

ESCWA RESPONSE TO THE UN YOUTH STRATEGY



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



E/ESCWA/SDD/2019/TP.2



1. Introduction: regional challenges of youth and escwa priorities

In 2015, there were over 71 million young persons between the ages of 15-24 years in the Arab region and it is estimated that by 2030, the number of young men and young women is expected to reach over 92 million¹. Young people can be a formidable force to drive sustainable development as well as benefit from it, should their full potential be realized and their human rights safeguarded in an environment of sustainable peace, stability, shared economic growth and social justice.

1- The United Nations defines youth as the age group between 15 and 24 years. See E/ESCWA SDD/2017/3, Population and Development Report, Issue No. 8, p. 30.

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However, young men and young women experience extraordinary challenges beyond their immediate control, including the ability to successfully transition from education to employment. The Arab region is characterized by high unemployment rates, underemployment and a large informal sector. Although the context differs from one country to another, one key question is constant: how can young people create an independent livelihood, realize their full potential in life, form families and act as drivers of sustainable development?

Young people spend most of this age of their lives learning, training, seeking work or working. The public sector alone is unable to bear such an immense responsibility which demands enormous amounts of resources. Options to significantly expand youth employment and work opportunities must be explored in the private sector. In addition, cross-cutting issues of deep concern such as gender-based discrimination and violence put many girls and young women in a far more disadvantaged position.

The rights-based agenda of young people is an element that rose to prominence due to the Arab uprisings

in 2010/11. While the challenges of meaningful civic engagement and political participation persist, opportunities for youth participation in public affairs have been generated. Creating new avenues to amplify the voices of youth, as has been urged by the United Nations Secretary-General, is one of the main driving forces behind Youth 2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy². The strategy looks at how to deliver better and more with youth and for youth.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reinforces this vision of empowered young people. The challenge in the Arab region today is to:

- Expand quality education and training for all;
- Generate adequate and decent employment opportunities for youth;
- Ensure human rights, good governance, social justice and gender equality;
- End all forms of violence and armed conflicts and engage youth in prevention and post-conflict efforts;
- Salvage finite and non-renewable natural resources and put a stop to environmental degradation.

2. Escwa contribution to the implementation of the UN youth strategy

The UN Youth Strategy was developed under the leadership of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth in coordination with the co-chairs of the UN Inter-agency Network on Youth Development³ (IANYD). Inputs were received from 27 UN entities (including ESCWA) and youth organizations and networks. The Secretary-General endorsed the Strategy on 22 June 2018 in the UN Executive Committee and it was officially launched on 24 September 2018 at a high-level event in New York. The Strategy will be implemented over a 12-year period until 2030, with an initial action plan covering the first four years after which it will be reviewed, adjusted and renewed on a quadrennial basis. The Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth has been tasked to lead the implementation, follow-up and review process.

The Strategy highlights major development challenges faced by youth – including access to quality education,

health care and decent work – as well as other challenges related to empowerment, participation, climate change and conflict. It also notes that many of these challenges are disproportionately borne by girls and young women.

One of the Strategy's main objectives is to ensure youth participation in the implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. It calls upon the United Nations to increase its work with young people across the three pillars of **sustainable development**, **human rights** and **peace and security**. It also aims to provide avenues for youth participation in the work of the organization.

The Strategy outlines **four core** functional areas:

1. Youth leadership and increasing staff knowledge of and capacity in youth-related issues;

2. See <https://www.un.org/youthenvoy/youth-un/>.

3. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) is the permanent IANYD co-chair and UNESCO is the current rotating co-chair for 2019-20.

2. Advancing the United Nations role as a knowledge and innovation pioneer;
3. Positioning the United Nations as an investment and solution catalyst; and
4. Ensuring the United Nations is a leader in accountability.

Five key areas to empower young people are also identified, based on the following objectives:

1. **Engagement, participation and advocacy:** Amplifying youth voices for the promotion of a peaceful, just and sustainable world;
2. **Informed and healthy foundations:** Supporting young people's access to quality education and health services;
3. **Economic empowerment:** Supporting young people's access to decent work and productive employment;
4. **Youth and human rights:** Promoting the rights of youth and supporting their civic and political engagement;
5. **Peace and resilience-building:** Supporting young people as catalysts for peace and security and humanitarian action.

