

وحدة الاتصال والإعلام في الإسكوا  
أبرز العناوين  
**News Brief**  
(10 تشرين الأول/أكتوبر 2018)

الإسكوا/ESCWA

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## الإسكوا/ESCWA

AFSD – 2018: Highlighting the Role of Youth in the Arab World in Fostering Transformation towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies ([SDG KNOWLEDGE HUB](#)), by Anne Dalitz)

9 October 2018

The UN's 2030 Strategy and Global Partnership Initiative for Youth was launched the day before the opening of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly to create a surge of interest in the ways youth can be agents of transformative change in their societies. In this year's Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD), this focus was front and center, and participants explored the role of youth in a larger framework, linking natural resources, the common good and inter-generational justice. The AFSD is the Arab region's platform to consolidate national multi-stakeholders' ideas and tackle regional issues in a collaborative way. It's key messages, articulated in an outcome document that was presented at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York in July, form the voice of the Arab region at the global level.

From 24-26 April, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) based in Beirut, Lebanon, welcomed over 300 representatives from government, civil society, the private sector, international and regional organizations, and youth to discuss pressing issues such as water scarcity, desertification and land degradation within the 2030 Agenda framework, as well as the role of each stakeholder in forging solutions to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Almost all of the 17 SDGs contain a direct reference to natural resources. This is particularly relevant to Arab countries as they face pressing challenges linked to transboundary issues, including water, energy, and migration that are exacerbated by high population growth rates and conflicts. With the number of displaced persons and refugees growing, so is the increasing pressure to manage and preserve natural resources in a more efficient way so that equal access—and basic human rights—are guaranteed for present and future generations.

Added to this increasing pressure are the risks to inter-generational justice. Mitigating these risks requires policy choices that allow future generations to benefit from natural resources and the common good in the same way past

generations have. Together with a change in the cultural mindset allowing for meaningful youth involvement, starting at a young age and covering all aspects of the political sphere, these will form the basis for sustainable and resilient societies that are adequately equipped to withstand an impending natural resources crisis.

Thirty percent of the population of the Arab region are youth between the ages of 15 and 29 years, according to the Arab Human Development Report ('Youth and the prospects for human development in a changing reality', UNDP, 2016). This demographic reality translates into approximately 105 million people who, together with next generations, will be affected by decisions taken today. Despite the obvious potential of youth as agents for transformation towards more sustainable societies—as well as their role in holding national governments accountable—they continue to be largely excluded from the political decision-making process. For instance, the average age of ministers in the region is 55 years, proving that young people's voices are not heard loudly in the political arena. In addition, most Arab countries lack a strategic vision for youth development.

In response, the AFSD reiterated the importance of engaging youth to achieve the 2030 Agenda and provided young people with a platform to further define their role in the transformative change process underlying the SDGs. For the first time, the AFSD agenda included a youth representative in almost all of the Forum's seven plenary and nine special sessions. One of the latter was co-designed and co-led by youth and included a snapshot of the situation of young people in the region, using innovative, fact-based infographics.

It is important to note that the situation of youth often exhibits significant disparities between those living in urban and those living in rural areas. To address this problem effectively, platforms fostering youth involvement must grow from the grassroots level.

Preparing young Arabs to become agents of change is a process that needs to be nurtured early on in life and therefore demands first and foremost the adaptation of education systems to those promoting technology and science, and harnessing innovation and entrepreneurship. Currently, acquired skills and expertise often do not match the requirements of the labor market, resulting in widespread youth unemployment across the Arab region. Therefore, the AFSD called for policies that support and drive youth's access into new professions originating from the ongoing "Fourth Industrial Revolution".

The AFSD youth session titled, ‘Youth in the Arab Region and the Transformation towards Sustainable Societies’, also called on the media as a key partner to support the youth in their striving towards more self-determination. Freedom of speech and expression is an important step towards the establishment of common positions and objectives to allow youth to speak with one clear voice about their needs in securing a sustainable future for themselves. Media, especially social media, has already become an important tool to support youth matters but further sensitization of the media is required to ensure continuous advocacy and widespread backup for the concerns of young people.

Despite the importance of structures that help policy-makers listen, they are not sufficient to guarantee that youth concerns are being taken seriously and that they are considered an equal partner on political grounds. A special role in this endeavor falls on Arab parliaments, which are encouraged to allocate specific budgets for youth development and capacity building to help youth overcome challenges by applying innovative solutions. At the same time, advocacy and sensitization on the role and responsibilities of youth must be nurtured foremost inside the family. If democratic structures are cultivated within the family, young people are more likely to continue promoting them in their societies.

At the closure of the three-day regional AFSD, participants had reaffirmed their commitment to the 2030 Agenda and to take bold steps towards transformative, sustainable and resilient societies. Business-as-usual scenarios are overwhelmingly unsustainable. Re-thinking development planning, including the need to incorporate natural resources and to present ways of meaningful involvement in the decision-making process to all stakeholders, and especially the leaders of tomorrow, is key to achieve transformative, structural change across all pillars of sustainable development. We look forward to engaging in the new youth strategy, and to continuing this conversation at the next AFSD.

