

Solutions that Work!



The Middle East and North Africa Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth September 25-26, 2018, Beirut, Lebanon



CONTEXT

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is home to one of the most youthful populations in the world. Around 35% of the population is between 10 and 24 years old, and 60% is below the age of 30.¹ Young people are inherently motivated to apply their ideas, talent and energy to help shape societies where they, and future generations, can live and work as productive and responsible citizens. Their involvement is critical to promoting tolerance, building peace and ensuring inter-generational transfer of protective family, cultural practices.

However, MENA has yet to translate this potential of young people into an asset for the region.² 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 globally³; a region which is the most dangerous place to live in the world⁴; and few opportunities to positively engage within their communities/societies - MENA having one of the lowest rates of civic engagement globally⁵. 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.⁶

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017) World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. New York: United Nations.

² Translating Research Into Scaled Up Action: Evidence Symposium on Adolescent and Youth in MENA, November 21-22 2017. Amman, Jordan. <https://esay2017site.wordpress.com/>

³ Youth unemployment in MENA is the highest in the world, at 24.9 per cent in the Middle East and 29.5 per cent in North Africa. Source: ILOSTAT, 2017. Unemployment rate – ILO modelled estimates, May 2017. <http://www.ilo.org/ilostat>

⁴ Whilst 7 percent of the world's adolescents live in the Middle East and North Africa, more than 70 percent of adolescents who died in 2015 due to collective violence – or an estimated 83,000 adolescents aged 10 to 19 - were living in the region.

Source: "Familiar Face: Violence in the lives of children and adolescents, November 1, 2017. See link <https://data.unicef.org/resources/a-familiar-face/>

⁵ Civic engagement among young people in the region is the lowest in the world, with a median of only 9 percent of youth across Arab countries volunteering with a civic organization in a given month, compared with 14 percent in the next lowest region, sub-Saharan Africa. Source: Silatech, Gallup, 2013; Adolescent and Youth Civic Engagement in MENA. (November 2017). Authors: UNICEF (Veera Mendonca and Marcela Rueda Gomez), AUB (Aline Germani and Rima Afifi), GAGE (Nicola Jones, Bassam Abu Hamad, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Ingrid Gercama). <https://esay2017site.wordpress.com/comprehensive-report/>

⁶ <http://arabyouthsurvey.com/findings.html>; Participatory Action Research with Young People in the MENA Region, Regional Report, 2017. UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, Adolescent and Youth Researchers, Aoun, JOHUD, NRC, Masar Association.; No Lost Generation Evidence Brief: Hear the Voices of Syria's Adolescents and Youth. 2017.

RATIONALE: WHY DO WE NEED AN EVIDENCE SYMPOSIUM?

Consultations with young people in MENA highlight the desire for real change to happen. They are asking for local and regional plans that focus on implementing effective solutions to the regional crisis. They want decision makers to find solutions that create work opportunities for young people, take bold steps to address their socio-economic constraints, find ways to enhance quality and relevance of education, tackle violence against adolescents and young women, enable adolescent and youth participation and engagement in decision-making about their future and most of all they want peace and development in the region.⁷ At the same time, 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 some areas, more work is needed to deepen and strengthen the regional evidence base of proven, scalable strategies to meet the needs of young people today and into their futures.⁸

In 2017, under the auspices of the No Lost Generation partnership⁹, 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.¹⁰ 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. Priority areas themes identified by young people on which discussions focused were: access to employment; social and civil engagement; and violence.

This second annual Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth comes at an important moment, since a new global level partnership focused on Young People will be unveiled the preceding day¹¹ – and in the region the ongoing political, economic and social dynamic continues to throw questions about the future into sharp relief: What are the prospects for adolescents and youth in their societies – especially those most vulnerable? How can we unblock the bottlenecks they face and ensure they access the opportunities they need to reach their full potential, contribute to society and the economy as they would like to, and build a more stable and prosperous future in their countries?

Focusing on solutions, this year's Symposium will build on the evidence base established in the 2017 symposium and engage adolescents and youth to identify scaled and sustainable ways to address issues of school to work transition, engagement, gender and violence in MENA.

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

The Evidence Symposium on Adolescents and Youth (ESAY), is a collaborative effort between adolescents and youth, policy makers, civil society, researchers, donors and the MENA UN:NGO group, to provide a platform to young people in the Middle East and North Africa to highlight and discuss the key issues affecting their communities. To ensure systematic engagement of adolescents and youth throughout the Evidence Symposium, the ESAY 2018 has set three targets:

⁷ <http://arabyouthsurvey.com/findings.html>; Participatory Action Research with Young People in the MENA Region, Regional Report, 2017. UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, Adolescent and Youth Researchers, Aoun, JOHUD, NRC, Masar Association.; No Lost Generation Evidence Brief: Hear the Voices of Syria's Adolescents and Youth. 2017.