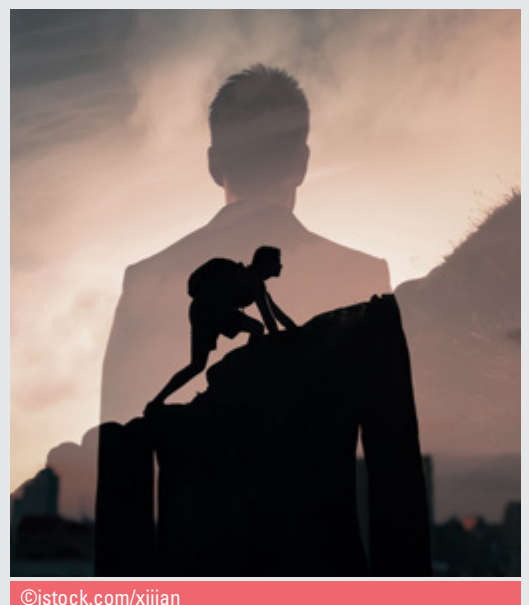
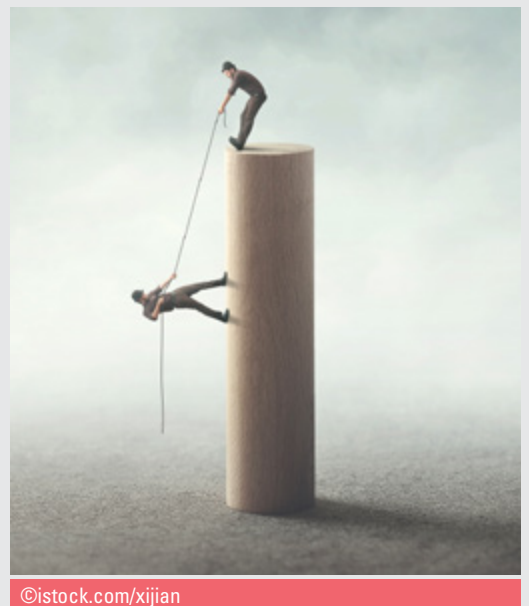
While ESCWA's work is relevant to the implementation of all five of these intersecting priority areas, ESCWA can play a particularly active role in the implementation of three of them.

2.1 Key area 1: engagement, participation and advocacy

ESCWA places and maintains emphasis on the importance of promoting the voice of youth through various approaches applied in different sectors. ESCWA focuses on facilitating youth access in decision-making and strengthening participation channels between young people and States. ESCWA has done so through two consecutive field projects on inclusive youth policies and access of young people in decision-making.

ESCWA also continues to examine the political participation of young women within the peace and security agenda and now has a joint field project with the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation entitled "Support to Women Refugees from Syria and Vulnerable Women and Girls in Host Communities in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon" (2018-2020). In terms of guaranteeing sustainable, wider and inclusive advocacy on salient youth problems, ESCWA continues to capitalize on the global campaign "16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence" and hosts with its partners an annual arts competition that creatively engages youth throughout the Arab region to address and interpret various forms violence against women and girls through their eyes.

At the governance level, ESCWA designed a key component to include and integrate the participation and voices of young people into the dialogue process through its "Libya Socioeconomic Dialogue Project", which aims to create



an inclusive national vision for sustainable development. Similarly, ESCWA also envisages a primary and driving role for youth to participate in enhancing innovative climate change response through fostering youth leadership. Advocacy for climate change is hence foreseen to target young people through training of young researchers (through phase II of the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socioeconomic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR) or the American Statistical Association's (ASA) Advisory Committee on Climate Change Policy (ACCCP)). In the area of water security, a proposal for a Youth Group for AWARENET, the Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network, is presently underway.

ESCWA has been active in harnessing technology for empowering youth. Last year, the Commission implemented two field projects on digital Arabic content to support young people in start-ups during which it dedicated several workshops that brought investors and young innovators together around one table. At the Arab Internet Governance Forum, young women speakers were given the opportunity to present their own projects. The ESCWA report "Community-based Innovation for Improved Social Well-being" highlights the essential role of young people in advancing innovation efforts at local level.

