



Synthesis of the Regional Review of Youth Policies in 5 Arab countries



Explanatory note

Under the overall guidance of the Regional Directors' Team of UN Development Group (UNDG), the regional Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People (IATTTYP), co-chaired by UNFPA and UNICEF, develops and implements strategic joint interventions. The Task team includes as members: UN-ESCWA, ILO, OCHA, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNESCO, UNFPA, UN-HABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNRWA, UN Volunteers, UN-Women and WHO.

For 2016-2017, the Regional Framework of Joint Strategic Actions for Young People in the Arab States / MENA Region has been developed by IATTTYP at the crucial time, when global development partners are collectively renewing their commitments to development, peace, respect for the human rights principles and the rule of law through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the Sustainable Development Goals at its core. The four thematic areas identified for development of in-depth priority actions are: Employment and entrepreneurship (Chair: ILO); Civic engagement, participation and inclusion (Chair: UNDP); Health and well-being (Chair: WHO) and Education (Chair: UNESCO).

The present Regional review of youth policies and strategies was proposed as one of the priority actions and undertaken jointly by UNESCO and UNDP with an aim to understand achievements, challenges and lessons from existing youth policies from 5 Arab countries and to propose a set of regional standards for youth policies in the Arab region.

The synthesis report has benefitted from the work and inputs of many individuals. The report was drafted by Ahmed Zaouche, Project Officer for the Network of Mediterranean Youth - EU Project at UNESCO, building on the country cases collected by an enthusiastic group of 3 intern-researchers: Samia Fitouri, Tony Antoury and Mohammed Mamdouh Abou Dalhoum under the supervision of Seiko Sugita, Programme Specialist for Social and Human Sciences at UNESCO Beirut office and Linda Haddad, Programme Specialist at UNDP Regional Hub for the Arab States.

It has also benefitted from careful review and feedback from colleagues both on country cases and the synthesis report: Naeem Al-Mutawakel (ESCWA), Veera Mendonca and Ider Dungerdorj (UNICEF), Salim Shehadeh (UNRWA/ UNESCO) and Mona El-Zoghbi (UNESCO).

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The Regional review of youth policies and strategies in the Arab region offers an interesting radiography of national policies on youth within 5 countries: Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait. It¹ aimed at providing a comprehensive review of the existing youth policies, their current status of operationalization and involvement of youth and guide the way forward, including enhancing the understanding of the complex and multifaceted challenges facing youth empowerment, based on a set of regional standards for youth policies.

While the uprisings of 2011 showcase the need for a better social, political and economic inclusion of young people, the policies initiated in Machrek countries examined in this report do not necessarily take into consideration the recent developments, except in Morocco where the National Youth Strategy undergo several revisions and adjustments to tackle the evolving political context of the country.

The regional comparative analysis reveals different conceptual approaches to youth roles and participation in society but also unequal experiences of national institutions partnering with and for youth, all of which being the reflection of evolving legal, social and political national contexts. Forms, process, partnerships, effectiveness and impact of youth policies and mechanisms of youth participation vary from one country to another.

Methodology

A template for initial data collection was designed and included the elements such as general information on the existing policy, description of the policy document, socio-political context analysis, content and process analysis, good and failed practices, references, etc. A team of 3 young research interns jointly filled information collected by desk research and interview with national offices, under the supervision of UNESCO and UNDP (June- August 2016). 7 countries were initially included in the review (Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine and Kuwait).

The present synthesis builds on the findings of the above cited review, which however lacks of standardized findings in 7 countries. In order to assure a decent level of comparability, the synthesis thus limits the research scope to past and ongoing youth national policies/strategies. For example, in the case of Tunisia and Libya, there were not any functioning youth policy framework, nor a government-affiliated youth initiative to be considered. Therefore, the scope of the synthesis was narrowed to 5 countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Kuwait and Morocco).

Youth definition and their involvement in policy development processes

The youth policy processes initiated in the 5 countries illustrate the need for a flexible definition of youth², allowing for contextualized and consistent situational analysis as well as for tailored interventions taking into consideration the needs of heterogeneous groups and minorities. Nevertheless, youth actors' roles are not comprehensively identified. Indeed, youth organizations, youth structures and groups, as well as national youth institutions are not systematically mentioned and analyzed. The roles and models of youth organizations which are taking progressive leading role on youth issues in these countries is missing, hindering an adequate capture of new actors' roles and multi-stakeholders process dynamics in policy design and implementation. Better inclusion of traditional and non-traditional youth actors in those actors would allow to better evaluate the fast evolving needs of young women and men targeted by the policy as well as the inclusion of the needs of the most vulnerable groups (including young refugees and migrants).

Indeed, youth had a minimal role in the policy formulation phases. Several consultations seem to have taken place, at the initiative of national authorities dealing with youth issues, in order to introduce or advocate for a youth policy project, collect data and identify thematic priorities with selected youth groups. However, no concrete and

¹ The study was conducted in August 2016 by a group of 3 young researchers under the supervision of UNESCO and UNDP as part of the joint action plan of the Regional UN Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People. It primarily relied on the resource available on website and complemented with a limited number of interviews with key stakeholders. It doesn't take into consideration recent developments in Palestine where a national youth policy has been formulated End-December 2016.