⁸ Good Practice Documentation in MENA, UNICEF and AUB on behalf of the UN InterAgency Technical Task Team on Young People 2016. <https://goodpracticessite.wordpress.com/>

⁹ The scope of this event includes and extends beyond the countries covered by the No Lost Generation initiative.

¹⁰ <https://esay2017site.wordpress.com/>

¹¹ UN Youth Strategy developed by the UN agencies under the leadership of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and the UN UANYD co-chairs (DESA and UN-Habitat) will be launched at the UN GA on September, 24th 2018. The Young People's Agenda (YPA) is a tool led by UNICEF and a diverse set of partners to mobilise resources and solutions to implement the UN Youth strategy, progressively ensuring that every young person attends school or is learning, training or employed by 2030. The aim is to coalesce diverse stakeholders into a partnership focused on uncovering and scaling solutions, unlocking investments, and unleashing the power of young people so they can shape a brighter future for themselves - and us all.

- One third of the ESAY 2018 participants will be adolescents and youth of which at least fifty per cent will be females and seventy per cent will be young people representing vulnerable groups¹².
- Young people will be systematically engaged in conceptualizing, implementing, monitoring and following up on recommendations of ESAY 2018.
- Voices of young people representing MENA adolescents and youth will be listened to and acted upon at the ESAY 2018.

The Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis (RAYAM)¹³, will be constituting a sub group of RAYAM, the VOICES Group, who will, in collaboration with the ESAY 2018 Steering committee ensure systematic engagement throughout the design, development, selection of solutions and implementation of the 2018 Symposium. The VOICES group will be expanded to include non-RAYAM members such as: the adolescent and youth participatory action researchers and solution makers identified through the calls for research, posters, videos, videographers/journalists etc.

SYMPOSIUM GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Goal:

To share the latest evidence-based solutions, to inform policy and promote the scale up of good practices addressing key issues related to youth and adolescents in MENA.

Specific Objectives:

- Provide an update on the state of the evidence for adolescents and youth in MENA and identify regional evidence gaps, propose priorities for evidence generation in 2019 and leverage resources to support continuation of this work.
- Share sustainable and effective solutions¹⁴ addressing key issues of Violence, School to Work transition, Engagement Gender and Violence – giving space to discuss concrete examples effective programmes addressing: jobs, skills deficit, the disillusionment, gender and violence among young people.
- Ensure systematic participation of vulnerable adolescents and youth throughout the process.
- Facilitate frank exchange between donors, young people, policymakers and practitioners.

PARTICIPANTS

The 150 participants at the Evidence Symposium will include adolescents, youth, policy makers, implementers, civil society, researchers, and donors.

CONFERENCE STEERING TEAM

Regional Adolescent and Youth Advisory Majlis / the VOICES Group, and representatives from the following organizations: UNICEF, Save the Children, American University of Beirut, GAGE-ODI, Plan International, No Lost Generation Partners, World Vision, Finn Church Aid, UNHCR, World Bank, ILO, UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, Mercy Corps, Malala Fund, OECD and the Danish-Arab Partnership Programme.

¹² Adolescents and youth (10-24 years) representing working children, refugees, displaced, married, living with disability, out of school, facing multiple deprivations

¹³ The RAYAM is envisioned to serve as a sustainable and inclusive regional platform for young people (10-24 years) from throughout the MENA region who are affiliated with youth networks, National Advisory groups, UN, NGO and partner programs, and young people who already demonstrate strong commitment and leadership in their communities and among peers. A subset of UN:NGO group members, namely representatives from SAVE, Mercy Corps, NRC, Action Aid, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNDP, WB and UNICEF, have come together to guide this process in collaboration with the RAYAM adolescents and youth. Key objectives of the RAYAM are: To inform and influence the regional humanitarian and development agenda; To inform and influence ongoing initiatives and programs; To engage with and learn from their peers in the MENA region; To communicate regional issues to local constituencies; To provide added value and a sense of agency to young people

¹⁴ A process will be put in place by the ESAY 2018 Steering committee and the research stream leads to ensure that the evidence presented is robust, and meets good quality standards. Examples of criteria that will be used to assess effective solutions will be based on the MENA good practice documentation and will include criteria such as - Appropriate methodology; Potential for impact; Evidence of scalability/replicability; Peer review and Ethics