly on actions that enforce youth national capacities and expand the quantity and quality of youth opportunities, encouraging them to fully participate in society.<sup>3,4</sup>

Implementation of the WPAY necessitates that youth fully enjoy all their human rights and essential freedoms and that Governments effectively act against violations of these rights and freedoms and promote tolerance, non-discrimination, and respect for diversity

The priorities of the WPAY intersect with several of the SDGs and their targets: priority one (Education) is aligned with SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning) and all its targets; priority two (Employment) intersects with SDG 8 (Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all) in targets 8.5, 8.6, and 8.7; priority three (Hunger and Poverty) converges with both SDGs 1-target 1.2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture) and 2-target 2.2 (End poverty in all its forms

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013. Definition of Youth.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Program, 2017. Fast Facts.

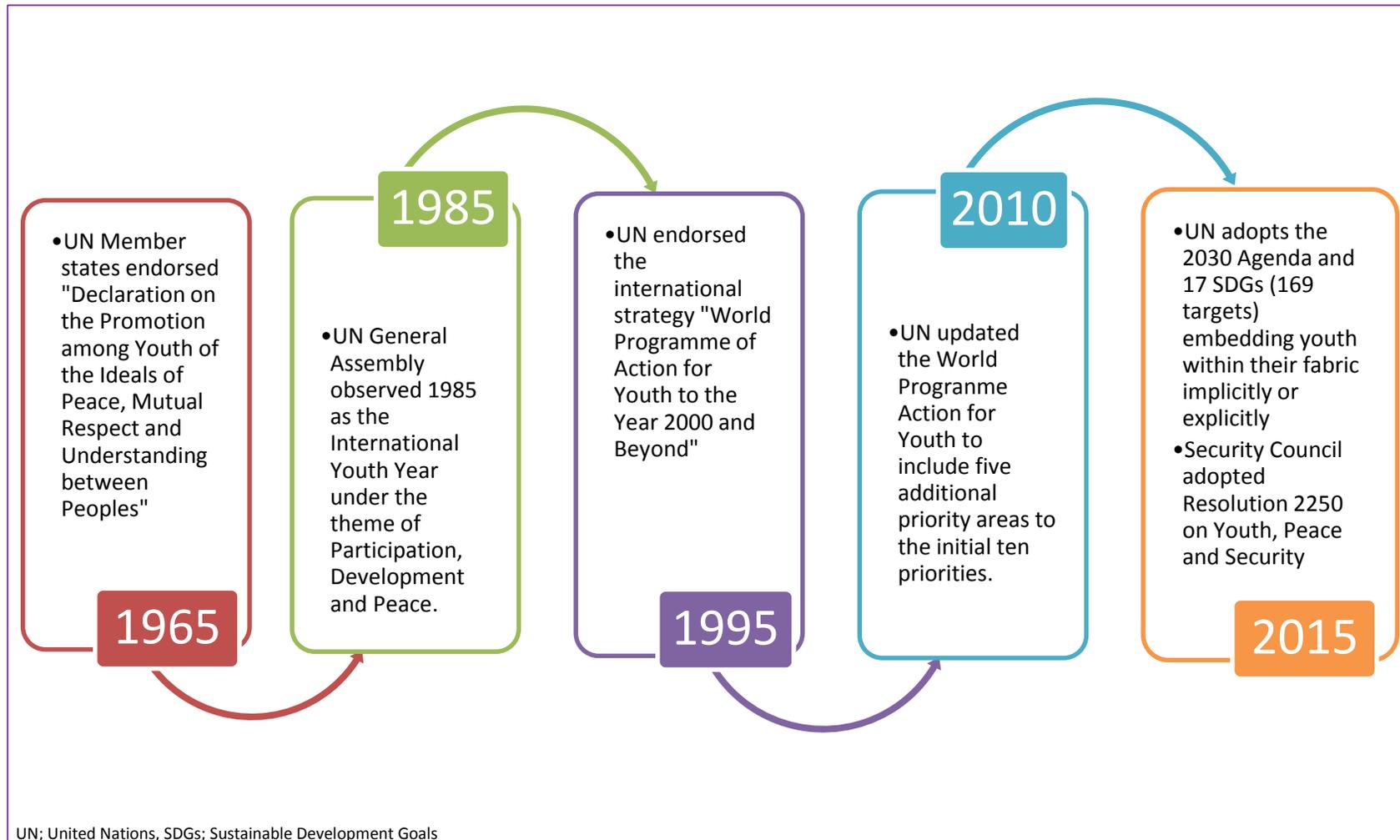
<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 2010. World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-programme-of-action-for-youth.html>



everywhere); Priorities four, six and thirteen (Health, Drug abuse, and HIV/AIDS respectively) are related to SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and its targets 3.3 and 3.5; priority nine (Girls and young women) crosscuts with SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and its targets 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.9; priority eleven (Globalization) associates with SDG 17 (Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development); priority twelve (Information and communication technology) is affiliated with SDG 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation) and its targets 9.4 to 9.8; and priority fourteen (armed conflict) correlates to SDG 16 (Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies) and its target 16.2.

Figure 1 Evolution of the recognition of youth role in peace and development by the United Nations<sup>1</sup>



•UN Member states endorsed "Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples"

1965

•UN General Assembly observed 1985 as the International Youth Year under the theme of Participation, Development and Peace.

1985

•UN endorsed the international strategy "World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond"

1995

•UN updated the World Programme Action for Youth to include five additional priority areas to the initial ten priorities.

