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Solutions that work:

**EVIDENCE SYMPOSIUM ON
ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH IN MENA**

Second Edition September 25-26, 2018

SUMMARY REPORT

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Executive summary

Adolescence offers three windows of **Opportunity**: firstly, it's a period which sees unique biological, endocrinal, neurological and psychological changes in the individual; secondly, it's an opportunity to 'catch up' and redress earlier life vulnerabilities; and lastly, it's an opportunity to influence inter and intra generational life outcomes – including those of the subsequent generation, of whom today's adolescents will be the parents.

The MENA region is experiencing significant demographic changes, producing a **historic window of opportunity** to reap a demographic dividend that results from an increasing ratio of working age population compared to dependent population (i.e. children and elderly). This can create greater national wealth, which can spur consumption, production and investment. However, three key pre-requisites must be met in order to reap that dividend, namely:

- **Political and social stability** – as violence and conflict deter investors and decreases human capital – and it is crucial to invest in the participation of their adolescents and youth, ensuring their engagement in decision making. If the engagement of adolescents and youth as potential problem-solvers and change-makers committed to peace, tolerance, democracy and shared responsibility for the region's disparities and deprivations is not facilitated, instability will remain.
- **Inclusive and equitable economic and social policies** – leaving no one behind and preventing continued marginalization of adolescents and youth, especially young women;
- **Decent employment opportunities** – ensuring that quality education systems build the skills required by the labour market and that markets generate decent jobs – to absorb the working age population.

A review of current evidence reveals that the priority issues for adolescents and youth include:

- Lack of access to relevant, quality education;
- Unemployment and socio-economic exclusion;
- Limited spaces for voice and accountability;
- Increasing rates of disability as a result of violence and conflict;
- An increasing desire to migrate – as a result of frustrations and limited opportunities.

Despite the frustration, there is persisting hopefulness among adolescents and youth. Evidence reveals they are optimistic that their reality will change and keen to engage positively to affect change. Data shows a significant number of adolescent and youth-led engagement interventions are being implemented in the region, along with an increased engagement of adolescents and youth through digital communication.

During the symposium policy and programme solutions that work sustainably and at scale to ease the transition from education employment were showcased. These include: the comprehensive roll out of the Life Skills and Citizenship Education in Morocco; the revamped market driven Technical and Vocational policy in Lebanon; the Work Based Learning experience in 8 MENA countries and a dual learning system from Lebanon.

No sustainable and scalable solutions for violence mitigation and response were presented. Nevertheless, young people continue to innovate in this area, including through the use of technology, to identify issues of concern for young people and to mitigate risks and address the effects of violence. More financial and technical support is needed to measure the effectiveness of promising solutions and ensure research to test and adapt solutions from outside the region.

Youth and adolescents in MENA:

- There are 124 million adolescents and youth in MENA. Twenty-six per cent of the MENA population is aged between 10 and 24 years old. Children and youth (0-24 years) account for nearly half of the region's population.
- The MENA region is the most dangerous in the world for adolescents today. It is home to 6 per cent of world's adolescents, but more than 70 per cent of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence globally were living in MENA. More than one-third (37 per cent) of youth in MENA live in fragile and conflict affected countries.
- Half of the 118 million under-18-year-olds experience moderate poverty, while one in four (29.3 million) experience acute poverty.
- 1 in 5 girls in MENA are married before the age of 18 and the rate of child marriage is increasing in conflict affected settings. Ninety-five per cent of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon rely on a negative coping mechanism such as child marriage or child labour.
- 15 million children are out of school in MENA, many because of conflict. In Syria, over 2 million children are still out of school (36 per cent). Of the 23.5 million children of lower secondary school-age in the region, at least 3.5 million are out of school, and an additional 2.9 million are at risk of dropping out of school.
- MENA has the highest youth unemployment rates in the world, 25 per cent for the Arab states and 29 per cent in North Africa. The youth unemployment rate is particularly dire for young females in the region whose unemployment is almost twice that of young men, 41 per cent in Arab States and 39 per cent in North Africa. This trend is exacerbated in conflict affected settings. Young men in MENA usually take between 2-3 years to make the education to employment transition. For young women it is significantly more, also, they are often discouraged from continuing their search for work and drop out of the labour market altogether.
- Young people in MENA experience amongst the highest rates of disengagement / NEET (not in employment, education or training) worldwide. The proportion of youth NEET varies across the region, from 16.1 per cent in Saudi Arabia to 44.8 per cent in Yemen. The number of young women NEET is typically close to 30 per cent across the region but is as high as 69.7 per cent in Yemen.

Key takeaways from the Symposium

1

Evidence is an essential basis for effective policies and programmes. The MENA Evidence Adolescents and Youth Symposium, which is an annual event, provides an opportunity to consolidate the evidence base – now maintained in an online [interagency adolescent and youth hub](#) – and identify gaps. The review and analysis of existing evidence has revealed key gaps – for example in the area of sustainable solutions for violence prevention and response, or to promote female employment and entrepreneurship.

In the Symposium was agreed that practitioners and researchers need to take the following strategic actions:

- **Advocate** and **ensure** all programme data is collected and presented as age and sex disaggregated data.
- **Disseminate** widely and translate into Arabic existing and any new evidence generated.
- **Promote** the use of the evidence in supporting scaling up of good practices and solutions that are proven to address key issues for adolescents and youth in MENA (for example: Promote widely the Life Skills and Citizenship Education Initiative; the market driven Technical and Vocational policy reform; Work Based Learning and the dual learning system for skilling young people in MENA).
- Actively **support** and **promote** research and solutions for the following critical areas for adolescents and youth in MENA: violence prevention and response; promotion of female employment and entrepreneurship.

2

It's time to stop talking about young people and start talking and partnering with young people. Although the prevailing narrative about young people in the region can be quite negative, the adolescents and youth in the MENA region are its most precious resource. Recommended strategic actions here include:

- **Capitalize** on the recently established Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM) to purposefully and systematically engage young people – especially the most vulnerable - in decision-making at regional and national level, particularly in decisions that will affect their future;
- **Link** young researchers and solution-makers to support (including technical assistance and funding) and build mechanisms to research, develop and promote scale up of successful solutions;
- Together with young people in the RAYAM, **elevate** and **amplify** their voices as an important contribution to the global conversation and as a counternarrative to those who portray adolescents and youth as a source of risk.

3

The right moment to start working with and supporting young people is now. If the countries in the MENA region fail to invest in their adolescents and youth; prepare them for productive adult life; absorb young labour market entrants; restore peace; and address gender inequality and marginalization, the unique opportunity of the demographic dividend will slip through their fingers. A large proportion of the region's working age population will be either outside the labour force or unemployed. They are likely to be disenchanted and will put a considerable demand on public resources.

If this bleak prospect is to be avoided and the demographic transition turned into a boost for prosperity in the region, the time to act is now.

1. Overview:

Second edition of the Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth in the Middle East and North Africa

On September 25, 2018, the MENA UN:NGO¹ Adolescent and Youth Regional Group and the No Lost Generation² initiative in partnership with adolescents and youth, held the Second Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth – Solutions That Work! – bringing together 125 participants: young people, policy makers, donors, development and humanitarian professionals and practitioners, researchers and academics. This intergenerational event aims to improve evidence and increase visibility of issues of relevance for adolescents and youth in the MENA region. The specific objectives of the Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth – Solutions That Work! – were:

- Provide an update on the state of the evidence for adolescents and youth in MENA, identify regional evidence gaps, propose priorities for evidence generation in 2018-19, and leverage resources to support the continuation of this work.
- Share sustainable and effective solutions addressing key issues around Violence Prevention, Education to Employment transition, Civic Engagement.
- Ensure the systematic participation of vulnerable adolescents and youth in the identification of areas for research and in the generation of evidence
- Facilitate frank exchanges between young people, policymakers, civil society actors, donors and practitioners.

The symposium was followed by a donor briefing on September 26, 2018, with the purpose of facilitating: an open dialogue among young people, donors and government partners on the situation of adolescents and youth; and an update on the current programmatic successes and challenges, along policy and programmatic recommendations, for working for and with adolescents and youth in the MENA region.

The uniqueness of this event, both globally and at the regional level, lies in the systematic and active participation of young people. Indeed, the symposium is organized by young people, for young people and with young people, where the focus on data, evidence that works and translating this into action brought forward the real demands of the young population of the MENA region.

This summary report captures key evidence, solutions and recommendations from the symposia. For the agenda, the concept note, session papers, presentations, winning submissions and posters please access the [MENA Adolescents and Youth Hub/ESAY Section](#).

2. Why now?



The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to one of the most youthful populations in the world - around 26 per cent of the population is between 10 and 24 years old, and 47 per cent is below the age of 24³. However, the potential of this significant cohort of young people has yet to be translated into an asset for the region. Instead of entering an age of transition filled with learning, exploration, dreams and ambitions, young people in MENA are faced with overwhelming challenges, including: the highest rate of youth unemployment globally; the high levels of violence due to conflicts and corporal punishment, both at home and school; few opportunities to positively engage within their communities/societies. As a result of these multiple risks and deprivations, optimism is waning in the region and young people have an increasingly bleak outlook of their future.

Nevertheless, consultations with young people in MENA highlight their desire for local and regional plans that focus on implementing effective solutions to the regional crisis. They want decision makers to find solutions to create work opportunities for young people, to address their socio-economic constraints, to enhance quality and relevance of education, to tackle violence against adolescents and young women, to enable adolescent and youth participation in

decision-making about their future and most of all they want peace and development in the region⁴. Nevertheless, many programmes tend to remain in pilot stage, and robust evidence to underpin effective scalable strategies for young people are not widely shared or translated.

In 2017, under the auspices of the No Lost Generation partnership, the MENA UN:NGO group on Adolescents and Youth in collaboration with young people organized the first Evidence Symposium for the region on Adolescents and Youth. The Symposium provided a forum for policy makers, young people, researchers, practitioners and donors to discuss the latest evidence and, using a positive development lens, start the process of identifying evidence and recommendations for solutions specific for the MENA region.

Focusing on solutions, the second annual Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth built on the evidence base established in the 2017 Symposium and engaged government partners, civil society actors and adolescents and youth to identify scaled and sustainable solutions to address issues of education to employment transition, engagement, gender and violence in MENA.

3. The voice of adolescents and youth

A key tenet of the MENA Adolescent and Youth Evidence Symposia is the systematic engagement of adolescents and youth throughout the whole Symposium. Young people were systematically engaged in conceptualizing, implementing, monitoring and following up on recommendations of ESAY 2018. One third of the ESAY 2018 participants were adolescents and youth, of which at least 70 per cent were people representing vulnerable groups. Voices of young people representing MENA adolescents and youth were listened to and acted upon not only at the ESAY 2018 itself, but also in the preparation, the donor briefing and the post symposium process.

In the pre-Symposium phase, the VOICE group was constituted as a partner of the ESAY steering committee. The VOICE group comprised of young people from the Regional Adolescents and Youth Advisory Group (RAYAM) and young people from AUB/ academia/other partners. ESAY adolescent and youth participants from 2017 were also involved to share their experiences and lessons learned.

