

**ECOSOC Youth Forum 2018**  
**Concept Note**  
**Regional Breakout Session**  
**Arab States**  
**31 January 2018**  
**9 AM – 11 AM**  
**[Room]**  
**United Nations Headquarters, New York**

## **1) Background and context**

The challenges facing the Arab States<sup>1</sup> region today present an opportunity to tap into the creativity, passion, and commitment of its youth to develop innovative solutions that can help build sustainable and resilient urban and rural communities. Now is the time to foster the individual resilience of youth, while helping them to support their local, national, and regional communities and contribute to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More than 60 per cent of the region's population is under the age of 30, and the current youth generation is the largest this region has witnessed over the past 50 years. This presents a great opportunity, as young men and women can be powerful agents of change, if given the right incentives. As such, harnessing youth's energy, knowledge, reach, critical thinking and innovative ideas and solutions is indispensable for the achievement of the SDGs. In particular, youth engagement is crucial if the demand for revitalized global engagement embedded in Goal 17 (partnerships and implementation) is to be attained.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Arab States region continues to show by far the highest youth unemployment rates – 29.3 per cent in the Middle East and 30.6 per cent in North Africa, respectively, in 2016 – and rates have continued to worsen since 2012<sup>3</sup>. Young women are particularly affected, facing the double burden of age and gender. The Arab States and Northern Africa exhibit the largest gaps in unemployment rates between males and females aged 15–24 – at 27.6 percentage points and 20.3 percentage points, respectively, in 2016 – despite the rising educational attainment of young women.<sup>4</sup> In addition to unemployment, youth exclusion is strongly evident, often crossing with other forms of marginalization linked to gender, location, culture and/or community. This undercuts both development and social cohesion, yet it remains poorly recognized.

39 per cent of the MENA region's population is rural<sup>5</sup> with this population relying on agriculture as their main source of income. Women make up the majority of the agriculture workforce and currently account for 43 per cent of agriculture employees versus 23 per cent for men.<sup>6</sup> These figures are expected to continue growing particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Arab States includes 18 countries in Middle East and North Africa

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast\\_facts/fast-facts--youth-as-partners-for-the-implementation-of-the-sdgs/](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/results/fast_facts/fast-facts--youth-as-partners-for-the-implementation-of-the-sdgs/)

<sup>3</sup> World Employment and Social Outlook 2016: Trends for youth International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2016

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> World Bank 2014. <http://data.worldbank.org/region/MNA>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

in high agriculture-reliant countries such as Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Palestine, and Egypt. However, the high rate of rural-urban migration as a result of unemployment can have dire consequences for food, security and political stability if not properly tackled. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) initiated the Rural Youth Economic Empowerment Programme (RYEEP) to help rural young people aged between 15 and 35 to create employment opportunities for fellow young people as this remain a key for rural development.

The 2030 Agenda, along with other important recent development agreements such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement at COP21, require strong partnerships between young people and all stakeholders to be fully implemented, and, collectively, they reflect the growing realization among all stakeholders that it is critical to invest in youth empowerment and the needs of youth across all issue areas.

Working with youth on the 2030 agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals requires a number of enabling actions to effectively partner for greater impact. The First Global Forum on Youth Policies in 2014, co-organized by UNDP, SG's Envoy on youth, UNESCO and the Council of Europe, as a result of its findings, have called for "promoting synergies between youth policies and broader development policies and frameworks, particularly in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and means of implementation thereof." In addition, the Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth was launched in 2016 with the endorsement of the executive heads of the United Nations and led by the ILO. Decent Jobs for Youth is a unique platform for partners to address fragmentation and catalyze effective, innovative and evidence-based action at country and regional levels. Similarly, the Education for Sustainable Development Leadership Training co-organized by UNESCO and Organisation de Développement Durable (ODDD) also recognizes the importance of youth as key actors therefore empowering them to inspire and mobilize others to take action towards building more sustainable, just and resilient communities; and to build a youth-led ESD network for exchange and collaboration to the success of Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

UNDP along with its partners in the UN system, governments, civil society and youth organizations have been providing support to national policy development and implementation, by promoting active participation of youth, including the most marginalized and vulnerable in all spheres of society. However, policies for youth inclusion and for the achievement of the SDGs, require evidence on "what works" through rigorous impact assessment as well as reliable and accessible data.