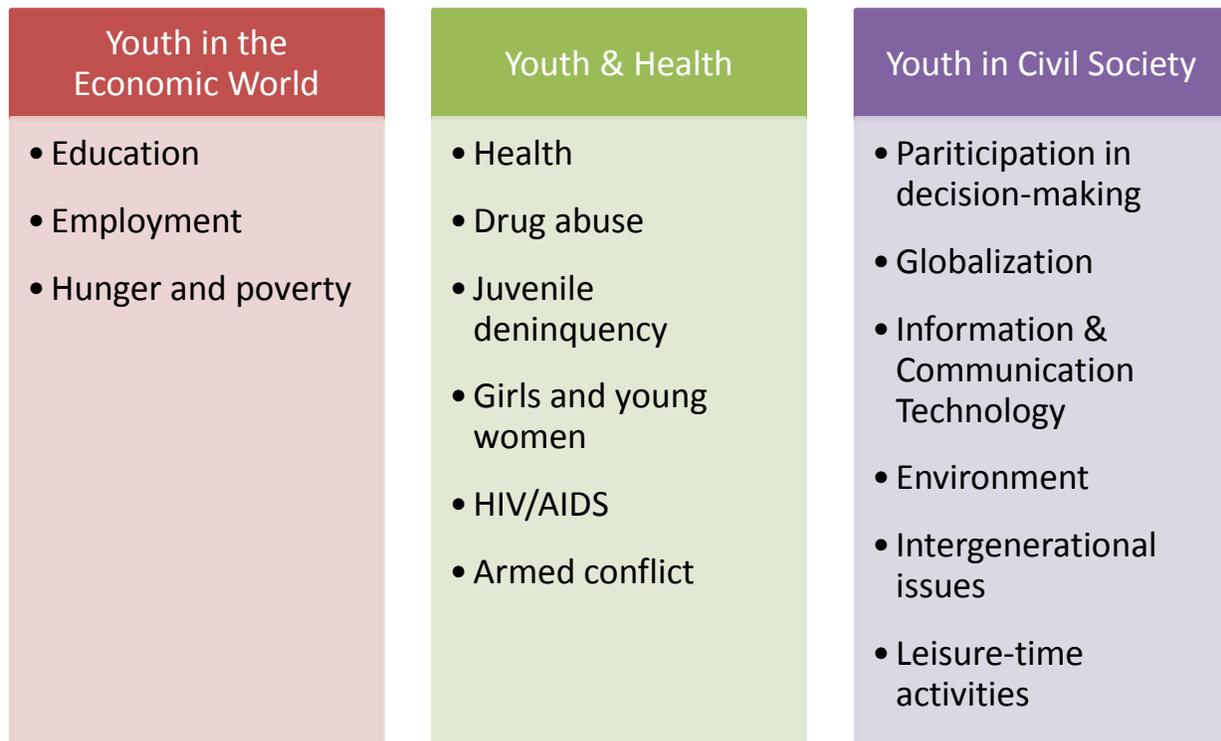
2010

•UN adopts the 2030 Agenda and 17 SDGs (169 targets) embedding youth within their fabric implicitly or explicitly  
•Security Council adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security

2015

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 2010. WPAY.

Figure 2 World Programme Action for Youth Fifteen Youth Priority Areas



Moreover, at the global level, the UN dedicated two of its Inter-Agency teams on youth. The first is the Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development (IANYD), whose aim is to improve the effectiveness of UN work in youth development, and whose work is guided by the WPAY framework. Currently co-chaired by the UN focal Point on Youth and the International Labor Organization, The IANYD supports and monitors the progress on the implementation of youth-related UN Resolutions, Conventions and the internationally agreed development goals. Guided by the WPAY, it undertakes various activities, mainly organizing international conferences on youth development and engaging in research initiatives and publications; and it has been working since 2012, to implement youth-related aspects of the Secretary-General's (SG) Envoy on Youth focusing on employment, entrepreneurship, civic engagement and protection of rights, political inclusion, education, including comprehensive sexuality education and health.<sup>1</sup> The second is the Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Youth Programme (IATTTYP) which is specifically dedicated to the Arab region. At the regional level, The IATTTYP developed a Regional Framework of Joint Strategic Actions for Young People based on a collective compilation of crucial strategic priorities addressing youth needs in the Arab region.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2015, the General Assembly endorsed a new development agenda entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; which includes seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was the international's community response to today's most urgent

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/un-inter-agency-network-on-youth-development.html>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People (UN IATTTYP), 2016. Regional Framework for Joint Strategic Actions for Young People.



global challenges to guide development priorities for an entire generation. The 2030 Agenda seeks to integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development- economic, social and environmental- with youth playing a major role in shaping it. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are interconnected and youth and youth-related issues are deeply embedded within SDGs with a focus on empowerment, participation and/or wellbeing. By this, the UN has reiterated once again that the knowledge of youth, and their reach and innovative solutions are fundamental if sustainable development to be realized.<sup>1</sup>

### 1.3 Youth in Sustainable Development Goals

*Paragraph 53 of the 2030 Agenda elucidates: “The future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today’s younger generation who will pass the torch to future generations.”*

Different approaches have been adopted by countries to tackle pressing youth issues in order to fully capture their human development, and create new opportunities for young men and women to avoid leaving them behind. At the global level, this recognition and commitment to empower youth from a cross-sectoral approach has been secured in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development declaration, and indeed with direct and explicit reference to youth in three sectoral areas, namely employment, education and climate change-related planning<sup>2</sup>. Emphasis is particularly and mostly placed on the issue of youth employment, addressed in three targets and in one means of implementation. Targets call for increasing the number of youth who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship (target 4.4); achieving full and productive employment and decent work for youth and equal pay for work of equal value (target 8.5); and substantially reducing the proportion of youth not in employment (target 8.6). The latter could be achieved via the development and operationalization of a global strategy targeting their employment and via the implementation of the ILO Global Jobs Pact<sup>3</sup>. There is also rich focus on education of youth, addressed in two targets (4.6 and 8.6) calling for achieving literacy and numeracy for all youth and for reducing the proportion of youth not in education or training. Finally, direct reference to youth is also made in means of implementation 13.b, which calls for promoting mechanisms to raise capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries, including focusing on youth.

Equally important is also a set of other various targets that undoubtedly entail implicit but highly important relevance to youth issues and concerns. Goal 2 on food security addresses in its target 2.2 the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women. Goal 3 on health is accompanied by four associated targets, namely 3.5 on strengthening prevention and treatment of substance abuse; 3.6 on halving death and injuries from road traffic accidents; 3.7 on ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services; and 3.8 on achieving universal health coverage. In addition, there is reference to age in target 1.2 on reducing the proportion of people of all ages, including children, who

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly, 2015. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Indirect references to areas addressing youth interest are not highlighted; and targets for adolescents are not included.

<sup>3</sup> Towards Achieving Sustainable Development in the Arab Region: The Population Dimension, ESCWA, 2015

live in poverty; target 10.2 on promoting inclusion in social, economic and political life; and means of implementation (target 17.18) on building capacities to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data.

## 1.4 Fostering youth engagement in SDGs inside the UN

The UN has engaged nine major groups and other stakeholders, including Children and Youth, in providing input on SDG implementation. The Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY) is a dynamic international network of youth and organizations working on bringing a change in the world, and act as a space for the voices of global groups of children and youth with respect to SDG implementation. The MGCY currently has four working groups: Restless Development, European Youth Forum, Pacific Youth Council, and Children and Youth International.<sup>1</sup> In all groups, it is worth noting that representation of Arab youth is limited.