Moreover, ESCWA work on the **digital transformation of government, innovation in the public sector and open government**, advocates for better governance through participation, open data and technology. Work in these areas encourages collaboration between society, which includes youth, and the government for better service delivery, as well as improved economic, social and environmental well-being.

Finally, at the heart of sustainable development ESCWA continues to create and strengthen dialogue between youth and key regional stakeholders in implementing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and advocates for youth political engagement in the annual Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. For example, the last two Arab Forum meetings not only included a youth panelist in every session, but also **Special Sessions on Youth**, which resulted in having young participants formulating specific key messages to empower youth in the Arab region to achieve 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

Direct interaction with young people to raise awareness about the United Nations and development issues has been also been initiated and undertaken through various activities such as: raising knowledge of the **17 SDGs among school children**; successfully organizing three consecutive **Model ESCWA** in 2016, 2017 and 2018 and hosting **Model United Nations** in 2017 and 2018⁴ for students from the American Community School Beirut at the ESCWA premises.

In sum, ESCWA is prepared to take the lead in the area of youth engagement and participation and in so doing, also promotes the goals of key area 4, noting that human rights of young people is a cross-cutting issue of prime concern in the Arab region.

2.2 Key area 3: economic empowerment through decent work

As in the case of youth participation, the issue of access to decent work in key area 3 features as a prominent theme of ESCWA's work. The ESCWA approach to addressing youth unemployment and job creation has been diverse and sectorial in nature, yielding a wealth of perspectives and solutions. To have a microeconomic perspective, ESCWA created country employment profiles for selected Arab States to provide a trend analysis of key indicators that measure productivity and decent employment using different demographic specifications, including gender, age and the inclusion of youth and women in the labour market. Currently, there is also work progress on examining the role of private sector demand for employment.

In addition, the school-to-work transition plays a catalytic role in pursuit of durable solutions for millions of youth who are attending schools, training centres or universities and aim to secure decent jobs or start up small businesses upon completing their studies. Through a field project entitled "Strengthened National Capacities for Integrated, Sustainable and Inclusive Population and Development Policies in the Arab region" ESCWA supported Jordan's Higher Population Council's efforts to tackle youth unemployment by revising its school curricula at various learning stages to put in place more efficient school-to-work transition strategies and methodologies.

From a combined social and gender angle, ESCWA enriched respective programmes targeting

4. The first (2016) and second (2017) Model ESCWA meetings were held in collaboration with the American University in Beirut (AUB) and the third one (2018) with both the AUB and the Université Saint-Joseph (USJ).

unemployment among young women, including issuing warnings on prevailing discriminatory practices. Furthermore, unemployment among youth in conflict countries was highlighted in the context of governance and considered the forced separation from education as not only endangering the skills formation of young people and undermining their human capital, but also sending red alerts on how these situations can potentially fuel violence, radicalization and criminality in parts of the region. As such, the Libya project mentioned above will include a dedicated segment on livelihoods and employment.

Recognizing the potential of technology to transform the future of employment, ESCWA aspires to promote and harness technology and innovation as a catalyst to stimulate job creation for young people.

An indisputable priority area for both policymakers, youth in the Arab region and ESCWA alike, the close engagement of ESCWA in addressing unemployment and job creation is designed to contribute to tackling this key regional development challenge. While unemployment is common in the region, the root causes, contexts and solutions differ. Therefore, ESCWA will take a multifaceted approach to this critical key area. While UN sister agencies (such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO) in the region are best placed to lead key area 2, ESCWA work will also address this priority area in terms of quality education, youth health services and healthy environment and will focus on the school-to-work transition perspective.