The ILO has responded to this challenge by making greater investments in understanding "what works" in youth employment and supporting governments and social partners to translate evidence into integrated policy responses. Taqueem (meaning "evaluation" in Arabic) is a partnership with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to strengthen gender monitoring and evaluation in rural employment in the Arab States.

The data revolution is an essential cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and data is considered to be one of the fundamental pillars of the accountability framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Improved access to data could tremendously contribute to the Arab region's social, economic, and environmental development and to advancing people's lives at all levels. However,

despite the fact that the number of internet users in the Arab region reached 197 million in 2017, making up almost half the population of the Arab region, online access to quality data in the Arab region remains difficult.

While policies and data are on one side of the equation, capacity building and innovation are on the other. In response to the growing need to create alternative paths to action and social change, UNDP supports a variety of initiatives across the region to engage and empower youth as they contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

Some regional flagship initiatives are the Youth Leadership Programme (YLP), Visualize 2030 SDGs Data Camp (Viz 2030), Rural Youth Economic Empowerment Programme (RYEEP) and the ILO Taqueem Community of Practice. In addition, UNDP collaborates with national partners in hosting social innovation camps, challenges and competitions at the regional and global levels, to draw them into the sustainable development dialogue and to strengthen their capacities to create their own solutions for their own communities.

The Taqueem Community of Practice is a collaborative approach to building capacity on monitoring, evaluation and impact evaluation and to foster learning and cooperation among youth and youth-serving organizations in the Arab States. Twenty-one organizations are currently part of the CoP. The Initiative provides targeted and in-depth support to CoP organizations focused on the development of individualized M&E strategies and the effective application of technology-enhanced, low-cost, high-impact monitoring and evaluation tools. Members of the CoP benefit from regular interactions with researchers and evaluation experts, and meet regularly at workshops and youth employment-related events to share experiences. A web-based knowledge sharing platform and dissemination campaigns support the exchange of lessons learned from the M&E systems.

YLP's mission is to invest in young women and men across the region to unleash their potential to become social innovators, leaders and a powerful force for change in their communities, countries and the region at large. The programme aims to support diverse youth as they tackle a range of issues facing urban and rural communities, thereby promoting many of the SDGs including Goals 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, and 17. Building on the lessons learned and momentum generated during YLP1 and YLP2, YLP3 was launched in 2017 with the theme: "accelerating innovative solutions for sustainable development." This year's objectives are to identify youth who are committed to contributing to the national and regional development agendas and to support them as they develop, implement and scale their own innovative solutions to sustainable development, be they social enterprises, non-profits, NGOs, advocacy campaigns or other initiatives. By enabling and empowering youth to contribute to achievement of national, regional and global sustainable development agendas, YLP3 looks to contribute to the overall knowledge-based economic transformation taking place across the region.

Additionally, UNDP RBAS' "Visualize 2030: SDGs Youth Data Camp" (launched this year) aims to encourage and train youth in the Arab region to produce data-driven audio-visual content on issues related to SDGs in their countries or the region. Data and knowledge resources on development issues in the Arab region are often outdated, unreliable, and fragmented across multiple international, regional and local sources. When available, access to credible and official data is burdensome. By having access to and effectively

using knowledge resources, youth can become more actively and meaningfully engaged in rethinking development policies, taking fact-based positions, or leading on entrepreneurial initiatives, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of their countries and regions. The aim of this Camp is to empower youth who make up the majority of internet users to contribute in monitoring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their respective countries. The Camp highlights the importance of consuming official statistics as part of a visual data-driven advocacy campaign around one of the seventeen goals.

The ECOSOC Forum Regional Breakout Session provides an opportunity for youth living in the Arab Region to share their experiences and initiatives as well as make concrete recommendations to the Forum on the implementation of the SDGs.