Prior to the launch of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, the MGCY delivered its vision and priorities (See Box 1) for SDG implementation in March 2015, strongly advocating for the inclusion of youth at all levels in decision making on SDG policies, and emphasizing the need to mainstream gender equality in all elements of the SDGs (Goals and Targets).<sup>2</sup>

### Box 1 Priorities of the Major Group for Children and Youth included in their statement on SDGs in March 2015

- Youth empowerment, participation, capacity building, education, employment and entrepreneurship
- Gender equality, gender equity and sexual and reproductive health & rights
- Climate change, planetary boundaries and sustainable consumption & production
- Health and wellbeing, poverty, food sovereignty and the human right to water
- Means of implementation and financing sustainable development

Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, the MGCY has represented global youth in six General Assembly hearings and different Expert Group Meetings from April 2016 till July 2016. The MGCY delivered its position in each of these events by making statements comprising its input on the themes or resolutions discussed in the sessions and addressing questions to representatives of Member States.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, since 2012, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has organized an annual Youth Forum as a platform for youth to contribute to policy discussion at the UN, permitting 36 youth advocates and youth representatives from youth-led and youth-focused organizations and networks to engage in a dialogue with Member States, and to identify methods for promoting youth development and

<sup>1</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/childrenandyouth>

<sup>2</sup> UN Major Group for Children and Youth, 2015. UN Major Group for Children Youth's vision & priorities for delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and the post-2015 development agenda.

<sup>3</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/childrenandyouth>



engagement in the 2030 Agenda.<sup>1</sup> The 2017 forum in UN Headquarters in New York included theme-based breakout sessions, mainly poverty eradication, hunger, youth employment and economic empowerment, gender equality, health and wellbeing, resilience and climate change, and region-based breakout sessions including a session on youth in the Arab region.<sup>2</sup> The Arab region breakout session pointed out that, with the growing momentum of discussing the implementation of SDGs in the Arab region, now is the time to engage youth in the Arab region as stakeholders and partners in tackling sustainable development challenges pertaining to the region (gender equality, good governance, social cohesion, and economic empowerment). The session also emphasized the significance of promoting the empowerment of youth in the Arab region to become active agents of change and encouraging them to use their creativity and innovative approaches to find solutions to the mentioned development challenges.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, guided by the UN, countries around the globe have already taken the initiative to engage youth in SDG implementation (See Box 2)<sup>4,5,6,7</sup>. Conducted in different regions around the world, the initiatives target different aspects of youth participation in SDGs, and set a good example for other countries that have not yet pursued such projects.

### Box 2 Good practices of direct youth involvement in SDGs in selected global countries

Good Practices			
<p>In 2016, the Dutch UN Youth Representatives in the Netherlands launched a national SDG project reaching 3000 youth during three months and aiming at informing youth about issues related to SDGs, inspiring youth to actively participate in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs, and encouraging policymakers to enhance youth engagement throughout the SDG process.</p>	<p>During 2015-2016, Peru implemented “Engaging Youth in Sustainable Development” project by advocating for a major youth policy reform in Latin America whereby policies achieve sustainable development for and from youth. So far the project drafted “Youth 2016 – A Commitment with Youth” and allowed youth to takeover Peru’s National Parliament in January 2016.</p>	<p>“Youth 4 Global Goals” aims to motivate youth in the Philippines to contribute to the achievement of SDGs through three stages: awareness, understanding and action. The project developed an SDG curriculum which was taught at schools at the different levels- elementary, middle and high; launched an Ambassador program to inspire youth and educators to make youth aware of the SDGs and engage them in their communities; and created Youth Action Mapper platform to compile all SDG-related opportunities in one platform for youth</p>	<p>In 2017, Jordan has engaged youth in the preparation process of its Voluntary National Review submitted to the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform of the High-Level Political Forum under the auspices of the ECOSOC. This consultation was part of a multistakolder initiative of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation and supported by the UN country team.</p>

<sup>1</sup> ECOSOC Youth Forum “The role of youth in poverty eradication and promoting prosperity in a changing world” 30-31, 2017 Summary Report.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/node/902004>

<sup>3</sup> ECOSOC Youth Form 2017. Report on Breakout sessions on key regional priorities for youth development- Arab Region.

<sup>4</sup> The Dutch UN youth representatives, 2016. Engaging youth in the implementation of the SDGs

<sup>5</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=10941>

<sup>6</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/partnership/?p=13488>

<sup>7</sup> Jordan’s Way to Sustainable Development First National Voluntary review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 2017

## 2. SDGs and Youth in the Arab Region

### 2.1 Brief Overview of socio-economic situation of Youth

#### a) demography: size and proportion of young people (15-24)

The Arab region is relatively young with youth (15-24) constituting one-fifth of the region's population<sup>1</sup> (See Table 1). Today, more than 72 million young men and women aged 15-24 years live in the Arab region, representing nearly 20 per cent of the total population, and ranging from 13.4 per cent in Kuwait to 22.1 per cent in Yemen. This is the highest proportion of youth the Arab region has ever witnessed. Although this proportion is only one factor conditioning the complexities of social and political life, the youth bulge in the Arab region is an important fact shaping the development of politics, economy, society and culture of the region.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 Proportion of youth and youth secondary enrollment in Arab States<sup>3</sup>

	% Population	% youth population 2030	% Secondary enrollment***
Algeria	16.6	17.2	..
Bahrain	15.2	14.0	89.4**
Comoros	19.5	11.4	47.3
Djibouti	20.1	17.7	..
Egypt	17.3	18.3	85.4
Iraq	19.6	19.5	32.1*
Jordan	19.0	18.6	79.2*
Kuwait	13.4	14.0	99.4*
Lebanon	19.5	11.4	68.2**
Libya	15.9	17.4	51.2
Mauritania	19.5	19.5	42.9
Morocco	17.7	15.7	50.3**
Oman	11.9	16.3	83.0
Palestine	21.7	19.1	80.1
Qatar	14.6	11.5	89.0**
Saudi Arabia	15.6	16.1	91.8
Somalia	19.9	20.1	..
Syria	20.0	17.9	44.1
Sudan	19.9	19.4	24.5
Tunisia	15.6	14.3	..
UAE	12.7	11.0	..
Yemen	22.1	20.0	29.8

\*2000, \*\*2010, \*\*\*2013

#### b) education and employment of young people (15-24)

Recent reports<sup>4</sup> on Youth in the Arab region indicate that they are more educated, urban, and connected, and have more access to global knowledge than preceding generations. As evident in

<sup>1</sup> ESCWA, 2015. Towards Achieving Sustainable Development in the Arab Region: The Population Dimension.