² 15-29 for Lebanon, 15-25 for Morocco, 12-30 for Jordan, 13-29 for Palestine and 18-30/43 for Kuwait



meaningful engagement of youth is documented during the other cycles (drafting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) in the concerned countries. Their role in operational cycle was absent in most of the countries or very limited.

Furthermore, and with an exception of Lebanon³, no permanent youth structures/mechanisms had been set up during those consultation processes. Thus, the effectiveness, legitimacy, wide representation, interests and competencies of youth involved could be questioned and may explain the lack of ownership and weak/inefficient implementation of the policies. It is noteworthy that the Moroccan Constitution has foreseen a permanent youth consultative council but not concrete materialization has been witnessed so far⁴. In Jordan, a “National Youth Advisory Group” as well as a “National Youth Forum” were foreseen in former national youth policy document (2005-2009). The first “Youth Organizations Coalition for Youth Programming Review in Jordan” has been launched in January 2016⁵ only. It consists of 115 NGOs from 12 governorates. Nevertheless, this Coalition is not involved yet in the revamping of the Youth Policy.

Alignment with international standards and frameworks

The national youth policy provisions and strategy documents of the 5 countries make explicit references to key principles outlined hereafter, most of them refer to international instruments and reaffirm the Baku Declaration (2014): rights-based⁶, inclusive, participatory, comprehensive, gender-sensitive, global/intersectoral, evidence-informed, knowledge-based, holistic, etc. While those commonly agreeable principles encourage a positive vision as well as promising intention for youth empowerment, they do not necessarily lay the ground to tangible indicators, mechanisms or governance tools for the concretization of the policy. Furthermore, the principles and objectives highlighted in the strategies deemed confined to jargon, formal, generic and out-of-touch language, which may not be easy to understand by the majority of youth who are targeted by national policies.

Youth policies implementation challenges: how to move from theory to effective public governance?

Should the youth policy process be primarily addressed as a model/learning exercise aimed at challenging a prevailing top-down approach when it comes to youth involvement into decision-making? Should the youth policy aim only at generating new and evidence-based gender-sensitive data? Should it only build a consensus without effective translation on the ground?

³ Creation of a youth forum, consisting of a consortium of youth civil society organizations.

⁴ End 2016, national coalitions of youth organizations have emerged in Jordan and Tunisia, with support from UNESCO

⁵ The Jordanian youth coalition was initiated by the Princess Basma Youth Resource Center/Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (Johud) with the support of UNESCO’s NET-MED Youth Project. A similar initiative was implemented in Tunisia where a civil-society led national youth coalition called “Youth Forum” was initiated in March 2016. In April 2017, the Tunisian Ministry of Youth and Sports announced the creation of a Higher Youth Council which will serve as credible vis-à-vis for the design of new legal and policy frameworks related to youth.

⁶ Rights issues are not explicitly addressed in any of the youth projects and documents initiated in the country.

Review showcases that youth policies are still confined into theoretical policy documents, not necessarily translated into effective and budgeted actions plans. This observation poses the limits of public policies process in the concerned countries and raised the issues of the governance capacities to implement public policies. While in Morocco, there is a governmental endeavor to support decentralization, including the local and territorial declination of public policies via local actions plans at the level of provinces/governorates/municipalities, such concern is not addressed in the field of youth policies.

Therefore, despite all methodological guidance as well as theoretical frameworks and processes invested in the youth policies design, the implementation and evaluation will prevail problematic, suffering from instable institutional structures, insufficient democratic reforms and multi-stakeholders managerial and technical capacities.

To overcome the barriers faced by institutions and CSOs in implementing youth policies, it could be interesting to take into consideration other forms of social and cultural obstacles and barriers. In a recent study entitled “Regional Analysis on Youth in Arab Countries” conducted by AUB, the authors recommended that the challenges to youth participation in decision making should be also posed “at the level of youth themselves, their families, schools, communities; in addition to national policies and legal frameworks. Since the variables described above interact across the different levels, interventions for change are more effective if implemented at these multiple levels. Adopting the ecological framework can allow policy makers to establish linkages across different spheres of influence that could reflect policies across different sectors”.



Country focus on main challenges

Jordan: not clear ownership, roles and responsibilities of the Higher Council for Youth Vs Ministry of Youth and Sports Vs Prime Minister's Office in the context of continuous ministerial disruptions and reshuffles; lack of wider and legitimate youth representation structures as well as prevailing top-down approach within national institutions; weak sustainability of initiatives and inconsistent youth engagement in the long-term not in favor of an efficient follow-up for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy.

Morocco: Defiance and lack of confidence and consensus between youth organizations and public authorities; lack of concrete and sustainable participation mechanisms; lack of earmarked financial resources; rushed and formal consultations methods for the design of the strategy, lack of territorialization/decentralization including the weak translation of the national policies to local and municipal levels, absence of local ownership.

Lebanon: Lack of an Action Plan to concretize the implementation of the Strategy; legal frameworks hindering youth participation to public life (including Art. 5 Law 1909 – Law 629/2004); insufficient laws and legislative structures to concretize the implementation of the strategy.