## 2) Objectives

It is important to explore the potential and assess the bottlenecks facing Arab countries in their attempt to empower youth and address youth related development issues from the policy-making and planning levels to systematic and structural barriers, implementation via national and local mechanisms, financing and monitoring, evaluation and results measurement, statistical tools and capacities. In this regard, the Regional Breakout Session for Arab States will explore importance of policies and other youth related concerns in creating an enabling environment or mechanisms for youth participation on SDGs.

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

- Youth's role in achieving SDGs and to showcase the solutions or products that they may have developed including through the YLP programme, Visualize 2030, the Taqeeem Initiative and Innovation for Development and through their own means.
- Policies and strategies enabling/or not, youth's participation and inclusion in achieving the SDGs.
- Challenges and priorities facing the region, youth empowerment and inclusion, SDG achievements, and social change initiatives.

## 3) Format

**Organization:** the session will be coordinated by UNDP Arab States, IYCS and ILO-IFAD Taqeeem partnership.

**Expected result:** Develop concrete recommendations on how to advance the youth development agenda at national, regional and global levels with a view to promoting solutions to the global challenge of strengthening resilience and sustainable development

**Draft Agenda:**

**5 min:** Welcoming remarks and presentation of the session Objectives and Approach (UNDP Arab States and ILO-IFAD partnership)

**20 min:** Selected youth will be giving 3 min each to talk on selected topics to be agreed on prior to the session (topic proposals below)

- Youth's role in achieving SDGs and showcase the solutions or products that they have developed through the different regional and individual youth initiatives.
- Policies and strategies enabling/or not, youth's participation and inclusion in the SDGs achievements.
- Challenges and solutions facing the region, youth empowerment and inclusion, SDG achievements, and social change initiatives.

**60 min:** Small groups' discussion led by youth on the selected topics.

**20 min:** Each group reports back to the larger group.

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

#### 4) **Issues at stake**

- Promoting youth in the Arab region empowerment and supporting youth to become engaged citizens and change-agents;
- The role of youth in addressing sustainable development challenges, especially in relation to:
  - Encouraging youth to tap into their creativity and use innovative approaches to addressing development challenges Goal 5)
  - Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6)
  - Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all (Goal 7)
  - Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11)
  - Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12)
  - Protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and biodiversity loss (Goal 15)
  - Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development (Goal 17)

#### 5) **Additional questions for the participants**

- What are the most significant struggles being faced by youth in the region today? How might young women and men be empowered and SDGs provide solutions for these problems?
- What are the primary challenges encountered by youth who hope to become successful change agents? What kinds of initiatives, policies, and/or programmes

might best support youth who want to become resilient and active society members, innovators, and solution-finders?

- What role can youth in the region play in proactively expanding their opportunities, both economically and socially?
- Youth policies have been recognized globally as important, however, which mechanisms or paths are better for ensuring youth inclusion as partners in achieving the SDGs and for ensuring an enabling environment that ensures sustainability?
- How can the youth in the Arab region build resilience in their local communities, including in rural areas? Who should they partner with?
- What role can youth play in promoting the SDGs, and particularly Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 15, and 17? How can individuals and organizations best support these youth in pursuing their aims?
- How can organizations empower youth with diverse backgrounds, especially in terms of gender, ethnicity, education, employment status, disability, and class? How can they contribute to enhancing pluralism in the Arab region such that it becomes a friendly environment for youth from diverse backgrounds?

## 6) Suggested reading materials

- [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)
- [UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017](#)
- [Arab Human Development Report 2016](#)
- [Security Council Resolution 2250](#)
- [Youth, Peace and Security Consultation and Dialogue, Arab States Report](#)
- [Launch of the UNDP Youth Leadership Programme](#)
- [Visualize 2030 Concept Note](#)
- [The IFAD-ILO Taqem Initiative](#)
- [Global Employment Trends for Youth 2017: Paths to a Better Working Future](#)
- [Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth](#)