In May 2019, a request for abstract submission was launched for young people to share their research, solutions and contributions to communities as a means of disseminating the knowledge and work of young people in MENA. The winners were invited to join the VOICE group and also present their work at the Evidence Symposium. Young people were also engaged through online discussion forums organized by the VOICE groups conversations through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

“We must remain passionate about the community we aim to benefit and avoid repetition of mistakes.”

— Emad Eddin Almasria, 23, Syria, young researcher and advocate

During the Symposium, adolescents and youth participants guided every aspect of the event. Roles led by young people included: comperes, moderators, presenters, rapporteurs, videographers, submission review, steering committee, managers of the social media pages to promote the symposium, technicians, researchers, VOICE spokespersons, and eco-friendly spokespersons. Following the Symposium, adolescents and youth had a crucial role in evaluating expectations, outcomes and achievements of the Symposium and in finalizing the report on the event. Furthermore, they managed the follow up media material for the Symposium.

To learn more, see [videos](#) prepared by young people & [other documents](#) from the Evidence Symposium on the MENA Youth Hub.

Adolescent and youth researchers

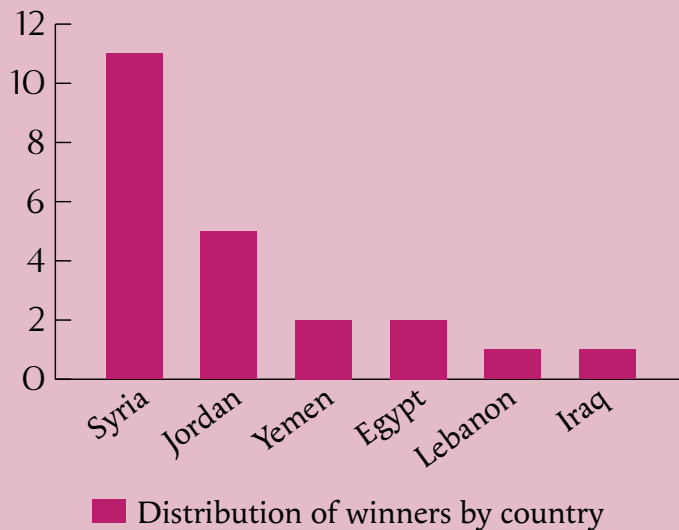
The call for abstracts for young people's (10-24 years) research and solutions was distributed widely and resulted in having a total of 256 submissions (35.5% by female researchers), from Algeria, Egypt, Gulf Countries, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria and Tunisia.

Submissions were assessed and rated by the sub-committees using the following seven criteria: Significance, Conceptualization, Methodology, Participation, Implications, Quality and Ethics. They were reviewed by a Subject Matter Expert and a VOICE / Adolescent and Youth Representative.

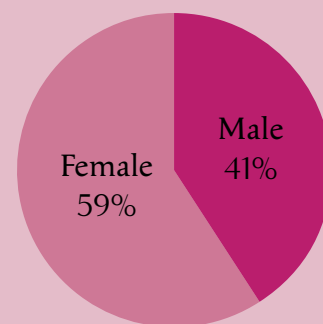
Although the number of submissions was quite considerable their assessment through the criteria resulted in only 22 submissions being accepted, including those for audio-

visual material. Of those the majority came from researchers aged between 21 and 24 years old, with the youngest submitter being 15-year-old.

Though the 22 winning submissions were deemed to be of high quality, the overall assessment revealed that the quality of submissions could be improved in specific areas as: methodology, data quality, ethical considerations, scalability/replicability. Many submissions were rejected as they shared potential research ideas rather than research that had been implemented. As a lesson learned, future Symposia will make submission forms simpler, provide sufficient time for applications, put in place mechanisms of support for most vulnerable adolescents and youth, ensure applicants have access to assessment criteria and process of review.



Distribution of winners by gender



“ My young friends, within each of us are ideas that just need to be arranged, written, studied and discussed more in order to get us out of our circle and into larger and larger surroundings, to carry to our society with change and offer solutions. ”

— Abdulrahman Samir Al Jarrash, 26, Syria, young researcher and advocate

4. Participants at the Evidence Symposium

“As youth, we form a large proportion of the population pyramid capable of making a difference through our community contributions in reducing conflict, promoting tolerance and renouncing hatred, but our efforts need to be implemented on the ground through the support of organizations, NGOs, United Nations agencies, international donors and international organizations.”

— Ola Abdulghafour Abdulhak, Yemen, young researcher and advocate

The Evidence Symposium involved a diverse group of stakeholders in the planning and implementation to ensure inclusion and representation of their priorities and needs:

- **VOICE Group – the adolescent and youth advisory team** ensured adolescent and youth engagement in all components of the symposium.
- **Policy Makers:** government partners working in translating evidence into policies and actions for adolescent and youth programming.
- **Implementers:** national/regional civil society organizations/groups/movements with evidence-based experience in implementing adolescent and youth programmes & private sector partners, entrepreneurs with experience in education to work transition.
- **Researchers (including adolescent and youth researchers):** academics, evaluators, investigators, young researchers and other partners who study adolescent and youth programming (including engagement) and who had results and evidence to share.
- **United Nations Agencies:** Representatives from the UN Interagency Technical Team on Adolescents and Youth who were engaged in the identification of evidence, good practices, participants, speakers and recommendations about how to continue collaborative efforts among different stakeholders.
- **Donors:** Representatives of donor agencies who support adolescent and youth programmes in the region.

5. What did we learn at the Evidence Symposium?

Key evidence and recommendations for action

5.1 Global evidence: Adolescence offers a unique window of opportunity

During the MDG era, an important drive to scale up investments in Early Childhood has come to mean that more children are now living into adolescence. To achieve the SDGs, these **successes need to be sustained into adulthood**. Nevertheless, we also know that not all children benefited equally from MDG gains. Hence, a re-prioritized set of actions that advance progress for the most vulnerable helps redress the gaps, creating a **second window of opportunity** to leave no child behind.

Currently, there are **1.2 billion adolescents** in the world, of which 90% live in low- and middle-income countries. They face serious challenges, including low enrollment in secondary schools,

vulnerability to trafficking, recruitment into armed conflict, child labor when not in school, as well as child marriage and bearing children at a young age.

Key Evidence:

The policy landscape for adolescents is fragmented, with those aged 10-15 often slipping between the cracks. Where policies exist, the focus is largely on risky behaviours. Furthermore, there is also discordance. For example, high age barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services are contrary to the lower age of consent to sexual relationships and marriage, in some parts of South Asia.

Indicator	Minimum age of consent to sexual activity	Legal age of marriage, male	Legal age of marriage, female
Afghanistan	Marital status	18	16
Bangladesh	14, for females only, according to definition of rape. However, only married couples are legally allowed to engage in sexual activity	21	18
Bhutan	18, for either sex, except for married adolescents	18	16
India	16, for females only	21	18
Maldives	Marital status	18	18
Nepal	16, for females only	20	20
Pakistan	Marital status	18	16-18
Sri Lanka	16, for females only. Not applicable to married Muslim girls	18	18

Bidirectional relationships exist between domains. Better adolescent health improves educational outcomes, while better education improves adolescent health outcomes. Access to and use of new technology requires reconceptualizing programmes, most urgently adolescent engagement.

Programs that include parents as a core component are often more effective than those targeting youth alone. Family relationships, particularly parental relationships, are critical for promoting positive youth development.

Non-family adults are an untapped resource for youth wellbeing. Adolescents who experience high-quality developmental relationships with non-family adults are better off on a variety of well-being indicators.

- A review of 33 impact evaluations on the effects of public policy on child labor by Dammert et al. 2018 provides a comprehensive look at pathways through which social protection and labour programmes affect child labour.
- Programmes that address the vulnerability of the household reduce child labour.
- Programmes that help families cope with exposure to risk (health insurance for example) minimize household reliance on child labour.
- On the other hand, policies aimed at increasing adult household members' participation in the labour market or entrepreneurial activities can generate demand for adolescent and child work.

Rigorous Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT) in South Africa shows well designed and implemented parenting program can:

- Improve the parent or caregiver-adolescent relationship;
- Reduce child problem behaviour such as risky behaviour;
- Prevent physical and emotional violence against children;
- Improve school performance.

Policies and programmes that focus on adolescents as victims undermine their role as peace-builders and voices for change.

Solutions that focus on simple demand and supply risk ignore the complexity of adolescent lives. For example, to increase school enrolment, it is necessary to address the specific reasons that out of school adolescents have for not being in school, including social and economic factors or personal characteristics, such as a lack of motivation to remain in schools.

Successful programmes pay attention to contextual features of the adolescents' environment that heighten exposure to risk. Indeed, interventions developed in high income contexts have mixed success when transferred to LMICs. This proves that understanding social norms and structural barriers is key to successful transferability. Good examples can be found in HIV/AIDS and STI prevention programming.

Enlisting adolescents as active contributors to solutions can be an effective strategy for the most vulnerable. For example, evidence suggests street youth are often highly self-responsible and have the potential to be agents of change.

Recommendations for action

- 1 Scaling up **positive parenting approaches for adolescents** in LMICs.
- 2 Developing **strategies that focus on structuring adolescent activity** and time use, as they are useful in promoting positive social adjustment.
- 3 Providing young people with **opportunities for social integration**, which contribute to positive adjustment as they heighten sensitivity to peer and social conditions. On the contrary, disenfranchisement, prejudice and discrimination can contribute to radicalization.
- 4 **Designing public spaces to support adolescents'** physical and psychosocial development; this is fundamental since the adolescent years are a period of exploration and identity formation. These spaces will help them engage in civic life and with natural environments.
- 5 Engaging **young people as active participants in programme design, research, M&E**. Indeed, even though **education remains the major source of capacity building around the world, less formal opportunities and empowerment initiatives** can often be useful resources in certain settings.



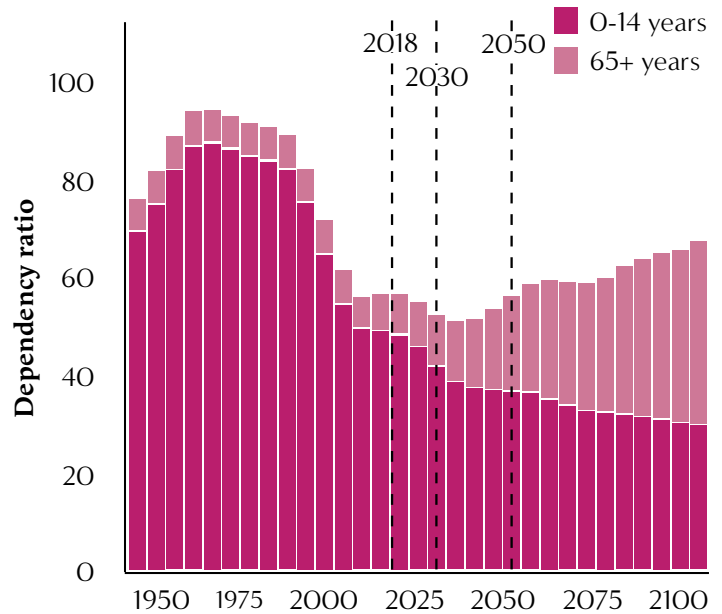
Click here for the [presentation](#) and the [Handbook of Adolescent Development Research and Its Impact on Global Policy](#) edited by Jennifer E. Lansford and Prerna Banati.