2.3 Key area 5: peace and resilience-building

This is a critical issue for youth in the Arab region. The bulk of ESCWA work in this area is generated through a broad focus on the impact of war on different age groups, including young people. As such, several projects are dedicated to building human capital among displaced populations and their host communities. The Libya project integrates youth in each stage. In adhering to one of the major outcomes of the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security⁵ concerning empowering the role of young people in conflict prevention and reconciliation, ESCWA is preparing Arab Governance Report IV: Building Accountable Polities, Preventing Conflicts and developing an institutional needs

assessment methodology to assist member States with identifying gaps within the public sector that can address development priorities that would support reconciliation, development and institution-building. During the second half of 2019, ESCWA will also deploy an institutional gaps assessment to ascertain the gaps within the public sector in enhancing the skill sets of youth, particularly youth populations that have been affected by conflicts.

Significant work on the subject also emanates from a well built and comprehensive programme on women, peace and security which, in previous years, highlighted the scourge of child marriages in humanitarian settings. An ongoing field project with the Italian Government seeks to protect and empower female refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, adding fresh insights from the field and continuing to accumulate and disseminate new knowledge and data. In addition, the periodic ESCWA publication of The Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women and Girls report serves as a regular monitor, along with similar publications.

ESCWA has also approached youth in peace and resilience within the context of social justice. Accordingly, a dedicated Development Account project on youth and decision-making was recently implemented, entailing a technical note entitled “Let’s Engage Arab Youth in Sustainable Development Goals: Arab Youth as Active Actors for Peacebuilding” that examines youth, participation and SDGs, with special focus on SDG 16.

Further interest of work in this priority area has also been articulated with reference to the important and positive role of youth in environmental protection, helping to mitigate climate change and contributing to adaptation and coping strategies.

Conflict and instability deprive young people of learning and force them to risk their lives crossing unsafe borders or seas in search of peace. Conflict also increases the threat of human smuggling and trafficking in the lives of young people. This understanding of the regional characteristics should guide the implementation of a growing set of legal instruments and frameworks on youth, peace and security. While the the global agenda (including the SDGs) perceives young people as “champions of peace”, attention should also be paid to protecting the lives, safety and security of young people.

5. See <https://www.youth4peace.info/ProgressStudy>.

ESCWA work on five key areas to empower youth

ESCWA divisions/units	Key area 1 Engagement, participation and advocacy	Key area 2 Informed and healthy foundations	Key area 3 Economic empowerment	Key area 4 Youth and human rights	Key area 5 Peace and resilience- building
Social development division	x		x	x	x
ESCWA centre for women	x			x	x
Technology for development division	x	x	x		
Emerging and Conflict- related Issues Division	x	x	x	x	x
Economic Development and Integration Division			x		
Statistics division		x	x		
Sustainable Development Policies Division	x		x		x
ESCWA's Unit on the 2030 Agenda	x				

3. Mapping escwa work on youth issues: The escwa youth marker

ESCWA introduced a **youth marker** in the 2018-2019 biennium to assess the contribution of its work to youth empowerment in the Arab region. The marker is designed along three criteria according to which each substantial output (such as publications, meetings of experts, etc.) of the ESCWA programme of work has been tagged. The youth marker defines whether an output is (i) fully integrated; (ii) partially integrated; and (iii) not integrated.

With a view to provide further guidance to managers during the tagging process, in 2018 ESCWA engaged in the development of a set of descriptive criteria for each of the above categories. During the review process the categories were adjusted to (i) youth-focused; (ii) youth-responsive; and (iii) youth-unresponsive and a description for each now guides programme managers in identifying ways to better integrate youth in their programme. Criteria under the categories relate, for example, to the use of age-disaggregated data for analysis in publications; the contribution of youth to the output; as well as the overall result of an intervention and its potential impact on the lives of future generations.

The intention to better define the existing ESCWA youth marker was also driven by another important innovation

in the UN: the development of an enterprise resource planning (ERP)-based application in support of its strategic planning and monitoring. The Strategic Management Application (SMA) allows tagging at all levels along the results chain (objectives, outcomes and outputs) for programmes and projects alike and enables the UN system to analyse its programmes through different lenses. In its first iteration, entities were able to tag certain "units of analysis" such as the SDGs with the gender marker and the new youth marker. As part of the group of advisers to the application developers, ESCWA's suggestion to introduce the youth marker as an additional "unit of analysis" was accepted and incorporated into the SMA.