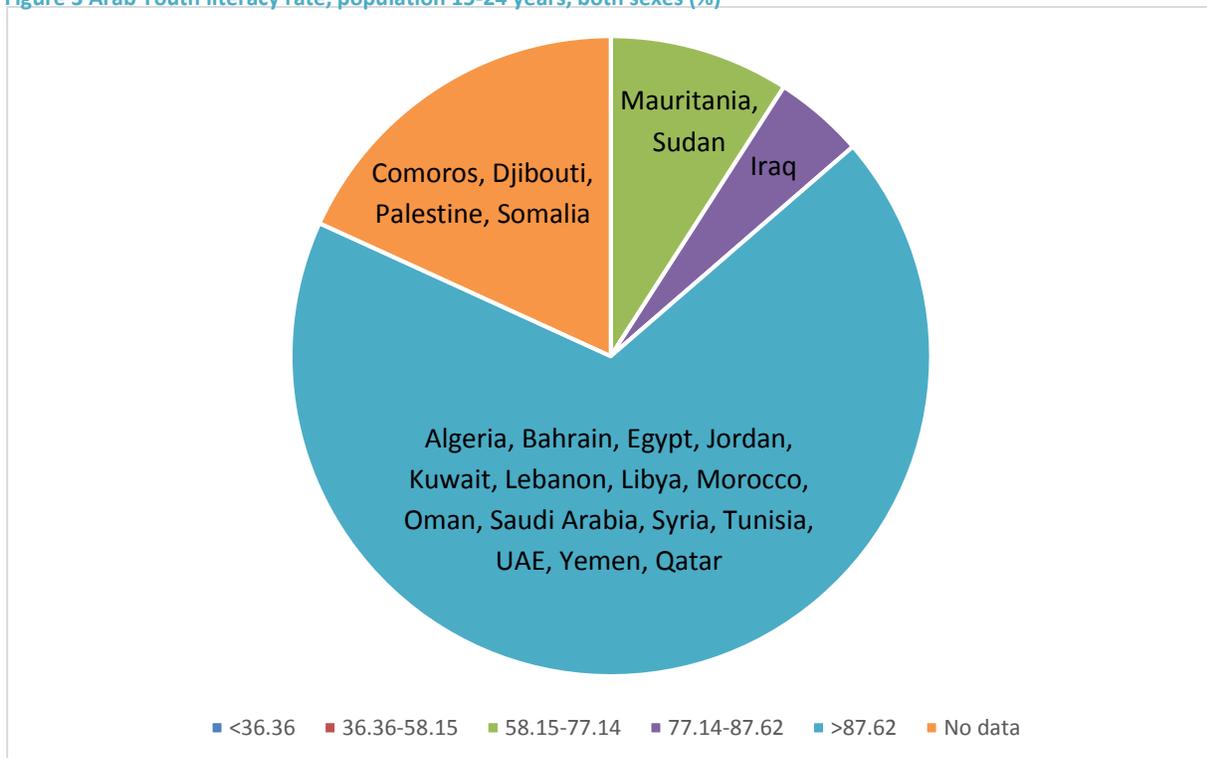
<sup>2</sup> Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), 2016

<sup>3</sup> Data extracted from Demographic Profiles of the Arab States for the year 2015. Secondary enrollment, where available, is for 2000, 2010 or 2013.

<sup>4</sup> AHDR, 2016

figure 3, youth literacy rate is more than 87% in 15 out of the 22 countries.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, today's youth have fewer opportunities allowing them to turn their skills into higher living standards<sup>2</sup>. Whilst data is not available for all countries, ILO estimates reveal that almost one fifth of youth in the Arab region are neither in education, employment or training (NEET) (See Table 2) in Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and Saudi Arabia with young females exhibiting higher NEET rates than males.<sup>1</sup> Fresh graduating students spend around 10 months searching for employment in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine,<sup>3</sup> causing frustration, increasing vulnerability and contributing to marginalization.

Figure 3 Arab Youth literacy rate, population 15-24 years, both sexes (%)<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2015

<sup>2</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>3</sup> Data extracted from Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Middle East and North Africa by the ILO (2016)

<sup>4</sup> Data extracted from the World Development Indicators of the World Bank for the year 2015

Table 2 Proportion of unemployment and NEET and time to first job among youth in the Arab region

	% Unemployment <sup>1</sup>			% NEET <sup>2</sup>			Time to first job (months) <sup>3</sup>		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Arab States	10.7	8.3	21.9	..	..	..	..	..	..
Algeria	11.2	9.2	19.7	21.2	10.8	32.1	..	..	..
Bahrain	1.3	0.5	4.3	..	..	..	..	..	..
Comoros	20	18.3	23.6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Djibouti	6.6	6.1	7.6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Egypt	12	8.4	23.9	26.9	18.9	35.2	9.4	8.0	15.4
Iraq	16	13.7	26.8	..	..	..	..	..	..
Jordan	13.2	11	23.9	..	..	..	13.7	13.4	14.9
Kuwait	2.4	2.6	2.1	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lebanon	6.8	5.4	11	21.3	16	27.3	8.6	7.7	10.2
Libya	19.2	16	28.3	..	..	..	..	..	..
Mauritania	11.7	10.8	13.6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Morocco	10	9.7	10.6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Oman	17.5	14.7	36.8	..	..	..	..	..	..
Palestine	24.9	24.2	27.9	31.6	26.2	37.2	9.9	9.0	13.7
Qatar	0.2	0.1	1	9.4	2.9	30.7	..	..	..
Saudi Arabia	5.5	2.7	21.2	16.1	6.6	25.9	..	..	..
Somalia	6.6	6.3	7.4	..	..	..	..	..	..
Syria	14.3	11.1	33	..	..	..	..	..	..
Sudan	13.3	11.3	19.2	..	..	..	..	..	..
Tunisia	14.8	12.5	21.2	..	..	..	..	..	..
UAE	3.7	2.8	9.6	..	..	..	..	..	..
Yemen	17.1	13.1	28.4	..	..	..	..	..	..

### c) human development challenges from the perspective of youth

Whilst not overlooking promising potential of the Arab youthful masses as a contributing strategic driving force that could be harnessed to achieve the development and wellbeing of Arab societies, youth, nevertheless, across the Arab region face invariably a number of tremendous challenges that affect them and if not adequately addressed, could indeed threaten and undermine the realization and fulfillment of their individual human capital and also their future aspirations. By and large, evidence indicates that the future of youth in the Arab region is jeopardized by economic stagnation, poverty, poor governance and exclusion, all exacerbated by violence (See Figure 4).<sup>4</sup> Young Arab women are substantially affected as they confront a double challenge of barriers and discrimination that are both youth-based and gender-based,<sup>5</sup> and face the world's widest gap in the global gender gap index, which considers economic participation, political empowerment and opportunity.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data extracted from ILOSTAT of the International Labor Organization (ILO) for the year 2016

<sup>2</sup> Data extracted from ILOSTAT of the ILO for the year 2015, except for Lebanon (2007) and Qatar (2009)

<sup>3</sup> Data extracted from Labour market transitions of young women and men in the Middle East and North Africa by the ILO (2016)

<sup>4</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2016 . Youth in the MENA Region.