5.2 Regional evidence and recommendations for action

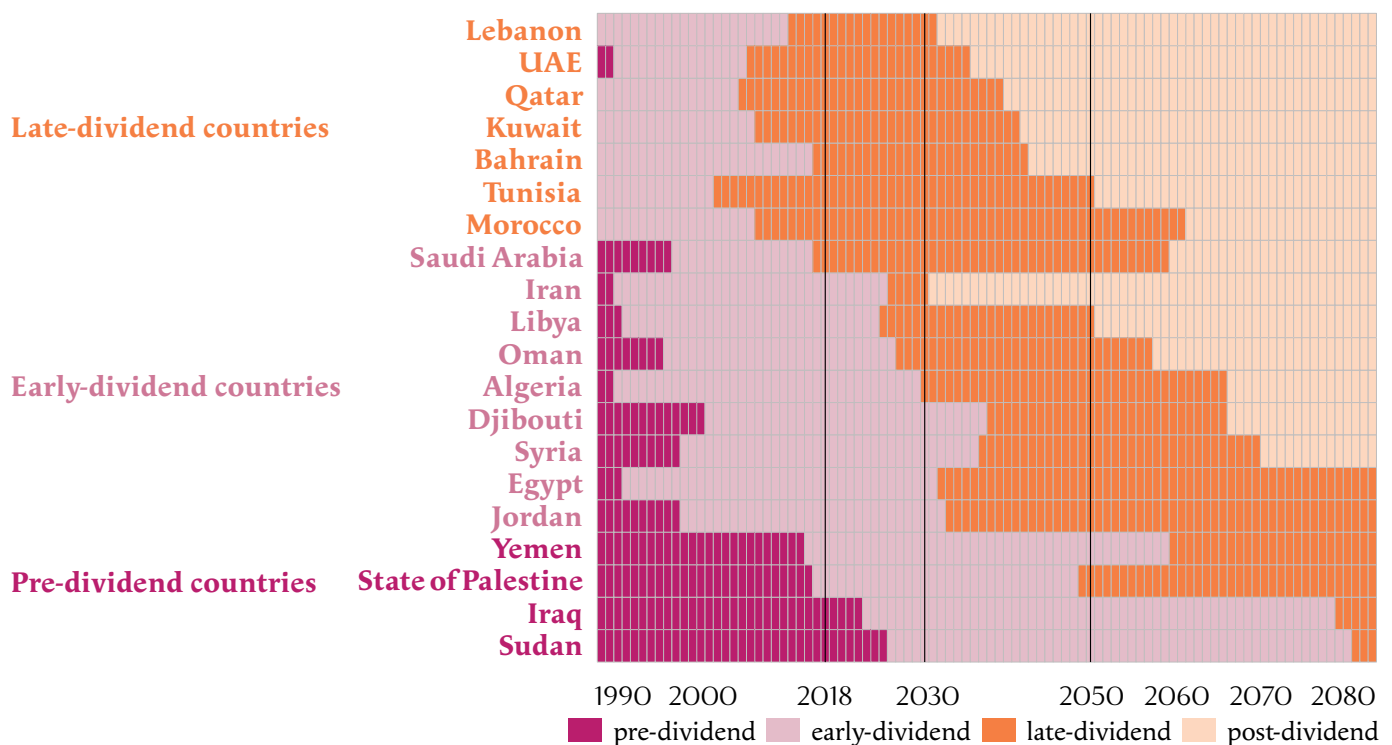
5.2.1 MENA Generation 2030: The prospect of a demographic dividend

The population in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is expected to more than double in size during the first half of the 21st century, with an unprecedentedly large proportion of the population in their most productive years. This opens up the potential for a demographic dividend – economic growth due to demographic changes. This temporary age structure presents a historic opportunity to invest in human capital and boost economic growth. But this will be possible only if appropriate policies are budgeted and operationalized within a politically and socially stable environment.

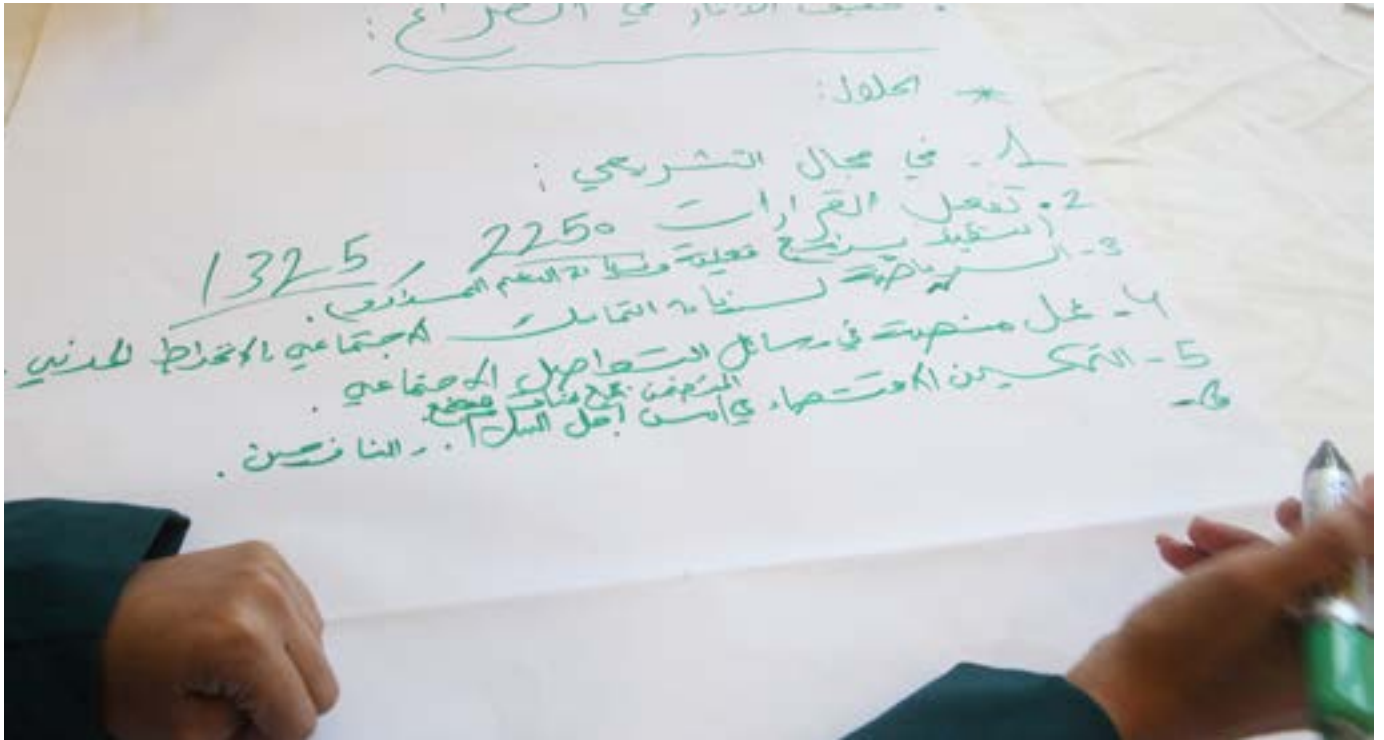
As the MENA population continues to grow, it does so at different speeds in different countries. Since Late-dividend countries (Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar and UAE) experience a low child-dependency ratio, but an increasing elderly-dependency ratio, the window of opportunity for these countries is slowly closing. On the contrary, Pre-dividend countries (Iraq, Sudan, Yemen and the State of Palestine) still



experience high fertility rates resulting in a high number of children, while Early-dividend countries (Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Libya, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Syria - 50% of MENA countries) are characterized by reduced fertility rates and experience high number of youth transitioning into working-age. The window of opportunity for these countries is wide open.



Implications



Education service provision: By 2030, the MENA region will face an increase of 25 million (+23%) additional students, especially at lower and upper secondary education level, to be accommodated in the already stretched education system. If countries do not address this huge influx, an additional 5 million children (+27%) may be out of school.

School-to-work transition: By 2030, the MENA region will experience an increase of 39 million (+27%) new entrants into the labour force. Unless necessary steps are taken to accommodate them in the national economies there will be an increase by 11% in youth unemployment.

Potential of female labour force participation: Closing the gender gap in the youth labour force would unleash human capital to contribute to economic and social development. The youth labour force would more than double in seven MENA countries, with highest proportional increase in Syria (+74%), Algeria (+68%), and Iran (+67%).

Reaping the peace dividend: The cost of conflict and violence in MENA is enormous and exposes children, adolescents and youth to the risk of death and injury, violence, uncertainty and loss of investment, especially in human capital. These and other factors contribute to the waning optimism among young people and consequently the world's lowest level of youth civic engagement in the region– a key driver of instability.

Hence, political and social stability is critical in reaping the demographic dividend. In addition to working for peace at the political level, it is crucial for all countries in the MENA region, and especially those afflicted by conflict, to invest in the participation of their adolescents and youth, ensuring their engagement in decision-making. If the engagement of adolescents and youth as potential problem-solvers and change-makers committed to peace, tolerance, democracy and shared responsibility for the region's disparities and deprivations is not facilitated, instability will remain.

Priority policy actions for reaping the demographic dividend in MENA

Pre-dividend *countries – window of opportunity is yet to open*

- Increased investment in early childhood development, proven to be the smartest investment with the highest rates of return;
- Investment in relevant and quality education, prioritizing skills for a fast-changing world, combined with policies facilitating the school-to-work transition;
- Strong engagement of adolescents and youth and an investment in girls, to reap the peace and the gender dividend.

Early-dividend *countries – window of opportunity is wide open*

- Increased investment in secondary education, where the highest increase of school-age population is expected;
- Investment in policies focusing on skills development through multiple pathways and vocational training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and job placements;
- For the most vulnerable adolescents and youth, transformative social protection measures that can facilitate their transition to employment, breaking the cycle of generational poverty;
- Strong engagement of adolescents and youth and an investment in girls, to reap the peace and the gender dividend.

Late-dividend *countries – window of opportunity is slowly closing*

- Immediate investment in skills development through multiple pathways and vocational training, apprenticeships, entrepreneurship and job placements;
- Increased investment in policies to address labour force participation, especially female labour force participation, employment generation, business environment, and productivity gains by enhancing human capital in the existing labour force;
- Strong engagement of adolescents and youth and an investment in girls, to reap the peace and the gender dividend.

5.2 Regional evidence and recommendations for action

5.2.2 Synthesis of the regional evidence

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The MENA region is home to an unprecedentedly large and diverse demographic of young people. Their daily realities vary by the country in which they live, by their social, economic and political environment, and by age, gender, and education level. Nevertheless, the common themes of insecurity and a lack of opportunities have kept many young people across the region from becoming independent, active, and integrated members of the society. Often, young people's ability to access meaningful jobs, as well as essential services such as health and education, is governed not only by the availability of services but also by their status in society including their gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality or disability. As a result, various sub-groups within the adolescent and youth population live in vulnerable and/or marginalized conditions. Frequently, this leads to resentment and a desire for change.