The development of ESCWA's youth marker has been supported the Office of Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth, which is also committed to the formulation of a youth marker at the global level."

ESCWA expressed its readiness and availability to contribute to the development of the global youth marker and offered its full collaboration with the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth to devise one that is meaningful to the whole UN. Consequently, ESCWA shared its youth marker with the Office of the Secretary-



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Generals's Envoy on Youth and eventually adopted a refined version in mid-2019.

The new ESCWA youth marker will be rolled out for the 2020 Programme Plan and ESCWA will feed its

experiences in applying it into the ongoing process of the global marker development by the Envoy on Youth, as well as its applicability and utility for the Umoja Strategic Management Application.

4. Facilitating access to vital information and data consistency

based on 11 priority areas for youth development identified by a Report of the Secretary-General submitted in 2010 to the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly with respect to the implementation of the World Programme for Action for Youth (WPAY), ESCWA embarked on developing and disseminating a DevInfo database, called Y-Info, which entails information on the following six priority areas:

- Health;
- HIV/AIDS;
- Substance abuse;
- Juvenile justice;

- Leisure time activities;
- Information and communication technology.

In addition, youth indicators are allocated a focused page within a dashboard that is part of ESCWA's Arab Development Monitor for Societal Progress.

Looking forward, ESCWA's contribution towards the implementation of the UN Youth Strategy could also explore our role as: (i) a clearing house to encourage the use of common data that are reliable, up-to-date and comparable; and (ii) a leader in localizing 90 global indicators by continuing to build the capacity of member States to support the implementation, follow-up and review of Agenda 2030.

5. Escwa in global and regional UN youth networks

ESCWA is represented in UN youth networks at both regional and global levels. Both levels aim to closely connect all participating UN entities, placing special emphasis on coordination, creating joint work and exchanging knowledge and good practices, especially in youth participation.

Globally: The global network is called UN Inter-agency Network on Youth and Development (IANYD) and is housed at Division for Inclusive Social Development, in the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), also the permanent co-chair, and serves as the UN Focal Point for Youth. The network is comprised of over 50 UN entities and solicits global input for the preparation, review and completion of key documentation such as Reports of the Secretary-General on Youth. Over the past few years, ESCWA played an active role through the network as the UN Youth Strategy was developed, debated and finalized. A monthly meeting is held at UN headquarters and an annual meeting takes place to discuss the work plan.

Regionally: The regional network has a task team called UN Inter-agency Technical Task Team on Young People (IATTTYP) which is co-led by UNICEF and UNFPA. The orientation of this network differs from the global one, due to its predominantly technical work and field programmes. It comprises almost all UN regional offices and ESCWA provides an important and unique role as the Regional Commission and acts as one of its policy arms. The main achievement of the network is the development of “Regional Framework of Joint Strategic Actions for Young People in the Arab States and Middle East and North Africa Region, 2016-2017” (which has been renewed for 2020). ESCWA participated in the development and implementation of the strategy and was tasked with thematic area 2 covering civic engagement, participation and inclusiveness, under the leadership of UNESCO regional office.

6. Way forward and next steps

On 24 September 2018, the Secretary-General launched the UN Youth Strategy during a high-level segment and urged all Members States to act on all the key areas. A recent global groundbreaking initiative “Generation Unlimited” received a special mention in Secretary-General’s address. The Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth will further elaborate the Strategy’s implementation mechanisms and request more specific information from UN entities. ESCWA has already drafted a response to the Strategy, which was transmitted to the Office of Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth in December 2019. Details of ESCWA future efforts to implement its response to the Strategy in the three above-mentioned key areas

(1, 3 and 5) will be further discussed in-house and with key partners at the global and regional levels.

Finally, partly in response to the UN Youth Strategy and based on global model of Young UN, in April 2019, ESCWA Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary, Dr. Rola Dashti, launched Young ESCWA (escwa-young-un@un.org) as a channel to share the views of junior staff on how to drive innovation and positive change within the Commission, and participate in coining its future strategic direction including advice on internal reforms to revitalize ESCWA, update its working methods and increase its ability to respond to the development needs of the Arab region.



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VISION: ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

MISSION: Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice.

Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.

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