<sup>6</sup> AHDR, 2016

Figure 4 Challenges affecting some youth in the Arab region exacerbated by existing violence



Despite the limited participation, the UN engaged youth (N= 321582) in determining the post-2015 Agenda through the “World We Want” survey among global citizens. The purpose behind the survey was to highlight the main issues that would mostly affect the lives of the respondents and identify priorities for the post-2015 development agenda (Figure 5)<sup>1</sup>. Youth issues in the region are typically characterized by limited attainment of quality education and successful school to work transitions. Although the region has witnessed a progress in all educational indicators, problems including illiteracy, primary education drop-outs, gender differences between boys’ and girls’ enrolment level, and limited school to work transition initiatives persist albeit with some variations between the region’s countries. In addition, the education component of the inequality-adjusted Human Development Index exhibits the widest inequality at 38.0 per cent, reflecting the inequalities in education systems that offer proper education for an adequate school to work transition only to a small minority of youth.<sup>2</sup> There is a crucial need to address the latter two problems as evidenced by the continued and soaring high levels of unemployment rate,<sup>3</sup> standing currently at 10.7 per cent (See Table 2) compared to a world average of 5.7 per cent; with female unemployment rate in Arab states (21.9 per cent) much higher than that of males (8.3 per cent).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, youth in the Arab region are marginalized with limited access to good-quality public services and access to social safety nets;<sup>5</sup> they have become increasingly vulnerable to poverty due to income inequality arising from excluding young people from progress, coupled with the lack of effective public institutions targeting youth needs.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the lack of decent employment

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.myworld2015.org/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 2016. Human Development Report.

<sup>3</sup> ESCWA and United Nations Programme on Youth (UNPY) (2010). Regional Overview: Youth in the Arab Region.

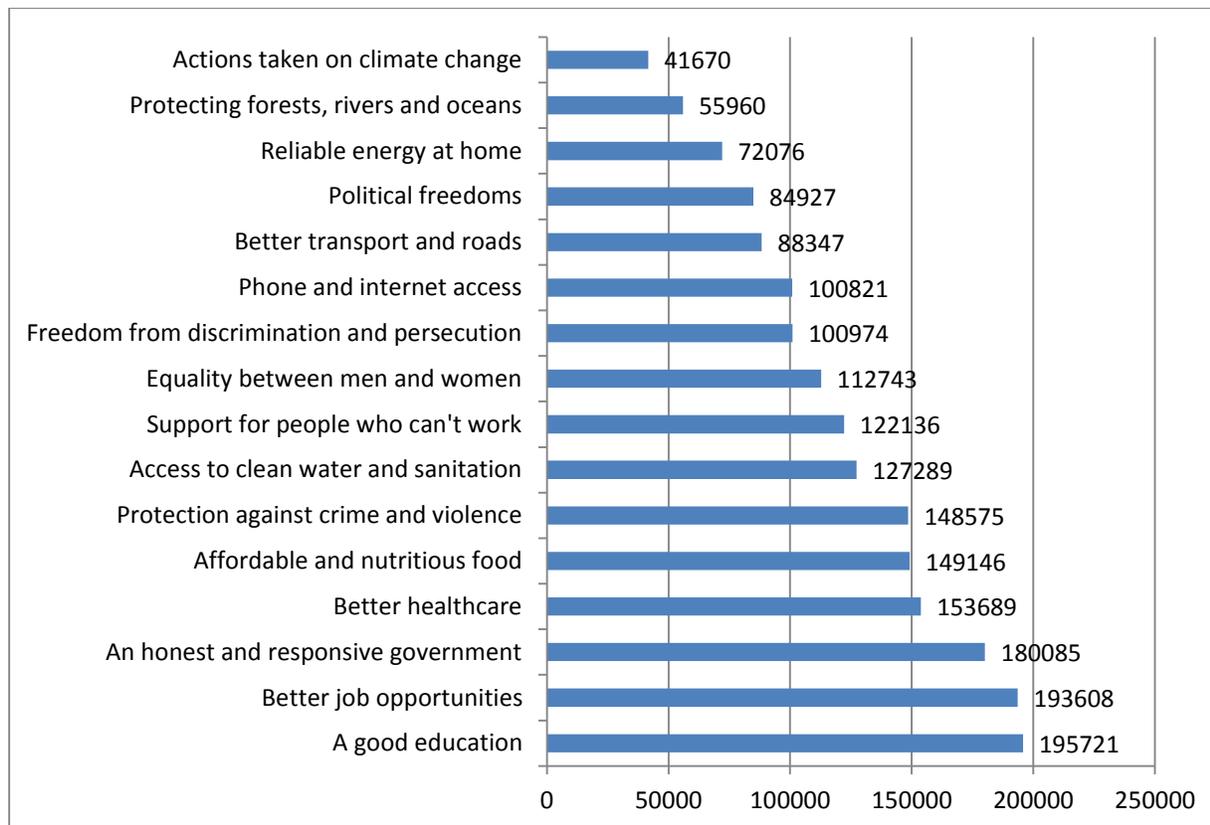
<sup>4</sup> ILO STAT of the ILO, 2016

<sup>5</sup> OECD, 2016 . Youth in the MENA Region.

<sup>6</sup> Policy Shaping and Policy Making: The Governance of Inclusive Growth, OECD, 2016

opportunities, the spread of conflicts, and the unstable political situation, many young Arabs choose to migrate temporarily or permanently,<sup>1</sup> often through unsafe and irregular pathways, exacerbating the brain drain phenomenon.

