



## Evaluation Brief

# ESCWA's Project to Strengthening Capacities of Policy Makers in the ESCWA Region to Formulate National Youth Policies and Plans of Action



ESCWA

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

## Background

The Arab world is experiencing an unprecedented “youth bulge”, with over 30 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 29, equivalent to over 100 million youth. The combination of a large portion of youth and a rapidly increasing population of workers exacerbates unemployment, extends dependencies on parents and fuels youth frustration. Sound economic and social policies, however, can transform a youth bulge from a staggering public crisis into an opportunity to promote youth development.

In order to address this challenge, ESCWA designed a project aimed at addressing the need to formulate, revise and upgrade existing national youth policies and action plans in the region. The initiative focused on building the capacity of decision-makers to identify youth issues and to develop responsive youth strategies using the World Programme of Action for Youth as a guiding framework. The project was carried out over two-and-a-half-years between March 2011 and December 2013 and engaged 15 ESCWA member countries.

The World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY) is an international strategy designed to address more effectively the problems of young people and to increase opportunities for their participation in society. Adopted in 1995, WPAY focuses in particular on measures to strengthen national capacities in the field of youth and to increase the quality and quantity of possi-

bilities available to young people for full, effective and constructive input in society.

Upon the project's completion, an independent external evaluator conducted a comprehensive evaluation during the first quarter of 2014. The evaluator used three major tools: an evaluation matrix, in-depth interviews, and surveys completed by involved stakeholders. The evaluation aimed to assess the project's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability and considered to what extent the project was successful in fulfilling its primary goals.

## Key Findings

The evaluation found that the project was successful in achieving its stated objectives. Team members were able to collaborate well with those involved and were focused on the project's goals.

**1. Relevance:** Participants said the project addressed member countries' needs and expectations regarding the development of youth policies. They ranked the project positively in supporting the promotion of national youth policies.

**2. Effectiveness:** The project was able to achieve its stated objectives. The team engaged fifteen member countries, held six workshops (four regional and two national) and produced six tools all focused on building



the capacity of governments and officials to develop effective youth policies. Participants said the project's main added value was the opportunity for governments to focus on policy formulation and to connect and learn from one another.

**3. Efficiency:** Despite some initial setbacks, the project's implementation was punctual, reflecting a good level of cost effectiveness by producing optimum results from available resources. This was due to a strong ability to compensate for project delays, accommodate for changes in target countries and to adapt to regional and country developments.

**4. Impact:** As a result of the project activities, Iraq, Syria and the UAE have begun the process of formulating youth policies. Yemen and Jordan have implemented their own national plans of action for youth and nine remaining ESCWA countries have enhanced their knowledge on youth policy formulation.

**5. Sustainability:** The increased and continued utilization of project tools through the addition of country-level activities contributed to the sustainability of the project's achievements.

## Key Challenges

1. The project experienced considerable difficulties in its early stages, including a lack of consultation with beneficiaries prior to the project's design, minor flaws within the project document, a lack of cohesiveness with the WPAY recommendations, and an unrealistic timeframe.

2. Many of the project tools were gender neutral rather than being mainstreamed for gender, despite a broad UN-led initiative targeting this issue within the organization.

3. A few respondents reported that some workshops and tools were not very user-friendly to them and hindered their learning experience for the training period of the project.

4. One interlocutor said that the slow development of a reference manual and workshops in Iraq delayed other national follow-up activities.

## Recommendations

1. In future projects, the development of more practical or functional tools with step-by-step instructions for application should be considered. The tools should be tailored to individual countries' needs, allowing projects to be even more responsive to particular member countries.

2. There is no United Nations organization specifically dedicated to youth. ESCWA, however, with its convening power among member countries and central role within the UN system, should establish frameworks with UN agencies concerned with youth issues in the region, such as UNICEF, UNDP, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, UNRWA, etc.

3. Youth Advisory Committees should be established to fulfill the need for structures to empower youth voices in order to express their views and participate in the policy making process.

4. ESCWA should help strengthen civil society in regard to youth issues by creating space for civil society actors to network across the region, enabling policy dialogue between civil society organizations, and offering capacity building services.

5. ESCWA should play a role in coordinating the development of a regional plan of action to promote the interests of Arab youth. The plan could include the best practices and lessons learnt from different countries' experiences as well as the roll-out of the indicators developed in this project.

In response to the above recommendations, the project team prepared an action plan specifying the steps it will take to enhance performance in future projects.