MAIN CHALLENGES FACING MENA YOUTH

1 Inequity

The inequity and multidimensional deprivations that prevail across the MENA region are at the heart of many of the challenges encountered by adolescents and youth in the region. The barriers faced by young people, and the extent to which they have access to opportunities, skills, platforms or technologies, are more or less similar across the countries in the region.

2 Poverty

A study of child poverty in 11 Arab countries⁵ in 2018 found that one in four children under 18 (24.7%) are acutely

poor, while nearly one in two (44%) suffer from moderate poverty. Poverty and its manifestations were, however, not uniform across the Arab countries surveyed. Countries were found to have varying combinations of moderate and severe child poverty and could be grouped into three clusters⁶. There are also strong urban-rural differentials. In Morocco and Iraq, for example child poverty rates were 5.7% in urban areas as compared to 36.5% in rural areas.

3 Gender discrimination

Discrimination against young women and girls remains widespread in homes, educational institutions and in the work place. In Syria, adolescent girls' mobility is often curtailed, preventing them from moving safely and freely outside the home. This limited mobility compounds their social and emotional isolation, prevents access to services, and contributes to mental distress⁷. In Saudi Arabia, even though Saudi women are more educated and more qualified than men, they have fewer opportunities⁸. Similarly, in Jordan, where young women are well-educated, rigid social norms continue to keep them out of the labour force or steer them towards a limited set of socially acceptable professions⁹.

4 Health and physical wellbeing

Adolescence and early adulthood are increasingly recognized as distinct periods in terms of the physical and psychological changes that they bring about. As established by the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health, the health of adolescents and young adults is affected by social factors at personal, family, community, and national levels¹⁰.

Evidence from the MENA region suggests that adolescent health and wellbeing warrants more attention. In Gulf Cooperation Council countries, adolescents are increasingly at risk of road traffic injuries, mental health issues, and non-communicable diseases¹¹. Marginalized groups are particularly at risk¹². However, as yet few developing countries have compiled status reports on the health and development of young people¹³.

5

Child labour

More than 9 million, or almost one in 10, children in the Middle East and North Africa are child labourers. Most are concentrated in agriculture¹⁴. In the Arab states, 38 per cent of all those in child labour are just 5–11 years of age. Approximately 32 per cent are aged between 12–14 years, while 30 per cent fall into the 15–17 years age range¹⁵. The situation is more acute when it comes to communities with high numbers of Syrian refugees¹⁶.

6

Migration

A study of youth aged between 15–29 years in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia, has found that political discontent significantly increases the intentions of young people to migrate. Those with a negative perception of democracy and a perceived inability to influence the government are more likely to migrate¹⁷.

In addition to out-migration from the region, MENA also attracts large numbers of in-migrants in search of work, mostly from Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Many of these migrant workers are young, arriving in the region to work temporarily in order to improve their economic situation and that of their families back home. Young men mostly come to take up jobs in the construction industry, while young women mostly come to take up jobs as domestic workers, often bordering on incarcerated slavery¹⁸. These young men and

women often spend several years in the MENA region, but are as yet invisible in data and information on youth in the region.

7

Refugee adolescents and youth

In the MENA region, 37% of the total young people live in fragile and conflict affected countries. As conflicts and wars continue across the MENA region, many of them with little sign of abating, the numbers of refugees are increasing, as is the intensity of their suffering. Refugee adolescents and youth are more likely to forgo essential services and experience discrimination. Poor conditions in camps are repeatedly cited as very demoralizing by children and adolescents alike¹⁹. Access to decent work and to tertiary education is significantly more restricted for those whose status is undocumented or who hold Syrian or Palestinian nationality. Harmful work is a significant reality for large numbers of underage refugee boys²⁰.

8

Disabled youth

Adolescents and youth with disabilities are among the most vulnerable. Significant stigma prevails against children born with disabilities in some societies within the MENA region. In addition to children born with physical, sensory or intellectual disabilities, the MENA region is witnessing a sharp rise in the numbers of children, adolescents and youth living with war and violence-related disabilities. There is no accurate data available on children who have a permanent disability from conflict related injuries in Syria, nor is there accurate pre-crisis data. However, the 2018 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) estimates that there are 2.9 million people living with a disability and in need of humanitarian assistance, which means approximately 1.2 million children in Syria are living with a disability²¹.

9 Other marginalized groups of youth

There are a number of marginalized groups amongst the adolescents and youth of the region who have not yet been studied in depth. These groups tend to be kept at the fringes of society and are mostly invisible when it comes to service provision, inclusion in decision-making, or youth-targeted programming. Among these groups are migrant construction workers, migrant domestic workers, sex workers, the LGBTQ community, and people living with HIV/AIDS, all of whom tend to live in precarious, often dangerous, conditions, and suffer from societal marginalization, discrimination and abuse.

10 Disillusionment and disenfranchisement

In Arab Mediterranean countries (AMCs), insecurities and lack of opportunities have continuously kept young people from becoming independent and being full, active, and integrated members of society. This process is commonly referred to as social exclusion²². Applying a Social Exclusion Index on data from Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia indicates that the share of young people suffering from social exclusion is the highest in Tunisia (46.7%), followed by Algeria (43.4%), Egypt (42.1%), and Lebanon (33.2%). The study concludes that exclusion from social and political life is the strongest driver of youth exclusion in all AMCs²³.

11 Tokenistic engagement of youth

Youth have expressed desire for sustained efforts by donors and development agencies to build on training programmes that

impart knowledge and skills. This will help bring about structural change by supporting young people to access civil society spaces and implement newly-learned skills to influence public policy²⁴.

12 Risk of radicalization and recruitment into armed groups

In a survey conducted with voluntary recruits to extremist groups, UNDP (2017) found that:

- The majority of recruits came from borderlands or peripheral areas that have suffered generations of marginalization;
- 55% of voluntary recruits expressed moderate to severe frustration with economic conditions, with employment being the most frequently cited need at the time of joining;
- An acute sense of grievance towards government featured very strongly in the decision to join the armed groups: 83% of voluntary recruits believed that government only served the needs of a select few.

13 Persisting hopefulness

Despite the acute frustration and anger, participatory action research with young people reveals that they are positive, hopeful that their reality will change, and keen to engage positively to change that reality²⁵. Studies from the region show there has been some good progress in supporting adolescent and youth engagement. Based on data collected through NGO and UN partners' data systems, more than 1 million adolescents and youth in the MENA region lead and/or are involved in civic and economic engagement programmes²⁶.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION AND RESEARCH

Data: Definitions of age cohorts

A concerted effort should be made to agree on unified definitions of the age categories 'Children', 'Adolescents' and 'Youth'. This is important in order to be able to compare data and results across world regions, MENA countries, agencies, and programmes. An effort should also be made to advocate for unified definitions to be adopted by academics.

Country-specific data

In addition to the need for region-wide data, it is imperative that country-based data be collected and collated in order for it to be useful for country-level identification of needs and specification of priorities.

Putting gender on the agenda

Research programmes that investigate existing social and cultural barriers limiting the mobility, accessibility, participation and choice of female youth in the region need to be prioritized. Intervention programmes that take those social and cultural barriers into consideration need to be supported and strengthened. Interventions must also attempt to deconstruct and understand social and cultural barriers and propose innovative ways to circumvent them, with the involvement of both women and men.

Health

Since health and health behaviours track strongly from adolescence into adult life²⁷, factors affecting adolescent and youth health are critical to the wellbeing of the entire population. Within future global health initiatives tackling non-communicable diseases, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and injury, there is a need for explicit data strategies to guide policies for young people. This should also include age and sex disaggregation of data and the study of risk processes during the adolescent years²⁸.

Addressing the specific needs of refugee youth

As long as conflicts continue in the region, AMENA will continue to be a region hosting large numbers of refugees. The needs of refugee youth will need to be taken into account in all programmatic work in order to ensure they have access to quality services and programmes. The aim should be to make their temporary state a period for empowerment, resilience, and integration, while at the same time engaging them in joint actions and programmes with host-country youth in order to lessen the potential for additional conflicts and resentment. It has been found that both refugee youth and those from host communities often feel a sense of despondency and disengagement²⁹.

Marginalized groups

Effort should be made to include understudied marginalized groups of youth in the discussion of youth-related issues and the analysis of evidence. These include migrant construction workers, migrant domestic workers, sex workers, the LGBTQ community, and people living with HIV/ AIDS. Special effort needs to be made to include them in surveys and studies as well as in youth-targeted programming.

The increased number of adolescents and youth with disabilities, as well as the vulnerable conditions in which they live, warrants urgent attention. Both research and interventions aimed at alleviating the vulnerability of disabled adolescents and youth need to be prioritized.



5.3 Evidence and recommendations for actions on key thematic areas

5.3.1 Easing the education to employment transition - Recommendations for action

“The lack of support has led young people in the entire Middle East to work that differs from their disciplines and specialization, or as it is now known, to migrate, thinking that there is support outside their homelands.”

— Raneem Muhammad, Syria, 23, young researcher and advocate

Young people in the MENA region are currently the most educated generation. Despite this, poor quality education that does not meet the skill needs of the labour market, coupled with an insufficient demand for skilled workers and a lack of decent job opportunities, means that young people often face a long transition period between education and work.

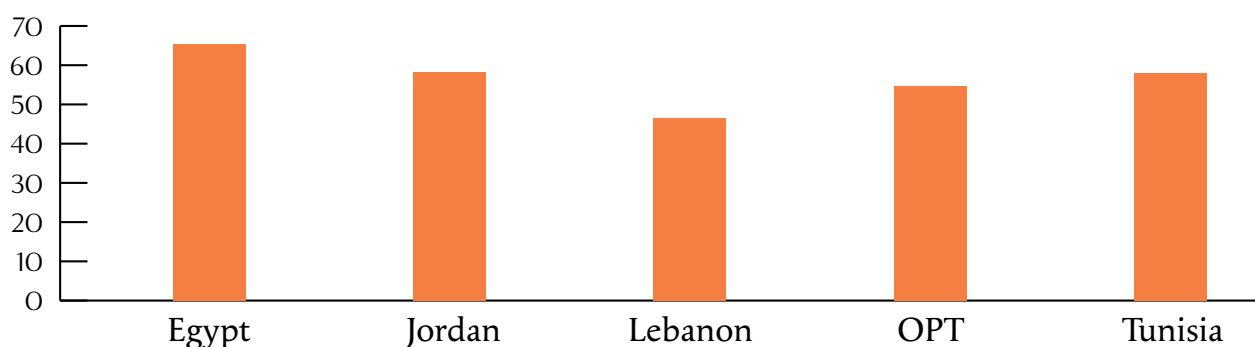
This transition is further exacerbated by the fact that, although there are low- to mid-skilled jobs available in the labour market, young people are unenthusiastic to engage in vocational education in order to gain the skills required for these jobs. Furthermore, young people also face significant barriers in pursuing

entrepreneurship as an alternative career option. As a result, youth in the MENA region have the highest unemployment rates globally, standing at 25 per cent in Arab States and 29 per cent in North Africa.³⁰ These figures strongly signal the challenges in absorbing young people into the labour market.³¹

Across the region, youth unemployment is not only an issue in magnitude, but also a problem of duration, with the majority of youth experiencing lengthy and challenging education-to-work transitions. Indeed, more than half of youth in MENA countries search for work for a period longer than one year (Figure 1)³².