Figure 5 The World We Want: Priorities of Arab Youth in Western Asia and North Africa



Additional issues of deep concern are the inadequacy of health services, including access to information on sexual and reproductive health and, lack of meaningful opportunities for young men and women to participate in public affairs and contribute to decision-making processes as equal citizens. Participation in civil society of youth in the Arab region is limited to 19 per cent compared to 32 per cent of African youth<sup>2</sup>. Several Arab countries have chosen to address youth issues “by proxy through committees on sport, culture, or family affairs”.<sup>3</sup> Overall, youth are still not considered as legitimate agents of change or feel empowered to undertake this responsibility. This mass disenfranchisement of young people in the Arab region is one of the major factors hindering the development of this population.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Mercy Corps, 2012. Civic Engagement of Youth in the Middle East and North Africa: An Analysis of Key Drivers and Outcomes, p. 11. Available from:

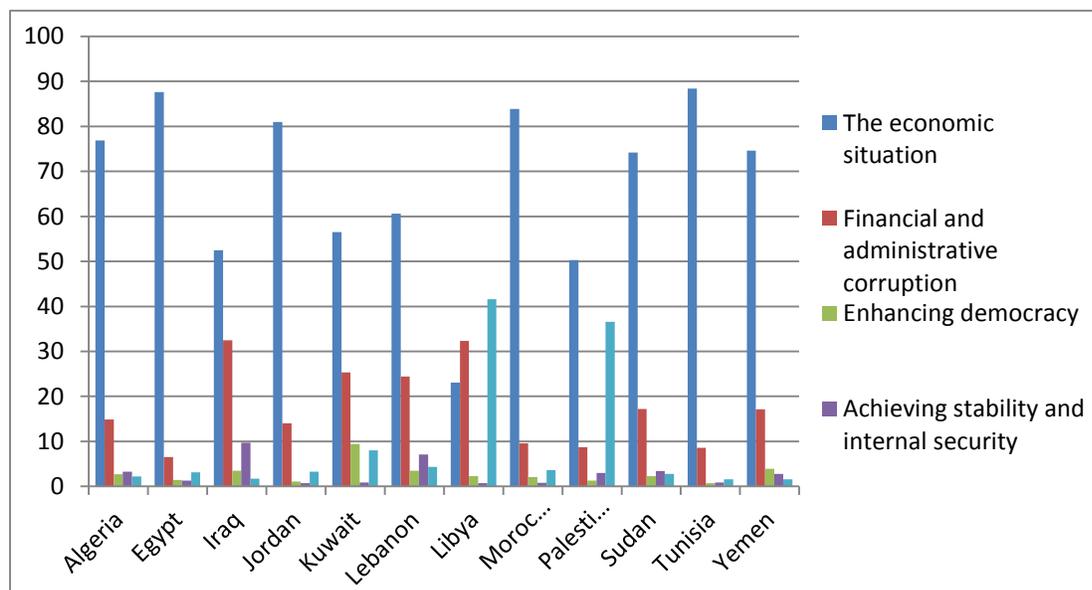
[http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena\\_youth\\_civic\\_engagement\\_study\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/mena_youth_civic_engagement_study_-_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> ESCWA and United Nations Programme on Youth (UNPY) (2010). Regional Overview: Youth in the Arab Region.

<sup>4</sup> AHDR, 2016

Five years after demanding political freedom during the uprisings, youth in the Arab region currently prioritize stability over democracy, according to the 2016 Arab Youth Survey conducted by Asda’a Burson – Marsteller, which covered 3500 18-24 youth living in 16 Arab countries.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, in the 2014 Arab Barometer survey assessing perceptions of youth on the most important challenges facing their countries, in six out of twelve countries, the proportion of youth prioritizing stability over democracy was higher<sup>2</sup> (See Figure 6). As youth in the Arab region bear the dreadful costs of war and civil conflict, they increasingly aspire to achieving peace and security.<sup>3</sup> Considering the present political tensions in the region today, 53 per cent of youth in the Arab agreed that promoting stability is more important than promoting democracy (28 per cent); and they aspire from their leaders to improve human rights, especially for young Arab women (67 per cent), as well as personal freedom of citizens (67 per cent). This strong consensus extends across sub-regions (74 per cent in the gulf countries, 57 percent in the Mashreq & Yemen, and 68 percent in North Africa) and gender lines (68 per cent of female youth and 66 per cent of male youth). Similarly, the Gallup Poll dataset<sup>4</sup>, which covered 21 Arab countries and the World Values Survey<sup>5</sup>, which covered 10 Arab countries, indicate that the youth in the Arab region highlight the significance of attaining peace and security, building capacities, increasing access to basic services, such as education and health, and promoting opportunities through securing decent jobs.

Figure 6 Perception of youth on the most important challenges facing their countries (in per cent)<sup>6</sup>



While youth in the Arab region are struggling to achieve full economic and social inclusion in their societies,<sup>7</sup> and are subjected to violence and conflict, countries need to develop youth policies, plans,

<sup>1</sup> Asda’a Burson – Marsteller Arab Youth Survey, 2016. Inside the Hearts and Minds of Arab Youth

<sup>2</sup> Arab Barometer, 2014

<sup>3</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Gallup World Poll Dataset, 2015

<sup>5</sup> World Values Survey, 2014

<sup>6</sup> Arab Barometer, 2014

<sup>7</sup> AHDR, 2016



and programs that are guided by SDGs, that are relevant to the realities of the region, and that highlight the full potential of youth in the Arab region and provides them with the necessary opportunities at all levels. While doing so, the countries could use the SDGs as a framework providing a cross-sectoral focus on youth. This framework will allow them to better organize their efforts and tailor comprehensive and effective youth development programs and policies, and potentially benefit from the large presence of youth as well as the demographic dividend.<sup>1</sup>

## 2.2 Youth in Arab Countries Strategies and Voluntary National Reviews of the 2030 Agenda implementation

The League of Arab States has prioritized youth development issues by undertaking several regional studies and organizing in Cairo the Youth Arab Summit 2013.<sup>2</sup> It is also worthwhile noting that several Arab countries' national development frameworks and visions<sup>3,4,5,6,7,8,9</sup> have recently been dedicated specifically to achieving inclusive sustainable development. At the national development planning level, many countries have successfully integrated youth issues, albeit in varying degrees, into these important and critical documents. For the other governments who have not included youth in their national visions, they are encouraged to contemplate the development of cross sectoral national policies on youth issues that are in line with those of the SDGs.

The first sentence is not complete. You may consider:

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)<sup>10</sup> are also a mechanism through which the role of youth can be enhanced. In 2016, Egypt and Morocco were the first Arab countries to submit VNRs to the High-Level Political Forum, the global follow-up and review platform which is organized annually under the auspices of the ECOSOC.<sup>11,12</sup> Egypt's VNR acknowledges the role of youth and the importance of unlocking the potential of this generational dividend, and has addressed youth empowerment, unemployment, participation in decision-making, and livelihoods. On the other hand, Morocco's VNR addresses youth participation in democratic management of public policies. In addition, Morocco dedicated a panel on young people and children, supported by UNICEF Morocco, in its National Consultation to prepare a road map for SDGs implementation in Morocco taking into account the national context. In 2017, two

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<sup>1</sup> ESCWA, 2015. Towards Achieving Sustainable Development in the Arab Region: The Population Dimension.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.poplas.org/ar/publication.php>

<sup>3</sup> Egypt's Vision 2030, 2015

<sup>4</sup> Jordan 2025, 2015

<sup>5</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> National Development Plan, 2015

<sup>6</sup> National Development Strategy (2015-2018), 2015

<sup>7</sup> Qatar National Vision 2030, 2008

<sup>8</sup> National Development Plan (2013-2017), 2013

<sup>9</sup> Palestinian National Development Plan, 2014

<sup>10</sup> Member states are encouraged to conduct country-led regular and comprehensive progress reviews at the national and sub-national levels.