Palestine: Institutional reorganization of youth departments (High Youth Council, Ministry of Youth, etc.); lack of evaluation and weak documentation of the outputs of the former strategy covering 2011-2013; resources focused on sport-related actions and not on other areas of the strategy; no concrete multi-stakeholders approach put in place; physical fragmentation of youth groups and territories in the context of the occupation which makes the elaboration of interventions and consensus on priorities more difficult; inefficient renewal and attractiveness of national youth clubs and centers often politicized and tribalized. A new Strategy covering 2017-2021⁷ is under development.

Kuwait: No concrete national youth policy⁸ endorsed and translated into multi-sectoral interventions. Lack of statistical and evidence-based data within the National Youth Project. The national youth empowerment documents and ministerial plans not aligned with explicit human rights based approach. Inadequate youth representation within the national Youth Commission. Organization issues amongst the youth-oriented governmental institutions.

Transparency and accountability

The allocation of resources (financial and human) is a pending challenge in all countries covered by the study. The timeframe of the existing policies varies from 4 years (Jordan and Palestine) to 15 years (Morocco). In the absence of accurate Action Plans, time-bound and measurable objectives, the financing and accountability mechanisms are weak. No mid-term review has been conducted as initially planned

in most of the policies. The weak culture of evaluation as well as the absence of clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms reflects the challenges of good governance and accountability in the region⁹.

In most of the policies considered, no clear/accurate/realistic/updated timeframe is included to monitor the expected results and objectives. Baseline statistics and benchmark indicators are also missing, which is often linked to the unavailability of data

⁷ The design of the new strategy has started in November 2016 with support from UNESCO Ramallah Office. It benefitted from 102 consultation workshops with youth organizations and groups, ensuring equal representation of young women and men as well as youth with disabilities.

⁸ A new Youth Strategy would have been announced end August 12th, 2016. Information to be confirmed with UNDP/Kuwait.

⁹ Arab Human Development Report, 2002.

and to the lack of funding to produce quantitative and qualitative data. The results frameworks are not enough elaborated (details on outcomes, outputs, responsible actor missing).

The lack of transparent mechanisms and indicators makes civil society organizations perceive those institutional strategies as reference frameworks rather than operational and fully-fledged youth policies. Some of them see a State's self-legitimation efforts in the field of youth or branding initiatives, without credible and sustainable follow-up mechanisms

Also, the policies examined show the need to better conceptualize the multi-stakeholders processed required for the implementation and follow-up of the policies, instead of describing the classical duties of national ministries and civil society organizations. The issue of transparency is also linked to the absence of communication and advocacy campaigns and to absence of financial resources which could have allowed to vulgarize the objectives and added-value of the policies, and to foster ownership and contribution of civil society organizations.

Gender mainstreaming

In the absence of specific gender actions clearly identified within an Action Plan, the youth policies examined could not be considered as gender-transformative nor gender-responsive. Some of them could be considered as gender-sensitive when it comes to the identification of sectoral needs and aspirations of young women and men. In addition, since most of the reviewed policies have not been implemented yet, it is not possible to evaluate the gender mainstreaming based on concrete indicators.

Good practices and innovation

- The organization of simulation exercises consisting of youth-led strategic planning of local strategies and actions plans in pilot municipalities proven to be a fruitful pedagogical approach to develop the knowledge and the skills related to youth policies amongst youth

organizations. Several pilot initiatives are taking place in Morocco, Tunisia and Palestine¹⁰ since 2014 which facilitated translating existing national youth policies to the local level, and to raise awareness on the relevance and interests for youth strategic policy frameworks. Given the significant obstacles facing the implementation of youth public policies in the region, the local level scale could overcome barriers and allows grass-roots successful experiments (easier funding, local clearer governance mechanisms, access to local data, etc.)

- Tailored capacity-building workshops as well as online training toolkits focusing on youth policies enhanced the credibility as well as the competences of existing youth organizations and coalitions (i.e.: Youth Forum in Lebanon, National Youth Coalition in Jordan, National Youth Forum in Tunisia) to engage with policy makers and government's stakeholders involved in the design or revision of youth policies.
- The establishment of large and national youth coalitions in Lebanon, Jordan and Tunisia, voicing up the concerns of young women and men when it comes to policies, allows for the inclusion of the views and needs of vulnerable and under-privileged youth. The transfer of knowledge within the above-mentioned youth coalitions need to be pursued.
- In Palestine, the work on the new national youth strategy allowed to bridge the gaps between youth organizations based in Gaza and West Bank. 14 consultation workshops, brought together 100 young women and men from all over the country, which constitutes an unprecedented experience.
- The investment in existing youth online platforms such as Leaders of Tomorrow (Jordan) and Jamaity (Tunisia) strengthens youth-led initiatives, and improves the management of knowledge and information sharing by youth. Online engagement and involvement of youth people should be a priority when it comes to ensure youth participation in policy dialogue or youth contribution to programme review and orientation.

¹⁰ Those experiences were held within the UNESCO's Regional NET-MED Youth Project.