Today's generation of young people may be the first to be worse-off than middle-aged adults. About one in three young people in the MENA region are unemployed (29 per cent in North Africa and 25 per cent in the Arab States), with almost one in two not in employment, education or training (up to 40 per cent).

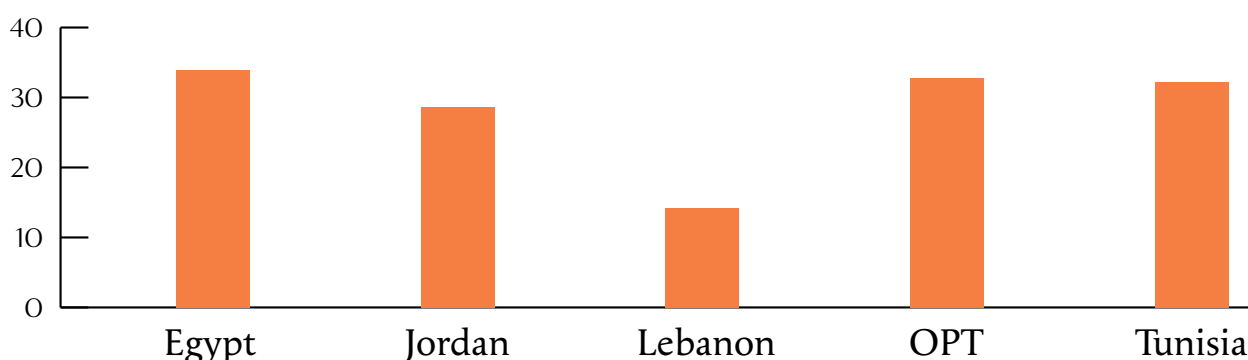
Figure 1: Unemployed youth that spent over one year searching for work (%)³³



In addition, youth unemployment rates in the MENA region are found to rise with educational attainment. For university graduates, the average youth unemployment rate is 34.7 per cent (21.1 per cent for males and 49.5 per cent females) compared to 19.1 per cent for youth with primary level education.³⁴ It is therefore evident that investments in education, particularly at the university level, do not result in immediate employability of young people. On the contrary, the attainment of a university degree does

reduce the education-to-work transition time. Indeed, those with primary education take on average 18 months to find a job, while university graduates take nine months to find satisfactory work.³⁵ Consequently, high unemployment rates and long employment searches have discouraged youth in the region from participating in the labour market.³⁶ Consequently, young people in MENA have amongst the highest shares of NEET rates worldwide, where they are not in employment, education or training.

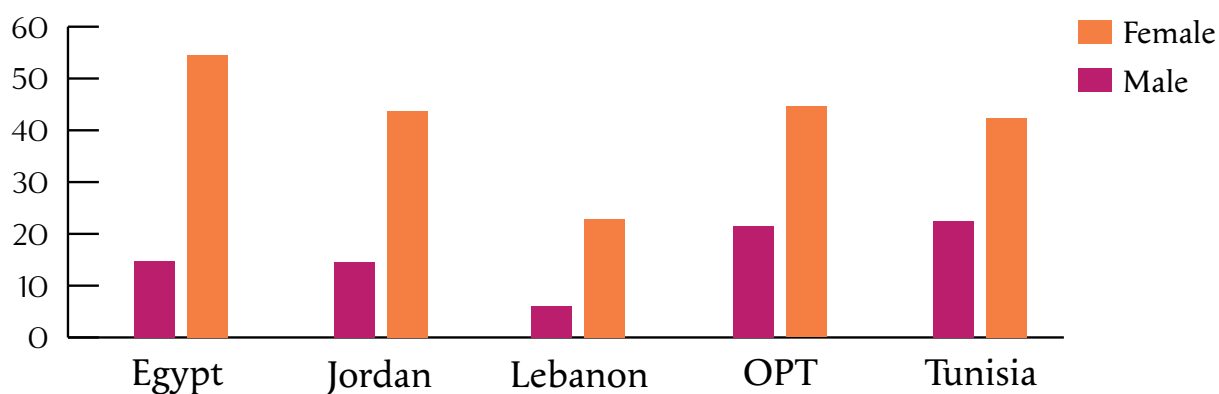
Figure 2: Total youth NEET in selected countries³⁷



Where young men in the region typically take between two to three years to make the education-to-work transition, it is significantly more difficult for women. In the MENA region, female tertiary graduates take on average 11 months to find work, compared to eight months for males, and the waiting time increases to 31 months for young women with primary education. Only 20.4 per cent of young females aged 25-29 years had completed the education-to-employment transition, compared to 60.1 per

cent of young men. As Figure 3 shows, young women are far more likely to become neither in education nor employment or training (NEET), with the average female NEET reaching 42.5 per cent. Accordingly, following the completion of their education, too many young women often remain inactive.³⁸ As a result of a lengthy transition from education to work, young women in particular are often discouraged from continuing their search for work and drop out of the labour market altogether.³⁹

Figure 3: Youth NEET rate in selected countries (male, female)⁴⁰



Furthermore, across MENA, youth from poor and fairly poor household income groups tend to experience higher NEET rates (44.4 per cent and 40.4 per cent respectively) than those who are in well and fairly well off households (28.4 per cent and 25 per cent).⁴¹ On the contrary, youth from wealthier households are more likely to remain unemployed, as they can afford to spend longer time searching for a job that matches their skills.⁴² Indeed, highly educated youth in the region are particularly unwilling to engage in poor quality jobs that do not meet their job reservations.

On the other hand, many of the unemployed youth eventually either decide to migrate or they will queue for public sector employment. Indeed, almost half of all unemployed youth (49.6 per cent) in the region want jobs in the public sector.⁴³ This is a result of this sector traditionally providing sustainable and decent employment, whereas the private sector still largely supplies inferior quality jobs for young people.

Overall, youth in the MENA region face more difficulties in accessing the labour market during their education-to-work transition in comparison to development countries.⁴⁴ This is due to a number of factors characteristic to the region; including education systems focusing on memorizing content rather than acquiring skills, which leads to skills mismatches, lack of decent employment opportunities and low entrepreneurship rates.⁴⁵

Poor quality education and TVET

The mismatch between the skills demanded by employers and the skills offered by the labour force is widely documented across the region as a primary barrier to effective job facilitation in MENA. This is due to the fact that educational systems including secondary schooling, technical vocational education and training (TVET) and universities are not adequately preparing

students for the current labour market. Instead, they continue to be geared toward rote learning, certification and preparing students to serve in the public sector, which used to be the primary employer of educated new entrants in most MENA economies.⁴⁶ Hence, despite the fact that greater numbers of MENA students are attaining education, particularly at a higher level, this does not always translate into higher employment rates and better quality productive work for youth. Increased privatization, globalization and new technologies - also known as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution'⁴⁷ - have brought on the demand for certain labour market skills in the region, many of which are not taught in existing public education systems across the region.⁴⁸ These do not only include technical skills, but life skills that assist youth in successfully transitioning into the world of work.⁴⁹ Hence, the continued mismatch in skills has further added to long and difficult periods of unemployment as youth transition from education to employment, with employers usually reluctant to hire young people lacking the skills they need. Despite this, investment in on-the-job training is very low amongst employers in the region who are often unwilling to build the skills and capacities of new entrants. While a skills mismatch does pose serious barriers to private sector employment for young people, it is important to differentiate between a lack of certain (life) skills in demand and lack of demand for highly skilled labour.

TVET graduates in the MENA region have greater prospects for employment compared to university graduates,⁵⁰ with the latter registering an unemployment rate twice as high as TVET graduates (30 per cent compared to 15 per cent).⁵¹ As previously mentioned, while the region faces a shortage in job opportunities for highly skilled youth, there are jobs available in mid-to-low level skilled occupations. Despite this, since TVET in the region is often associated with poor quality education lacking good job prospects, access to TVET remains very limited in the region, with a small number of

enrollments in secondary education. Culturally, there is a strong preference for the pursuit of higher education across the region, with TVET often associated with academic failure.⁵² Furthermore, on one side, the majority of TVET graduates who do make the transition from education to work in the formal sector, are still not satisfied with their employment due to poor working conditions.⁵³ On the other side, employers possess a high degree of dissatisfaction with the skills and preparedness of TVET graduates in employment.⁵⁴ Therefore, there is also a need to improve the quality of TVET in order to both increase the employability of youth and ensure a higher TVET demand amongst young people in the region.⁵⁵

Poor job quality and underutilization of youth skills

There are four times as many youth unemployed as there are job vacancies in the region.⁵⁶ Despite this, the employment crisis in the MENA region is not just about a lack of work opportunities, but a lack of decent employment available to youth. When young people do manage to attain employment, the majority are concentrated either in low-productive work in the public sector, or more commonly, in low-quality, low-paying insecure jobs in the informal sector⁵⁷ - 80 per cent of the working youth in the region work in the informal sector.⁵⁸ Furthermore, whereas more young women would be willing to engage in

the labour market, there is also a lack of 'gender-appropriate' jobs available for them.⁵⁹ Eventually, the employment opportunities for youth overall strongly influence the age at which they leave education. While those who have good job prospects leave education earlier, poor job prospects lead young people to decide to remain in education.⁶⁰

Higher-skilled youth in the region particularly struggle to find work that matches their level of qualifications.⁶¹ In fact, the more a young person is educated, the more difficult it is for them to obtain work that matches their skill set. This common situation of 'over-education' in the region is determined by the availability of jobs in the private sector which require skills that are below the level of education obtained by young people. Hence, since the supply of qualified workers is far greater than the demand of technical and professional work, youth often have no choice but to accept employment that is below their skills level. On average, 38.4 per cent of working youth in the region are underutilized⁶² in their place of employment, with female rates being much higher than their male counterparts.⁶³ Indeed, the gender gap in labour underutilization amongst youth in MENA is largest than any other world region, with rates for females reaching 49.3 per cent.⁶⁴ Overall, this situation triggers migration; indeed, especially when young male workers are underutilized, they are more likely to move to countries where their productive potential can be realized.