<sup>11</sup> Egypt National Review Report For Input to the 2016 HLPF, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Rapport du Royaume du Maroc concernant les premières mesures en matière de mise en oeuvre de l'Agenda 2030 pour le Développement Durable, 2016.

additional Arab countries, namely Jordan and Qatar, submitted VNRs.<sup>1,2</sup> During the consultation of preparing its VNR, Jordan actively engaged youth throughout the process ensuring harmony between goals and targets as well as national needs and aspirations. The report extensively emphasizes the important role of youth in building the economic, social, environmental, and political future of Jordan, and underscores the massive need in providing youth with more opportunities through sustainable and inclusive development. Qatar's VNR sheds light on the role that Qatar Foundation has played in the economic and educational empowerment of youth in the Middle East as well as those living in the least developing countries. For 2018, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and United Arab Emirates are expected to submit VNRs; and are thus encouraged to engage youth in this process from the beginning.

### 2.3 The case of Sustainable Development Goal 16 in the Arab region

*“There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.” – General Assembly Resolution 70/301<sup>3</sup>*

In his 2017 Vision on Prevention, the UN SG prioritizes the 2030 Agenda and Sustaining Peace as an essential long-term prevention of crises and booster for development, accentuating that the SDGs and Sustaining Peace are complementary.<sup>4</sup> In 2015, The UN Security Council (SC) endorsed the pioneering Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS). For the first time, the SC committed a full resolution on the “positive role young people can and do play in conflict prevention, the prevention of violent extremism and peacebuilding”.<sup>5</sup> Peace could be defined as the “absence of violence” or “absence of the fear of violence”, and is linked to several interconnected factors that affect one another, including relevant education and employment opportunities, horizontal, vertical and gender equality, justice, sound management of natural resources, human rights protection, political inclusion and low levels of corruption (See Figure 7).<sup>6</sup> Peace, justice and security are major components of sustainable development and are critical for it; peace and development have been continuously interlinked and considered as mutually reinforcing,<sup>7,8</sup> and have been deemed to be mostly urgent for highly vulnerable populations, including youth and women.<sup>9</sup> Youth are frequently the victims of conflicts; they are wounded or killed, abducted, made orphans, taken hostage, forcibly displaced, left with deep trauma and emotional scars, and deprived of education and healthcare.<sup>10</sup> Previous experience from countries

<sup>1</sup> Jordan's Way to Sustainable Development First National Voluntary review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Qatar Voluntary National Review 2017 Sustainable Development Goals 2030, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> General Assembly resolution 70/301 of 25 September 2015.

<sup>4</sup> The Vision of The Secretary-General on Prevention, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Security Council resolution 2250 of 9 December 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, “Structures of peace: identifying what leads to peaceful societies”, October 2011 (Sydney).

<sup>7</sup> General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Report of the Secretary-General, 2016

<sup>9</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012. Realizing the Future We Want for All.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations, 2010. WPAV.

affected by conflict, such as Cambodia, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Rwanda, show how sustained peace can lead to rapid development gains.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 7 The interconnected factors related to peace



The sixteenth goal of the SDGs addresses peace and entails to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access, to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.<sup>2</sup> Target 16.1 is pertinent to the Arab region as it aims to reduce all kinds of violence and subsequent deaths. The relevance and significance of this goal to the Arab region is underscored in the 2015 Arab Sustainable Development Report and the report of the 2016 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. The former indicated that the peace and good governance are critical factors for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region and the absence of violence is essential for the achievement of the other goals,<sup>3</sup> while the latter reiterated that the

<sup>1</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012. Realizing the Future We Want for All.

<sup>2</sup> <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16>

<sup>3</sup> Arab Sustainable Development Report (ASDR), 2015



transformative process in the region should comprise an awareness of the interconnectedness of peace, security and sustainable development.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the responsibility of attaining peace is no longer unique to governments and policy makers. Since the adoption of Security Council Resolutions 2250 and 2282 in 2015 and 2016 respectively, youth are now recognized as major agents of change and crucial partners in sustaining peace, both peace-building and peace-keeping, and preventing conflicts. In fact, the engagement of youth is key for achieving SDG 16 and its embedded revitalized global engagement, inclusion, accountability and participation.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, even the theme of International Youth Day 2017 is “Youth Building Peace”, dedicating this day to celebrate youth’s contribution to conflict transformation and prevention as well as social justice, sustainable peace, and inclusion. In addition, the World Programme of Action for Youth fosters the promotion of active youth engagement in maintaining security and peace. The WPAY indicates that the way of doing so is through social inclusion of youth in decision-making and through providing them with access to quality education and healthcare to encourage their role as positive contributors to society and to help them reach their potential.<sup>3</sup>

The challenges youth face in the Arab region to be actors in attaining peace are intensified as they live in the least peaceful part of the world, suffering from the Israeli occupation in Palestine, and dramatic conflicts and crises which increased from four in 2003 to eleven in 2015 (See Figure 8).<sup>4,5</sup> The new generation of youth in the Arab region is growing in an environment of armed conflict where they are either internally displaced populations, irregular migrants, refugees, or hosts of refugees; the latter mainly residing in resource-scarce areas leading to a jeopardized access to basic education and health services.<sup>6</sup> Considering that youth account for one fifth of the Arab population in the region, that they have diminished hope to attain tangible progress, and that some of them are inactive facing deprivation and marginalization, youth play a dynamic role in shaping the area’s security landscape, being more prone to creating conflicts and joining radical organizations than adults. Not only are armed conflicts in the region destroying the social fabric of the Arab society due to loss of civilians including children, but they are also interfering with the economic development through destroying resources, capital and labor.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Input from the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, 2016

<sup>2</sup> UNDP, 2017. Fast Facts.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/international-youth-day-2017.html>