Solar manufacturing in the Arab region remains difficult, IRENA says ([PV magazine](#)/Emiliano Bellini)

OCTOBER 8, 2018

In a study on the potential for local manufacturing of renewable energy equipment in the Arab region, IRENA has assessed how three pilot Arab countries – Lebanon, Jordan and the UAE – where development of clean energy is currently strong, may host PV, CSP and wind energy industries. In all of them, however, there are currently few chances of seeing a rising solar and renewable energy manufacturing industry, due to a series of challenges, such as, among others, the lack of a qualified workforce, and favorable regulatory settings.

The Arab region has strong potential for building manufacturing capacities for renewable energy components, according to the report “Evaluating Renewable Energy Manufacturing Potential in the Arab Region: Jordan, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates,” published by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA). It is based on the analysis of three potential markets with strong renewable energy development: Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan.

Overall, the authors found that wind could be the most suitable technology for the creation of an industry in the region, while the nascent solar PV industry may be put at risk by the presence of international players, which undermine the development of this sector in terms of further investment in new facilities and production lines. Furthermore, they believe that technology transfer may be needed, in order to strengthen PV manufacturing capabilities through establishing joint ventures.

Lebanon: A few chances for PV

The smallest of the three countries chosen by IRENA experts, Lebanon, has the least chance of hosting a solid solar panel industry in the near and distant future as, according to IRENA, the country’s current technological environment lacks infrastructure, while its administrative framework lacks a qualified workforce and expertise able to keep track of recent developments of the PV technology. Low customs duties and the limited size of the Lebanese solar energy market are also cited as two factors unfavorable to local module production.

A similar assessment has been made for concentrated solar power (CSP) technology, for which the exclusive manufacturing of components would be difficult, the report notes.

As for wind power, the IRENA analysts believe that the local industry has the capability to manufacture wind towers using local raw materials, while assembling gearboxes from local or imported electronic components. “Nevertheless, regular upgrades would be required in ongoing industrial processes, testing, inspection and continuous research and development,” according to the study.

The findings of the study are so far supported by the fact that no announcement for solar module factories has been made to date in Lebanon. “Production costs in Lebanon would not be competitive with the international market due to the need to import raw materials, high energy costs, and high land costs,” the study highlights.

**UAE: The best positioned country**

The UAE is, among the three pilot countries, in the strongest position. The study stresses that there are currently four operational solar manufacturers in the country: Dubai-based DuSol Industries (50 MW); solar cell maker, Microsol International; Almaden (100 MW), which produces ultra-thin, double glass, and frameless PV modules at the Dubai Silicon Oasis Free Zone; and Noor Solar Technologies (NST), which produces both modules and inverters, also in Dubai.

The country may be particularly suitable for solar glass production, according to the report, as it already possesses a strong glass industry, but also for solar cells and modules. “New lines for solar modules could be manufactured through joint ventures with international companies, leading to an increase in competitiveness and a decrease in system costs,” IRENA experts wrote.

According to them, various inputs offer promising local capacity potential, such as the presence of automated production, as well as that of cable and connection box manufacturers, which may easily adapt their products to PV applications. The main challenges for the UAE solar module industry are also the limited size of the solar energy market and strong international competition, not to mention the technological issue represented by the fact that solar modules produced for the Middle Eastern market need to be designed for harsh climate conditions.

**Jordan: Good fundamentals with limited development**

IRENA analysts have stressed how the local manufacturing of renewable energy components in Jordan is supported by domestic content requirements, which stipulate that 20% of components should be locally manufactured, a percentage that could even be raised to 35%.

Only one manufacturer of PV panels, however, is currently operational in Jordan – Philadelphia Solar – which according to IRENA has a capacity of between 15 MW and 20 MW, although the company says its annual production capacity is 220 MW.

Its presence may, however, “motivate other local industries, such as the glass industry, to enter the solar PV market, for example in module assembly,” the experts wrote. Limited know-how on components, such as wafers, cells, glass and inverters, as well as limited R&D capabilities represent, together with the limited size of the Jordan solar energy market, the most important challenges for the future of a local panel industry.

Joint ventures with international players are also recommended as viable options to set up solar panel manufacturing capacities across the country, a solution that would help the country in increasing competitiveness and decreasing system costs. Strong support may also come from Jordanian cable and connection boxes manufacturers, which are well established in the local and export markets.

### Policy recommendations

The authors of the study have identified a number of actions local governments could implement to help the Arab solar and renewable energy manufacturing industry grow. These include, among others, the establishment of more political support, in order to enhance the market size, defining a national plan for renewable energy equipment manufacturing, assessing the feasibility of upgrade of existing production lines, and creating links between domestic manufacturers and big international players.

In an interview with pv magazine in January, Business Planning and Strategy Manager of Jordan-based consultant, Sina Industrial Projects Co, Ali Suleiman, provided an extensive overview on the emerging Middle Eastern PV panel manufacturing industry.

In the overview, he stressed the difficulty for existing manufacturers to scale up capacities and create big manufacturers able to compete with Chinese solar giants,

while also highlighting the lack of qualified workforce and R&D capabilities as unfavorable factors.