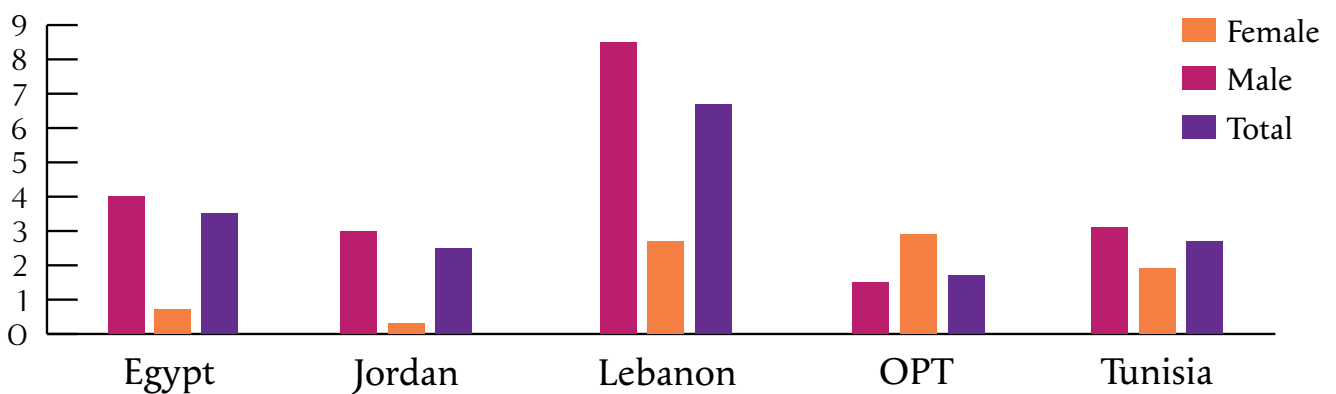


Barriers to entrepreneurship

With young people facing limited employment options in both the public and private sectors due to declining job prospects and lack of job creation, entrepreneurship presents an alternative potential for youth to enter the labour market. Despite the opportunities for enterprise development, youth entrepreneurship

is particularly low in the MENA region, with only 3.4 per cent of employed young people being employers.⁶⁵ Young women are especially less likely to pursue entrepreneurship, with only 1.7 per cent of working women classified as employers compared to 4 per cent of young men.⁶⁶

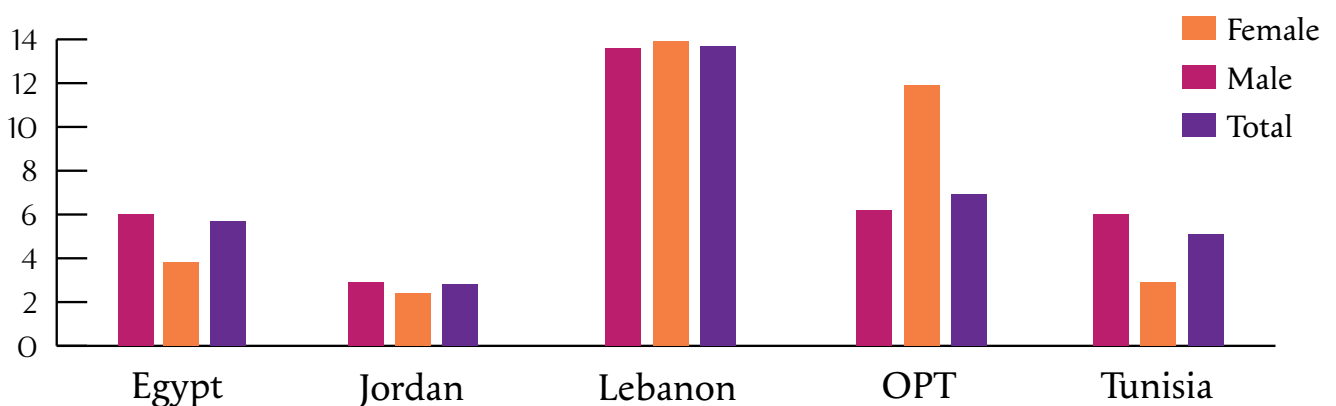
Figure 4: Youth employers⁶⁷ in MENA⁶⁸



Moreover, young people that are self-employed are more likely to be in vulnerable employment,

as own-account workers^{69,70} (which represent 6.8 per cent of working youth in MENA⁷¹).

Figure 5: Youth own-account workers in MENA⁷²



The vast majority of youth pursued self-employment in order to gain greater independence. The only exception is represented by Egyptian youth, who reported taking up entrepreneurship as a last resort when confronted with a lack of employment opportunities in Egypt.⁷³ On the contrary, it is common for youth to prefer to wait for public sector jobs which provide the assurances of a steady income, job security and benefits.

Across the region, youth continue to experience great obstacles in starting up their own business. These include a poor entrepreneurship culture, regulatory and legal frameworks that are often weak and not conducive to enterprise set-up and growth, and limited lending capacities from financial institutions as well as poor financial infrastructures. Most countries in the MENA region also have an inefficient business environment that fails to support young people in their enterprise development, including high costs and complex bureaucracies related to registering and starting a business. It is estimated that the registration costs of a business in the MENA region is 6.4 times greater than that in OECD countries.⁷⁴ While young people often lack the entrepreneurial skills necessary to successfully start a business or grow an existing one, the excessive bureaucratic requirements and high costs related to that are often a deterrent.

‘What works’ in easing the education-to-employment transition?

As examined, there are numerous barriers that hinder young people in the MENA region from making the education-to-employment transition. These include a skills mismatch, lack of decent job opportunities and difficulties in pursuing entrepreneurship. Consequently, MENA countries are unfortunately making a loss in education investments for their youth, missing the chance to capitalize on the

economic potential of its large working age population.

Children, adolescents and youth in the region can become agents of change for a more prosperous future by playing their part to reap the demographic dividend.⁷⁵ But for this to happen, they must finally be perceived as a source of potential solutions. Decisive action by policy makers is essential if adolescents and youth in MENA are to reach their full potential, contribute to problem solving and help the region benefit from the demographic dividend.

In the coming 12 years, 25 million additional students (an increase of 23 per cent) will need to be accommodated in the already-stretched education systems. The projected increase will be highest at lower- and upper-secondary education level. Further, the MENA region will experience an increase of 39 million new entries to the labour force (an increase of 27 per cent) to be accommodated in the national economies.

In regard to this, the ILO’s ‘Call for Action’ on youth employment (resolution adopted at the 101st International Labour Conference in 2012) made a crucial stand calling for immediate, targeted and renewed action to tackle the youth employment crisis globally. Specifically, the resolution calls on governments and social partners to: (1) foster pro-employment growth and decent job creation through macroeconomic policies, employability, labour market policies, youth entrepreneurship and rights; (2) promote macroeconomic policies and fiscal incentives that support employment and; (3) adopt fiscally sustainable and targeted measures. The ‘Call for Action’ recognizes that the MENA region has significant potential to turn the demographic transition that its countries are experiencing into increased prosperity for its people.

Recommendations for action

The right policies for youth employment



Ensure engagement of young people in education- and employment-related decision-making:

Currently opportunities for young people to shape policy outcomes are very limited and sectoral policies tend to lack coherence. Engagement of young people in decision-making and delivery of public services is essential to reduce youth unemployment – it requires greater involvement of young people in shaping education and employment policies and services, increased coherence in the delivery of education and employment policies, and evidence-based policy ensuring sound monitoring and evaluation systems. [See here](#) for an overview.



Promote a new learning agenda towards life skills and 21st century skills:

Countries in the region have to re-think education and promote a new learning agenda to address low quality learning, a mismatch of skills with the labour market, and high youth unemployment - especially graduate unemployment. In particular, due to the rapidly changing technology within this Fourth Industrial Revolution and the corresponding socio-economic impact on people's lives, life skills and 21st century skills need to be fostered. This will require the promotion of learning aimed at acquisition of skills to better prepare children and young people for future challenges, and to create open learning systems that provide learning opportunities for all. Further, building linkages between education systems and labour markets is critical to aligning education systems to the evolving demand for skills. At the same time, this needs to be accompanied by the integration of school-to-work transition mechanisms within education itself.

Life Skills and Citizenship Education

The Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) regional framework reflects on the multi-dimensionality of learning and promotes acquisition of life skills – skills for learning, skills for employability, skills for personal empowerment, and skills for active citizenship. Within these four dimensions of learning, twelve core life skills have been identified to enable children and young people to better respond to future challenges in life and in work – such as creativity, critical-thinking, problem-solving, cooperation, negotiation, but also respect for diversity, empathy and participation for increased social cohesion and civic engagement.

Putting the acquisition of life skills at the centre of learning, makes 'what to learn' as important as 'how to learn', including the practical application of life skills in school, at the work place, as well as among family members, within the community and among peers. [Read more here.](#)



Ensure greater investment in youth employment:

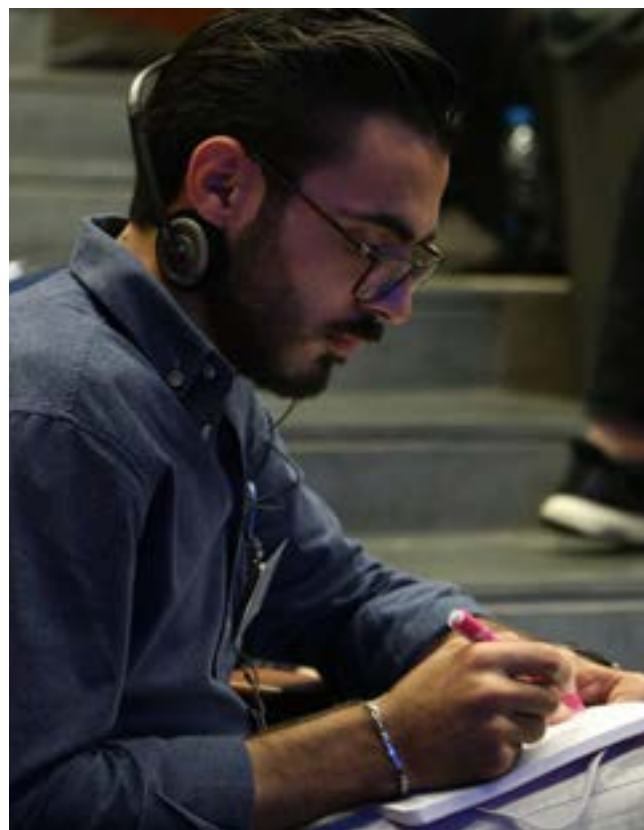
An integrated roadmap for youth employment requires substantial reforms for more inclusive and job-rich growth, considering all the different aspects involved. (I) Economic policies have to champion pro-employment macroeconomic policies, with focus on sectors with high job creation capacity for youth. (II) Labour

market and social protection policies need to be strengthened towards targeting the most disadvantaged job seekers and establishing social protection floors. (III) Employability requires upgrading of training and skills development systems, with improved linkages to labour market information and career guidance services. (IV) Entrepreneurship requires an enabling business environment and business development services, as well as boosting entrepreneurial literacy at school and through on-the-job experiences. (V) Participation is essential to protect labour rights of young people and improve representation in policy-making and social dialogue. [Read more here.](#)



Foster decent jobs, and adequate and inclusive working environment: Labour market and social protection policies need to be strengthened

towards targeting the most disadvantaged and establishing transformative social protection floors.