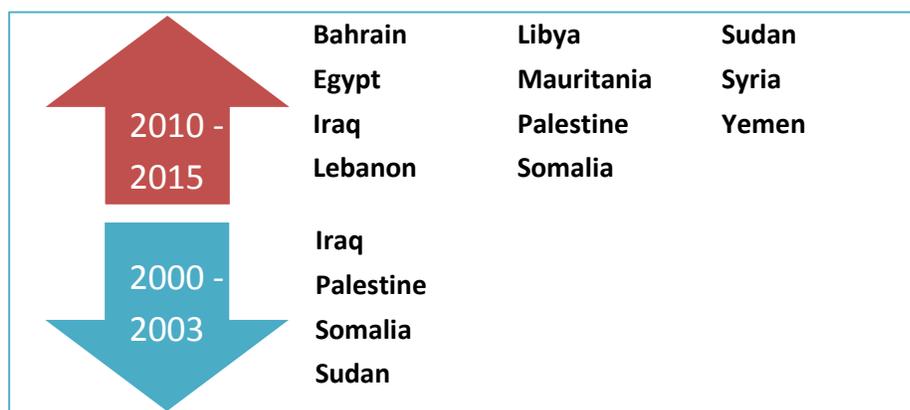
<sup>4</sup> ASDR, 2015

<sup>5</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>6</sup> OECD, 2016. Youth in the MENA region.

<sup>7</sup> AHDR, 2016

Figure 8 Presence of political violence in Arab countries (2000-2003 VS 2010-2015)<sup>1</sup>



As such, preventing conflict and ensuring security for youth in the Arab region depend on solidarity and goodwill, as well as on resourceful and inclusive political processes and effective systems of justice. It is very crucial to strengthen the cultures of peace and tolerance and to build capacities of youth to sustain peace and security in countries.<sup>2</sup> Hence, peace education should be fostered in Arab countries in order to achieve sustainable peace in addition to sustainable development. Youth stakeholders, government, and international agencies should direct their resources toward promoting peace education, whether in school curricula or conflict resolution and peace-building training. The process needs to be comprehensive in nature and encompasses partnerships with civil society organizations and religious leaders who need to be encouraged to spread moderate messages among populations, especially youth.

It is noteworthy to shed the light on the first of such initiatives in the Arab region. Under the patronage of the Crown Prince Al Hussein bin Abdullah II Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a conference entitled “Youth, Peace, and Security in the Arab States Region: A Consultation and High-level Dialogue” was organized by UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, and the Peacebuilding Support Office. The conference took place on 4-6 December, 2016 in Amman and gathered 59 participants from 18 Arab countries, and it aimed at mobilizing youth peacebuilders in Arab States to delve into their potential and evaluate the challenges facing peacebuilding initiatives led by youth.<sup>3</sup> The findings of the conference are summarized in figure 9.

<sup>1</sup> AHDR, 2016

<sup>2</sup> UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, 2012. Realizing the Future We Want for All.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA and Peacebuilding Support Office, 2016. Meeting Report on Youth, Peace, and Security in the Arab States Region: A Consultation and High-level Dialogue.

Figure 9 Summary of the findings of the Youth, Peace, and Security in the Arab States Region Consultation

The meaning of YPS to Arab youth	Challenges and obstacles to peace and security	Priorities	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Basic needs</li> <li>•Protection</li> <li>•Human Rights</li> <li>•Education</li> <li>•Diversity</li> <li>•Participation</li> <li>•Context-based meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lack of confidence in the international community</li> <li>•Building trust between youth and national and local governments</li> <li>•Freedom of speech</li> <li>•Foreign military interventions and ongoing occupations</li> <li>•Targeted sanctions</li> <li>•Youth and violent extremist groups</li> <li>•Conscription</li> <li>•Patriarchy and gender inequality</li> <li>•Political exclusion by laws</li> <li>•Limited funding mechanism for youth-led peacebuilding initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Raising awareness of young peacebuilders</li> <li>•Changing negative image of youth in mass media and as perceived by decision makers</li> <li>•Building partnerships with youth to access the most marginalized</li> <li>•Training youth on conflict resolution and peace</li> <li>•Increasing support from governments</li> <li>•Spreading a culture of peace</li> <li>•Identifying the real needs of youth</li> <li>•Recognizing and prioritizing problems associated with the exclusion of young refugees</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Lift economic sanctions, and control and ban arms trade</li> <li>•Create alternative platforms and methods to enhance youth participation in politics</li> <li>•Integrated youth programs</li> <li>•Revise educational curriculum</li> <li>•Create a regional network for youth peacebuilders</li> <li>•Evaluate funding mechanism to support youth-led initiatives</li> <li>•Reach youth in remote areas</li> <li>•Demonstrate peaceful youth identity in the region</li> </ul>

Moreover, in his vision on prevention, the UN SG emphasized the importance of women’s inclusion and empowerment.<sup>1</sup> In order to address the double challenge faced by young women in the Arab region, governments are encouraged to conduct a systematic review of legislation to abolish all forms of discrimination affecting female youth in the workplace; consolidate the demands of female youth in their national youth strategies and countries visions, and national voluntary reviews; collect sex- and age- disaggregated data to inform policy decisions; and promote opportunities for female youth to partake in all spheres of public life.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Vision of The Secretary-General on Prevention, 2017

<sup>2</sup> OECD, 2016 . Youth in the MENA Region.

### 3. Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development seeks to achieve prosperity for all, with a strong emphasis on youth and their role in achieving peace as a key condition to sustainable development. Particularly, youth in the Arab region face many development challenges, especially when it comes to security and peace. Hence, there is a need to respect the international consensus on the significance of their inclusion for sustaining peace and development, and to learn from the various global experiences. Engaging youth at the country-level in SDG implementation requires a close partnership among youth, civil society organizations (CSOs) and governments, while taking into account the context of each Arab country.

On one hand, youth in the Arab countries need to claim their position as active agents of change and ensure their participation in SDG implementation in their countries. They need to seize available opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes of youth-related issues. One example is the UN Youth Delegate Program. Currently, Morocco is the only Arab country that has youth representatives to the general assembly. Youth in other Arab countries could advocate for this representation with their Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

On the other hand, CSOs should contribute to empowering youth through capacity-building workshops and peace-building training, providing them with the required skills they need to become agents of change. CSOs should act as a liaison between youth and the government and connect them with policy-makers. The latter need to prioritize the expansion of available opportunities for youth, to provide space for youth initiatives and innovations, to promote peace education in school curricula, to involve youth in decision making processes through the adoption of special measures such as the quota system, and to engage them in SDG implementation and monitoring, including through the voluntary national reviews.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
GA	General Assembly
IANYD	Inter-Agency Networks on Youth Development
IATTTYP	Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Youth Programme
MGCY	Major Group for Children and Youth
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
SC	Security Council
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SG	Secretary-General
UN	United Nations
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WPAY	World Programme of Action for Youth
YPS	Youth, Peace and Security

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