Technical and Vocational Education and Training Policy Reforms

The National Strategic Framework for Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) in Lebanon reflects an emphasis on the importance of providing young people with life skills. Facilitating the transition of students from education to employment is only possible through concerted efforts to provide them with a range of technical skills and life skills relevant for all aspects of their economic and social life. Current rapid changes in the labour market have allowed governments to re-think how to keep pace with these changes and how to reflect that in their education systems. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon had to reconsider its qualification framework, especially for TVET, so that its new education and employment strategies reflect these new realities.

The new TVET Strategic Framework build on three objectives: (i) achieving the ambitions of young people to secure a decent life, and providing lifelong learning to meet changes in labour market requirements, (ii) meeting the needs of employers to secure a labour force that has the right set of skills, and encouraging self-employment, (iii) securing the development of a culture of peace, cooperation, communication, and acceptance of others. [Read more here.](#)

The right programmes for youth employment:



Explore the expectations and perceptions of employers:

Labour markets face a lack of information for setting effective labour policies and

national strategies to guide young graduates from education to employment. The economic crisis in the region does not foster job creation, resulting in high youth unemployment. The mismatch of skills also reflects inadequate recruitment decisions due to nepotism, socio-political interference and scarcity of on-the-job training opportunities. Overcoming such issues requires the promotion of technical and vocational training to help direct young people towards technical employment where wide opportunities exist. This will also foster workplace based training to improve productivity and support entrepreneurship and startups as main drivers of job creation. Regular surveys and forecast studies to anticipate potential demand for skills in emerging sectors are needed, as well as enhanced cooperation between education systems and the labour market to ensure alignment of skill supply and skill demand. [Read more here.](#)



Promote mechanisms to match employers and employees:

Common mechanisms, such as job fairs, can be used to further research the

gap between education and employment, and to anticipate trends most sought in the labour market. It helps in identifying the qualifications and technical/academic disciplines provided within the labour force, in comparison with the qualifications and technical/academic disciplines demanded by the labour market. It further enables anticipation of skills and qualifications increasingly demanded by the private sectors.

[Read more here.](#)



Promote mechanism to match idea-seekers and idea-owners:

Fostering entrepreneurship among young people requires matching those with business

ideas and those who are seeking new solutions, willing to promote and invest into new ideas. Therefore mechanisms need to be established or strengthened, providing opportunities to interact with the private sector and to find common ground of applying knowledge, skills, technologies, and investment to jointly advance on innovations, startups and entrepreneurship among young people.

Employers Perception Survey

TVET programmes aim to equip graduates with the skills and expertise needed in the labour market to improve their employability. Employers Perception Surveys of TVET graduates inform about the strengths and weaknesses of TVET programmes and requirements to keep up with new trends and workplace practice. This interaction ensures graduates are equipped with the skills demanded by the labour market, facilitates the transition of graduates to employment, and hence is a crucial instrument to gauge employers' satisfaction and perception. For an overview of the results of the survey, [see here.](#)

Dual Education System

The Dual Education System focuses on practical learning at the workplace combined with theoretical learning at vocational schools. It helps students to strengthen relevant technical skills, and substantiate those skills in related working environment to smooth the transition to employment. It further facilitates the involvement of the private sector in the debate on skills development, takes account of the skills demanded by the labour market, reduces skills mismatches, decreases youth unemployment, and strengthens small and medium enterprises.

Within the dual system, networks are established between the private sector and education institutions, usually combined with a tracer study to evaluate effectiveness and employment outcomes to inform required adjustments and policy development. [Read more here.](#)

Innovations to foster employment and entrepreneurship

Taking advantage of technological development and innovations allows greater access to talent, increased participation of women in the labour market, and greater scalability of solutions that work. Online learning, employment and entrepreneur services provide budget-friendly solutions, allow shorter turn-around times, eliminate geographical barriers, and facilitate access to smart content solutions. For example, online freelancing platforms create exposure, allow indecency and foster learning by doing. While the region is brimming with young talent seeking to gain access to the market, 70 per cent of online freelancing platform workforce are usually below the age of 30 years old. For an example of an innovative online freelancing platform, see [Tarjama](#).



Combine theoretical and practical learning: Quality work-based learning schemes are a powerful driver of youth employment. The term refers to all forms of learning that

takes place in a real work environment. It provides young people with the skills needed to successfully obtain and keep employment, and progress in their professional environment. Apprenticeships, internships, traineeships and on-the-job training are the most common types – combining elements of workplace-based and school-based learning. Benefits include employability and easier transition into employment for young people, efficient

recruitment and increased productivity for the private sector, inclusion and human-capital development for societies. It requires reinforced national capacities to anticipate future skill seeds, and improved technical and vocational pathways, including digital skills and entrepreneurship skills. This includes, but it is not limited to: further establishing and developing legal and institutional frameworks and mechanisms for work-based learning; building and sustaining social partnerships and engagement between employers and young people; enhancing the standing and status of TVET and occupations; developing capacities of workplaces and incentives for vulnerable young people. For more information, [see here](#).

Key asks of young people - The time to act is now! Think big!



MORE evidence – *Provide us, the young people, with disaggregated data and evidence made available in Arabic:* Enabling young people to do quality research, and hence build the foundation for engagement in policy development, requires robust data and evidence. Hence, young people request more evidence to be made available in Arabic, and encourage translation and dissemination of their research to a wider audience to highlight the challenges discovered, good practices, and solutions that work.

MORE engagement – *Let us, the young people, have a say in education and employment decisions that affect us:* Easing the transition from education into employment is a main concern of young people, and hence they should have a say in policy discussions that directly affect their life and livelihood. Hence, young people request stronger involvement in policy discussions around education and employment to have a voice in key aspects that affect their lives and are essential to successfully transition into adulthood.

MORE scaling up – *Help us, the young people, to ensure that innovations and good practices are available to all:* While it is helpful to have such a platform to share and learn from each other, it is essential to promote scaling up of good practices and solutions that work. In light of low quality and relevance of education, the mismatch of skills, and the highest youth unemployment rates globally, it is essential to reach a critical mass to ensure long-term changes in systems and economic and social perception.

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER – *Help us, the young people to engage with government and private sector to look for joint solutions:* Ensuring long-term changes in systems and perceptions requires shared responsibility of policy-makers, the private sector and young people. Hence, young people request joint engagement of all parties to ensure sustainable and scalable solutions that work. The role of the private sector is important in creating jobs, while the role of policy-makers to ensure an enabling investment and business climate to encourage job creation and entrepreneurship is critical.

5.3.2 Violence prevention and response – Evidence and recommendations for action

“We can transform the large number of people who are victims of war into active youth by reintegrating them and activating their role in society at all levels.”

— Nour Hemmami, 23, Syria, young researcher and advocate

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region continues to witness unprecedented levels of conflict and displacement—a situation that is exposing children, adolescents and youth in the MENA to grave and widespread forms of violence, rights violations, and protection risks. Adolescents (ages 10 to 19) and youth (15 to 24)⁷⁶ are at particular risk of child recruitment, child marriage and child labour, including its worst forms, along with other violations. **In total, over 61 million children,**⁷⁷ representing a third of all children in the region, live in countries affected by ongoing war, conflict and displacement.⁷⁸ Four countries in MENA (Syria, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen) are designated for official monitoring of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict,⁷⁹ and Israel, Palestine, Lebanon and Libya are ‘situations of concern’ in the [Secretary General’s Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict \(CAAC\)](#).

This year’s report on CAAC documents the highest ever number of grave violations against children in Syria, along with widespread child recruitment, detention and sexual violence against children and young people in several other countries in the region. Gender-based violence (GBV) in Syria remains pervasive both inside and outside the home, particularly in the forms of domestic violence, child marriage and sexual violence and harassment.⁸⁰ Women and girls

are disproportionately at risk of all forms of GBV, particularly women and girls who are widowed, divorced or separated, women and girls in female-headed households and persons with disabilities.⁸¹ Recent evidence confirms that boys and male adolescents and youth are also at significant risk of sexual violence in Syria.⁸² The situation is further complicated in conflict-affected countries by unreliable and insufficient humanitarian access to children, adolescents and youth in urgent need of protection and assistance.

Millions of young people in the region have fled war-torn areas as refugees and internally displaced persons, with children representing some 2.6 million of the refugees from the Syria situation alone, over 680,000 of whom are adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17.⁸³ Whilst they may have found relative safety from the immediate threats of armed conflict, they continue to face significant risks of violence and exploitation in situations of displacement.

Moreover, as their displacement becomes more protracted, refugee and internally displaced families in MENA are contending with increasing socio-economic vulnerability from indebtedness, the depletion of savings and limited livelihoods opportunities — which, in turn, exacerbates the vulnerability of adolescents and youth to a broad range of protection risks. Up to half of Syrian refugees

under 18 are estimated to be involved in child labour, including the worst forms, and child marriage is steadily increasing with each consecutive year of the crisis. In comparison to pre-conflict Syria, when child marriage in Syria was at approximately 13%, the most recent assessments indicate that 47% of married women, ages 20 to 24 years old, were married as children.⁸⁴ In Jordan, for instance, 82% of Syrian refugees now live below the poverty line, with female-headed households at greatest risk of resorting to harmful coping strategies such as child marriage and child labour.⁸⁵ Lebanon has witnessed a sharp rise in a spectrum of severe negative coping strategies among displaced Syrian families, from 28 percent in 2014 to 67 percent in 2015, which include begging, the removal of children from school, child marriage, the worst forms of child labour, and even survival sex.⁸⁶ As of 2018, nearly all (96%) of displaced Syrian families in Lebanon rely on some form of negative coping strategy to meet their basic needs.⁸⁷

These protection risks are also related to gaps in school enrolment and retention, with the greatest challenges experienced by adolescents and youth. Over 689,000 Syrian school-age children and adolescents (35%) are out of school in the five host countries,⁸⁸ many of whom are among the most vulnerable, including children with disabilities and girls — whose education is often deprioritized in comparison with boys by families struggling to meet basic needs. Girls who are married early are more likely to drop-out from school, and girls who are not in school are also more likely to be married early. Boys may also be more likely to be pulled out from school related to child labour.

The situation is particularly dire for adolescents and youth. In total, there are an estimated 1 million registered Syrian refugee youth (aged 15-24 years) in 3RP countries. Of these, 32% are of upper secondary age. While

enrolment rates are stable for children in primary school, these decrease dramatically at secondary level. The enrolment rate for Syrian students in upper secondary education is below 25% in all host countries, with the exception of Egypt⁸⁹ — with only 1% of Syrian refugees reaching tertiary (university level) education.

Even in non-conflict settings, children and young people in MENA face high levels of violence and rights violations, a reality linked to harmful social norms and practices (notably including discrimination against women and girls), the ongoing use of corporal punishment in homes and schools, as well as the prevalence of smuggling and trafficking of children and young people on the move in and through the region. In a recent study by UNICEF, the overwhelming majority (77 per cent) of adolescents and youth moving through the Central Mediterranean route towards Europe reported enduring some form of exploitation or violence during the journey.⁹⁰ Furthermore, despite ongoing support and capacitation by No Lost Generation (NLG) partners and others, the region's child protection laws, policies, systems and services generally remain inadequate in all MENA countries.

Moreover, countries in the region, including those most affected by the Syria crisis, contend with pervasive gender discrimination against women and girls across multiple spheres. Of the countries assessed in the 2017 Global Gender Gap Index, which assesses gender equality in economic participation, education, health and survival, and empowerment, Syria ranks 142nd out of 144 countries, whereas countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon are among the bottom 15 of nations assessed.⁹¹ Whilst NLG partners are jointly pioneering innovative approaches to promote gender equality through humanitarian programming, much more needs to be done to achieve gender equal and inclusive communities and policy frameworks in the region.⁹²

2018 Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth (ESAY) – Violence stream:

Recognizing the immense, often untapped capacity of young people to positively contribute to the protection of their communities, **the regional NLG, child protection group, emphasizes approaches designed to better harness this vital source of human capital**, and to empower adolescents and youth in the process. Aligned with this approach, the 2018 ESAY seeks to engage adolescents and youth as experts, presenters and sources of evidence. It provides a platform for them to share their ideas and solutions to the challenges they face in the region and dialogue together to identify recommendations. In total, the invitation for presentations for the 2018 ESAY elicited over 250 proposals from the region, the majority of which were submitted by young people.

Drawing from this promising body of evidence and engagement, eight submissions were selected as winners and finalists for the Addressing Violence Stream of the ESAY, six of which are from young people themselves. Overall, women and girls represent six of the

panelists. The submissions included a broad array of innovative approaches to developing new evidence, modalities and initiatives to strengthen protection from violence that are either directly led by young people themselves or targeted to address the identified needs of young people and their communities.

The final submissions for the thematic stream addressing violence were grouped under two over-arching themes, each of which served as a dedicated panel in the Violence Stream of the ESAY:

- 1) *Addressing Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence* (in particular gender norms) including exploring gender-discriminatory language, raising the voices of women and girls, and young people's use of technology and media to raise awareness; and
- 2) *Mitigating the Impact of Conflict on Young People*, including programming related to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), Rehabilitation, and Peacebuilding.

Addressing Root Causes of Gender-Based Violence

From **Libya**, an innovative proposal from LIBTESOL (the General Assembly of English Language Teachers) examined the social impact of the discriminatory language used in addressing women and girls on social media, including Facebook. The findings drew on the experiences and insights of 45 women and 30 men, who participated in the study. The latter examined the ways in which violent and gender-discriminatory language in social media pose immediate risks and impacts, including through

threats and harassment, whilst also further reinforcing gender inequality normalising violence against women and girls.

Drawing on similar themes, a member of the Youth Empowerment Society (YES) in **Morocco** presented the 'Audio Your Voice' project, which seeks to positively harness the power of technology in addressing GBV in the country. The presentation examined risks related to the use of information technology, including smart

phones and websites, and the ways in which harmful gender norms are reinforced and online harassment is prevalent.

An Engineering graduate from **Syria** shared findings on the gender disparities over the life cycles of women, girls, boys and men, including the internalisation of gender norms among children and young people in the region, along with their attitudes to and experiences regarding GBV. The research drew from a broad range of sources including academic literature, humanitarian reports and data, as well as the experiences and views of communities and young people themselves.

Mitigating the Impacts of Conflict

A **Syrian** graduate in biomedical engineering presented efforts to improve access to prosthetics and specialized health services for persons with paralysis and amputations, particularly as a result of armed conflict. The presentation highlighted the critical role of prostheses and other medical interventions in mitigating social exclusion and isolation, and in enhancing access to education, livelihoods opportunities, and self-sufficiency. The submission also examined cultural and attitudinal obstacles prevalent in MENA, such as pervasive discrimination and stigmatization of persons with disabilities, and the heightened risks of violence persons with disabilities often face. In particular, the researcher highlighted findings from extensive experience working young people (17 to 24) who are in need of prostheses and specialised care as survivors of conflict-based violence.

The International Medical Corps (IMC) presented on its Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) for Syrian refugees in **Jordan** and for internally displaced youth in **Syria**. This presentation made the point that children and young people continue to be disproportionately affected by armed conflict across the world,

A young community activist and researcher from **Yemen** presented on an innovative youth initiative called 'Khaluna Ne'esh' ('Let's Live') that engages community members, particularly women and girls, to better understand and address the prevalence of gender-discriminatory norms and GBV, including how violence against women and girls has increased in the context of armed conflict and instability. The project looked to women and girls as leaders in formulating new proposals and responses to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender discrimination and GBV.

and that child protection and psychosocial support programs often operate under highly challenging circumstances in the region. The presenter reflected on how the IMC has been responding to the emerging needs of affected populations since the beginning of the Syrian conflict and how it has played a key role in the implementing protection and psychosocial support programs across the region.

Noting the immense and continuing needs for Mental Health and Psychosocial Services (MHPSS) for displaced and conflict-affected populations in **Iraq**, a member of the Iraq Health Gateway organization presented on the enormous scale and lasting impacts of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) committed in areas that were under the effective control of ISIS. The presentation described the critical assistance and services being provided by family support centres in areas recently liberated from ISIS, such as Mosul and Salahuddin. Each centre has six psychosocial centres which formidably address rights violations such as sexual violence and child marriage - especially in terms of countering persistent cultural norms that stigmatize, silence and isolate survivors - and work to safely reintegrate survivors into families, homes and communities.

A young Fellow in the Democracy Pioneers Programme of the American University in Beirut (AUB), Lebanon, presented the immense potential of Young People as Peacebuilders in **Yemen**. The presenter described her success in publishing a specialized Arabic-language guidebook outlining the core concepts and terms of peacebuilding, as well as in establishing a new civic foundation, the Saba Youth Foundation for Development and Peacebuilding. The presentation described the work of this foundation in supporting Yemeni

youth in building an array of skills needed to more positively cope with the effects of and be engaged in promoting solutions to conflict, including through peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The central thesis of the presentation is that young people bring a rich array of skills, capacities, and social connections that are indispensable to peacebuilding and stability in the region. Indeed, if young people and their capacities are excluded from these processes, the consequence is that peace and social cohesion are unlikely to be realised.



Research and programmatic success from young people

Addressing the root causes of Gender-Based Violence

Research

Libya – LIBTESOL: Examining the social impact of discriminatory language towards women and girls on social media.	Violent and gender-discriminatory language in social media pose immediate risks and impacts and reinforce inequality and normalize violence against women.
Syria – Gender disparities in life cycles and internalization of gender norms.	Draws connections between gender inequality and GBV as a global phenomenon, in particular asking how such problems manifest in Syria and the MENA region.

Programmes

Morocco – Youth Empowerment Society: ‘Audio Your Voice’ Project – using technology to address GBV in Morocco.	Highlights the ways women and girls in Morocco use technology to survive and address GBV, through sharing resources, legal options and personal experiences.
Yemen – ‘Kaluna Na’esh (Let’s Live): programme engaging community members to understand the prevalence of gender-discriminatory norms and GBV.	The project gives women and girls the opportunity to formulate responses to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender discrimination and GBV.

Mitigating the Impacts of Conflict

Research

Syria – Improvements to the access of prosthetics and specialized health services to mitigate social exclusion.	Highlights the critical role of prostheses and in mitigating social exclusion, enhancing access to education, livelihoods opportunities and self-sufficiency. The presentation also draws on cultural obstacles and stigmatization of disabilities in MENA.
Iraq – Mental Health and Psychosocial Services for displaced and conflict affected persons.	Explores the critical assistance of MHPSS services provided by family support centres in areas that were under ISIS control. The presentation also highlights the challenges in countering persistent cultural norms that stigmatize SGBV survivors.

Programmes

Jordan and Syria – IMC Youth Empowerment Programme (YEP) for refugees and internally displaced youth.	Examines how YEP responds to the emerging protection and psychosocial problems under highly challenging contexts.
Yemen – Saba Youth Foundation for Development and Peacebuilding and the potential of Young People as Peacebuilders.	Presents a specialized Arabic-language guidebook outlining the core concepts of peacebuilding and the work of the foundation in supporting Yemeni youth in building an array of skills to cope with conflict and promote solutions to conflict, highlighting the skills, capacities and connection young people hold essential to peacebuilding.



Recommendations for action

No sustainable and scalable solutions for violence mitigation and response were presented. Nevertheless, young people continue to innovate in this area, including through the use of technology, to identify issues of concern for young people and to mitigate risks and address the affects of violence.

Drawing on the diverse body of experience, leadership, innovation and evidence provided by young people in the region, the recommendation is to identify new and effective solutions to **addressing violence against**

adolescents, especially the critical need to address all forms of gender-equality and GBV as a fundamental human rights and development issue.

The voices and views of young people will take centre stage in formulating conclusions and recommendations building on the shared commitment of young people to contribute their respective skills, capacities and experiences in mitigating the immense harm of the conflicts that have ravaged their homes, communities and countries.

6. Commitments and follow-up actions

Donors and practitioners in the room committed to:

- **Promoting and implementing disaggregation of data** wherever possible, to enable more effective analysis of the situation for male and female adolescents (10-19); and male and female youth (15-24).
- **Supporting the generation, sharing and use of evidence** to inform policy-making and programming so that it addresses the priorities and needs of youth. This includes easing the transition from education to employment, and prevention and response to violence. AUB committed to continue playing a key role in this work, including through making Arabic language resources more widely available.
- **Supporting efforts to fill the gaps in evidence and solutions**, notably in the area of prevention and response to the many forms of violence experienced by young people in MENA, including Gender Based Violence – noting that technology and innovations have the potential to play an important role in tackling violence and the discrimination that underpins it.
- **Supporting and making the space for the perspectives, opinions and voices of young people to be heard** in discussions and decision-making processes affecting their future.
- **Building the systematic participation of adolescents and youth into programming.**

In immediate follow up, the Embassy of the Netherlands committed to working with the No Lost Generation partners to facilitate consultation with the RAYAM on the new global level Dutch policy on youth. Other meeting participants committed to disseminating the key points of the Donor Briefing to relevant colleagues and partners, underlining the inspiring nature of the conversation with young people and the importance of living up to our commitments to them.

Further key asks for the donor community from the young people and the organisational partners involved in the Evidence Symposium:

- **Promote the solutions identified in the Evidence Symposium** to ease the transition from education to employment.
- **Explore mechanisms to link young solution-builders with funding** and other support (such as mentoring) in order to generate, test and, where appropriate, scale up further solutions.
- **Contribute to addressing the recommendations from the Evidence Symposium** which will be documented in a final report and which will guide the work of partners during the year until the 2019 Symposium. Many of these will align directly with the commitments listed above, but are likely to give more detail and, in some cases, may require budgetary support or influence from the donor community in order to maintain progress and achieve results.

Endnotes

1 The UN:NGO Group is a regional interagency coordination mechanism consisting of United Nations and non-governmental organizations that work together to advocate and support work with adolescents and youth in the Middle East and North Africa region.

2 Launched in 2013, No Lost Generation is a strategic framework for the responses to the Syria and Iraq crises. The initiative brings together key partners to achieve agreed outcomes under three pillars: Education, Child Protection and Adolescents & Youth. No Lost Generation is led jointly by UNICEF, Mercy Corps, Save the Children and World Vision.

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